ANALYZING AND UNDERSTANDING THE LATVIAN ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

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Abstract

Several distinctive environmental movements of the past century have had major influence on public policies in the United States. More generally, social movements that push environmental issues into the limelight have the potential for significantly altering public perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs, thus driving big policy changes. This thesis examines the Latvian environmental movement (1987-1990) that played a central role in mobilizing the Latvian people to turn against the Soviet Union’s control of Latvia and subsequently earn independence from the Soviet Union. The Latvian environmental movement took aim at the USSR’s policies that harmed Latvia’s treasured landscape and repressed the nature-centric roots of Latvian culture and nationalism. Yet, despite this initial national mobilization around environmental protection, and even with the presence of a powerful “Green” party coalition, the new Latvian national government has focused more on economic growth, infrastructure development, and other non-environmental policies since independence. The remnants of the national environmental movement instead are now found in scattered pockets of civic environmentalism, where local interests have taken up the mantle of environmental protection in the absence of strong government action. The primary intent of this thesis is to analyze, explore, and describe the Latvian environmental movement, and to document this change in Latvian environmentalism after the separation from the Soviet Union. This will be investigated by applying Weber’s (1999) comparative analytic framework for environmental movements to the Latvian case.
**Introduction and Significance**

Several distinctive environmental movements of the past century have had major influence on national and international policy in the United States: Preservationism (e.g., National Parks Act 1916), Conservationism (e.g., Forest Reserve and Management Acts 1891 and 1897; creation of U.S. forest service in 1905 and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in 1902), and Contemporary environmentalism (e.g., NEPA 1969, Clean Water Act 1965, Clean Air Act 1970, and Endangered Species Act 1973). Social movements that spotlight environmental issues have the potential for significantly altering public perception, attitudes, and beliefs, thus driving significant policy change. More recently, scholars in this field have identified the onset of a new environmental movement in the U.S.: Grassroots Ecosystem Management (Weber, 1999).

Grassroots Ecosystem Management, or community-based conservation, focuses on the importance of decentralization, collaboration, citizen participation, and a holistic worldview that emphasizes not only the environment, but also the economy and community (Weber, 1999). Proponents of this new movement also emphasize the tangible link the local people have to the landscape in directing the effort to assert localized authority over policy decisions affecting the landscape in which they reside (Weber, 1999).

Yet, while an important part of the value of Weber (1999) derives from its substantive recognition of an important new environmental movement of consequence in the U.S., of greater import, especially to this thesis, is its development and application of a systematic analytic framework for comparing environmental movements. This distinctive comparative analytic framework allows us to understand the complexities of natural resource conflicts and the interaction of the civic communities, policies, and institutions in a variety of settings, including different countries.
Weber (1999) recognizes and builds on the considerable literature over the past 100 years that is devoted to understanding and categorizing U.S. environmental movements. Prior to his 1999 article that made the case for the distinctive new American environmental movement, Grassroots Ecosystem Management, or GREM, the literature had settled on three distinct environmental movements--the preservation environmentalism of John Muir that started in the late 19th century, the conservation environmentalism of Gifford Pinchot, T.R. Roosevelt, and Aldo Leopold that dominated environmental politics and policy choices for the first half of the 20th century, and the top-down environment-over-economy approach that defined the contemporary environmental movement, which gained traction in the 1960s and 1970s.

The innovation, and the value, offered by Weber (1999) was a new analytic framework that draws on a broad range of existing literature and evidence from scholars, political leaders, environmental historians, policymakers and public managers. The framework itself ranges across more than a dozen major characteristics in order to produce greater clarity in the differences and similarities among established U.S. movements and the new GREM, which started appearing in the late 1980s and early 1990s (For example see table 1, p. 39). Prior scholars had recognized differences among American environmental movements, but confined themselves to examinations of individual parts or legislative initiatives of particular movements (Reisner, 1987; Hirt, 1996), full treatises of a single movement (Hays, 1959), the philosophical sources of a movement’s reason for existence (Muir, 1888; McPhee, 1971; Leopold, 1949), and lengthy explorations of a particular aspect associated with one movement (Nash, 1967). Yet Weber’s (1999) framework allowed for synthesis within and between environmental movements, while simultaneously allowing for the recognition of an important new U.S. environmental movement.
Given this, my thesis aims to add to the body of literature designated above and uses the Weber (1999) framework to examine and explicate the contours of the Latvian environmental movement (1987-1990), wherein an environmental movement relied not only on the intangible historical influences of the Latvian culture’s affinity for nature and stewardship, but also a successful bid for independence from the USSR.

Throughout the 20th century the former USSR enacted massive public works, ramped up industrial activities, reclaimed all private land, collectivized farming, restricted Latvian language and culture, and imposed government sponsored migrations of ethnic Russians to work in Soviet factories in an attempt to “Sovietize” and “Russify” Latvia (Darst, 2001; Dreifields, 1996; Steger, 2009; Schwartz, 2006). These policies repressed the Latvian national identity and contrasted sharply with the nature-centric roots of Latvian culture (Steger, 2009). The Soviet mandated activities degraded the treasured coastal and terrestrial landscapes through widespread industrial development and practices, causing heavy pollution, and damage to ecosystems, many of which were considered culturally significant sites by Latvians (Darst, 2001; Steger, 2009). These outcomes further instilled a deep resentment of Soviet domination. Activists led by grassroots leaders, students, and cultural figures condemned the degradation of their homeland as unjust, and highlighted these impacts as having been directly caused by the USSR’s Central Ministries’ policy decisions (Steger, 2009). These activities combined with an undercurrent of social discontent and the aspiration for political independence to motivate the people of Latvia to fight for, and eventually achieve independence from the USSR in 1991. In short, central to the drive for Latvian independence was the demand for environmental and social reform (Darst, 2001; Steger, 2009).
The Latvian environmental movement was not the only mobilization spawned from the opposition to Soviet policies; a number of other former Soviet republics experienced similar movements due to, among other motives, the buildup of public resentment of environmentally destructive practices (Darst, 2001; Steger, 2009; Jancar-Webster, 1993). Jancar-Webster (1993) asserts that the degraded state of “the environment was one of the main causes for the downfall of the communist regime” (Steel et al., p. 200, 2006). The literature highlights environmental catastrophes like the nuclear power plant disaster in Chernobyl, the egregious pollution of lakes, waterways, and seas, severe air pollution, and the widespread degradation of agricultural land, all of which “contributed over time to the undermining of communism” (Steel et al., p. 200, 2003; Feshbach, 1995; Jancar-Webster, 1993). Dawson (1988) describes other independence movements in Lithuania, Ukraine, and Russia, all of which also had significant environmental and nationalist components. Dawson (1988) challenges the conclusions made by Jancar-Webster (1993), carving a distinct divide within the literature, and instead asserts that these movements were much more nationalist, and discounts the mobilization in the name of the environment, as simply a “safe proxy for deeper, but more politically dangerous, nationalist agendas” (Schwartz, p. 70, 2006; Dawson, 1988). Aspects of both of these dominant theories are evident in the Latvian environmental movement.

The intent of this thesis is to analyze, explore, and describe the Latvian environmental movement, and to document a major shift in Latvian environmentalism from a nationally focused movement to a scattered, localized civic-based environmental movement. In fact, what this research finds is that even though the movement that spawned the Latvian independence movement was environmentally motivated, and the current Latvian political landscape includes a strong Green party coalition, the environment has become a depoliticized issue (Galbreath, 2013;
Galbreath and Auers, 2009). By depoliticized I mean that in the context of national Latvian politics environmental policy is seldom mentioned and rarely makes the policy agenda. In fact, the prominent national political parties tend not to treat environmental protection as a serious policy issue (Interview, 1/22/14). Thus, at the political level environmentalism has largely receded from the national stage, which matches the trend of environmental depoliticization in many of the former Soviet Republics (Steel et al., 2003). As a result, environmentalism in Latvia is now mostly manifested in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or in more place-based civic models in which local pockets have taken the mantle of environmental protection into their own hands; largely for issues pertaining to agricultural policies (Aistara, 2013; Interview, 6/16/14-A; 6/17/14; 1/22/15). And while this thesis is not designed to explain why the national movement in Latvia fragmented, it is clear that the long road, starting in the late 1990s, of preparation for the country’s entry into the European Union in 2009, provided a significant national-based environmental protection framework that removed much of the urgency, and need, around designing and implementing their own Latvian inspired policies.

This thesis will first proceed with a description of the methods used to research the topic and complete the analysis, followed by a brief recounting of the area’s history and the Latvian culture’s long-held affinity for nature. Then the discussion moves to the formative historical events and background of the Soviet era in the 20th century and how it influenced the Latvian environmental movement. Next, the thesis describes the 1987-1990 movement and provides a synopsis of present-day environmentalism and environmental politics in Latvia, before turning to a comparative take on Latvian environmentalism in regard to other environmental movements. These sections will ultimately contribute to a better understanding of the Latvian environmental movement, and add to the literature for developing a systematic analytic framework for
comparing environmental movements in general, and for comparing environmental movements that occur in countries outside of the United States.

**Methods**

In-person and Skype interviews and a review of the secondary literature are the primary sources of data for this project. The interviews were administered via a survey to ensure that the questions yielded the information needed to complete the comparative analytic framework. Due to specific nature of this research topic, purposive selection of interviewees was required to effectively tell this story.

I contacted individuals in both Latvia and the United States that were qualified and knowledgeable on this subject matter, and/or participated in the Latvian environmental movement. This resulted in eight interviews being conducted. I completed an institutional review board (IRB) review of my project in early June of 2014. Later, I travelled to Latvia in June 2014 for field research to complete the interviews with participants in the Latvian environmental movement, and completed interviews via Skype with some of the most key experts on Latvian politics, environmentalism, and the Latvian environmental movement. The list below is the interview subjects that consented to be named in this research project. They are:

**Janis Brizga**, Chair of environmental non-governmental organization; Zala Brivība “Green Liberty”. Brizga was a student activist during the Latvian environmental movement. He is now the chair of one of the more prolific environmental NGOs that originated in Latvia.
Einars Cilinskiis, Latvian Environmental Protection and Regional Development Minister, He was a former member of Environmental Protection Club. Cilinskis later became involved in politics and at the time of the interview was serving as the Republic of Latvia’s Environmental Minister.

Dr. Juris Dreifelds, Associate Professor at Brock University, Dreifelds specializes in Comparative Politics (Russia and the Post-Soviet Republics, Environmental Politics, Political Sociology). He has published multiple articles on the Latvian environmental movement and Latvia’s transition to its current political status.

Dr. Daunis Auers, Associate Professor at University of Latvia. Dr.Auers is an associate professor of comparative politics in the department of Political Science at the University of Latvia. He has published a number of articles on the Latvian environmental politics.

The Connection between Latvian Culture and Nature

The Republic of Latvia, located in northeastern Europe is one of the three independent Baltic, NATO, and EU states. Latvia is sandwiched between Estonia to the North, Lithuania to the South, borders the Baltic Sea on the West, Russia on the East, and shares a short border with Belarus to the Southeast. Latvians speak one of two persisting Baltic languages, Latvian, a fact of which they are fiercely proud. Although Latvia currently enjoys the sovereignty and relative prosperity granted by independence and praiseworthy international status, Latvian politics has an embattled and defiant history rife with war, exploitation, and occupation by a variety of foreign powers. Despite limited experience as an independent nation, Latvians tenaciously clung to their
unique culture and language sustaining their traditional values and obstinate desire for self-governance. This story is similar to the histories that played out in numerous other small European nations also struggling to preserve their own individuality, while experiencing heavy influences from the cultures and power-plays of their powerful neighbors. The section to follow will provide an illustration of the unique Latvian cultural identity by summarizing the formative historical events which culminated in the Latvian environmental movement and subsequent independence movement re-establishing the Republic of Latvia.

Of central importance to the history of the region was the external recognition of a unique Latvian culture during the first “National Awakening” (Latvian Institute, 2014; O’Connor, 2003) in the late nineteenth century. This period marked a time of modernization, cultural revival, nationalism, increased public welfare, and, most importantly, a clear focus on the connection between nature, natural features of the landscape and the Latvian people (Latvian Institute, 2014). Critical to this was the development of an influential faction of Latvian intellectuals; who, through their work, became Latvian cultural icons. This group, made up of artists, poets, archivists, and writers brought about the distinction of Latvian culture and the esteem of Latvian as a “literary language” (O’Connor, p. 46, 2003). These pillars of Latvian culture wrote with reverence about things near and dear to Latvians, especially nature, the landscape, and the struggle for freedom (Interview, 6/16/14-A; 6/17/14).

It was during the First National Awakening that a Latvian national identity was acknowledged, and among values central to this intangible identity was reverence for nature and the quality of the environment. As Schwartz (2006) details, a closeness and healthy respect for the land is the basis of this ancient relationship, and is at the foundation of the Latvian identity. Thus, stewardship and sustainable cultivation of the landscape, which “originat[ed] in the
animistic religious practices of the proto-Latvian tribes,” is considered “the defining Latvian act” and, as such, has been passed down from generation to generation (Schwartz, p. 62, 2006; Interview, 6/17/14). These historical anecdotes are not simply extraneous information in the case of Latvian environmentalism. Latvia’s embattled and subjugated past stimulated the will to preserve these cultural characteristics, grounded as they were in the ecosystems, landscapes, and natural features of Latvia (Interview, 6/16/14-A; 6/17/14; 6/19/14).

For example, the Daugava River has been considered by many to be the lifeblood of Latvian culture and landscape for millennia (King, 2012), and not coincidentally the topic of contention sparking the Latvian environmental movement. Multitudes of Latvian folk songs, stories, symphonies, and poems allude to this natural landmark. The river is as the “Ganges River is for Hindus, an olive tree for Palestinians, the horse for Mongols, the Alps for the Swiss, the Sakura for the Japanese, and fjords for Norwegians” (King, p. 15, 2012). At the same time, the Daugava River is not only critical for a variety of natural resource based livelihoods; it also holds a sacred place for Latvians (King, 2012).

[It] flows through more than 350 kilometers of Latvian territory, including the capital city before emptying into the Gulf of Riga. Its banks contain the remains of fallen warriors who died resisting the enslavement of Latvia over the past seven centuries. According to Latvian tradition, [one interpretation] the white stripe on the national flag represents the Daugava, and the maroon stripes symbolize the blood spilled on both banks of the river in the struggle for Latvian independence” (King, p. 15, 2012)

Galbreath (2009) goes on to highlight the contemporary reverence of natural elements, by providing the example of “great” trees that were once altars and sights for ritual practices, but are
now “important symbols of the Latvian national identity and appear on the face of contemporary banknotes as one would ordinarily expect to see a historical figure” (p. 336). The perseverance of the Latvian nature-centric culture gradually developed into the eco-nationalist (Dawson, 1988) rhetoric prevalent during much of the Soviet-Latvian period in the 20th century, particularly toward the end of the Soviet period of domination (Interview, 6/17/14; 6/19/14; 1/14/15).

Soviet Latvia

A brief period of independence between the World Wars ended with the events following the signing of a non-aggression treaty in 1939, infamously known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, between Moscow and Berlin. After repeated threats of military invasion, disguised as memorandums purporting “mutual assistance”, the demand from the USSR came for Latvia to be incorporated into the Soviet Union (Latvian Institute, 2014; Latvia in the 20th Century, 2014). Immediately after occupation, Moscow arranged political changes that favored the Soviet Union and which ultimately led to the removal of the free Latvian government and the instatement of a puppet regime, the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (LaSSR; Latvia in the 20th Century, 2014). The government kept opposition suppressed and closely controlled any public and politically motivated activities (Dreifields, 1996; Steger, 2009). To further subdue the population, the Soviet government enacted policies suppressing the Latvian culture and national identity (Schwartz, 2006).

Sovietization of Latvia began almost immediately with resolutions to nationalize land, businesses, banks, and commercial infrastructure (Darst, 2001; Galbreath, 2013; Latvian Institute, 2014; Latvia in the 20th Century, 2014). Early in this period of Sovietization, approximately 43,000 of Latvia’s “top citizens” were deported to Siberia; most perished in labor
camps (Latvia in the 20th Century, 2014). The message to the Latvian public was clear; being affiliated with opposition groups or expressing free political thought would not be tolerated (Latvia in the 20th Century, 2014). The clear objectives of these actions were to exterminate potential ideological or political challengers and to facilitate the transitions necessary for Sovietization and Russification.

Critical to the transformation of Latvia was collectivizing the traditionally discrete farms into a massive state-run enterprise. By forcing the rural farmers to combine plots of land they aimed to subdue the countryside, and further distanced Latvians from their cultural heritage and dutiful pride associated with being the steward or “saimnieks” of an individually owned farm (Galbreath, 2013; Schwartz, 2006). Continuing this policy agenda, in 1958 the Soviet Union implemented a change to the bilingual education laws in an attempt to snuff out the Latvian language (Galbreath, 2013). The population of Latvia experienced significant demographic shifts during the early period of occupation as a direct result of state-sponsored migration and the deportation of “high risk” Latvians (Latvia in the 20th Century, 2014). Thus, the number of ethnic Latvians continued to decline (Latvia in the 20th Century, 2014). By 1959, Latvians made up only sixty-two percent of the total population of about two million, compared to seventy-five percent twenty years earlier (Latvia in the 20th Century, 2014). The ethnic Russian population had increased most drastically (Latvia in the 20th Century, 2014). The relatively high standards of living in Latvia, compared to the rest of the Soviet Union, and the need to provide labor for the Soviet-built industrial factories drew in scores of immigrants to the small mostly homogenous country (Auers, 2012; Latvia in the 20th Century, 2014). This intensified the resentment of Soviet domination in Latvia, and solidified the resolve of ethnic Latvians to protest these injustices by holding true to their national identity, culture, language, and advocate for the
protection of their treasured landscape, the latter of which eventually proved to be the instigator of the social movements to follow.

**Environmentalism during the Early Soviet Era**

Built to mirror the Soviet ideals of progress and economic expansion via industrialization, and the illusory efficiency associated with centralized planning, the industrial capacity in Latvia was increased and accommodated by an influx of foreign workers (Latvian Institute, 2014; Latvia in the 20th Century, 2014; Interview, 6/19/14). The stark contrast between the Soviet and Latvian views of natural resources and the environment is readily apparent. In post-revolution Russia the dominant ideology was one of consumerism. A predominant belief was that “nature was to be used, not preserved” (Zaharchenko, p. 1, 1990; Interview, 6/19/14). The iconic Soviet propaganda posters of this time period reveal the point of pride associated with collective labor, industrial progress, and technology leading to economic prosperity and societal well-being.

In the Soviet Union during the 1950’s and 1960’s the preeminent attitude was to conquer nature. Consequently, during this period the Soviet government commissioned multiple “nature reconstruction” projects (Zaharchenko, 1990). Essentially, smokestacks and dams have opposite connotations within the respective contexts of the Soviet and Latvian ideologies. Furthermore, the Cold War arms race fostered the perception that industrial development and technological progress were the ultimate objectives at any cost, due to their implications for national security. The economic and industrial growth centric model led to dismal environmental health in parts of the former Soviet Union, and to some of history’s most horrific environmental and industrial disasters (Chernobyl Nuclear disaster 1986; drying up of the Aral Sea since the 1960’s; lasting effects of nuclear testing and waste in Central Asia). However, not all Soviet practices were
environmentally damaging. It must be noted that large swathes of land also remained untouched during Soviet rule due to military cordons and some areas were marked for preservation (Nagendra and Southworth, 2009; Interview, 6/17/14; 6/19/14). The Soviet Union implemented Latvia’s first national park system; including Gauja National Park, which is Latvia’s largest and oldest national park (Nagendra and Southworth, 2009). Nonetheless, environmental health in population centers and near industrial sites remained poor, and civil projects were planned with little heed paid to their effects on the local peoples (Auers, 2012; Steger, 2009).

Nature reconstruction projects were a point of pride to Soviet ideology and were widely used throughout the former Soviet Union (Darst, 2001; Steger, 2009; Zaharchenko, 1990). The inspiration for many of these projects was the “Great Stalin Plan for the Transformation of Nature” (Zaharchenko, 1990). This manifesto detailed the need to “resolve all economic and environmental conflicts to the advantage of economics” (Zaharchenko, p. 5, 1990). A portion of this plan was to reverse the flow of Russia’s numerous northern north-flowing rivers towards the southern arid regions of Central Asia (Zaharchenko, 1990). A more regionally relevant, but a no less brazen example, was the Baltic-White Sea canal built in the 1930’s (Gulag, 2014). Although the projects were reported to the Soviet public as grand triumphs over nature, many of these projects experienced logistical challenges and pitfalls due to issues common to the command and control style of Soviet governance. Administrative disorder, economic infeasibility, and a lack of resources were prevalent (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; Gulag, 2014). The resulting impacts of these projects were enormously costly in life due to primitive and brutal working conditions, lack of capital, and were tremendously ecologically altering (Gulag, 2014).

The Soviet Union was notorious for its industry-centric economy and subsequent poor environmental quality in certain areas (Darst, 2001; Steger, 2009). Civil projects, ecologically
damaging run-off from collectivized farming, and ramped up industrial activity directly impacted the Baltic nations and the ways of life of their citizens. The economically important and “hyperindustrialized” port-city, Ventspils, had “tragically high rates of birth defects” (Stukuls, p. 28, 1998). The Sloka paper and pulp mill, located just outside of Latvia’s capitol Riga, was a significant point source of toxins released into the Baltic Sea degrading Latvia’s famous beaches, while providing the Soviet Union with a significant portion of its paper products (Stukuls, 1998). Thus, the environmental health of the Baltic Sea, located off the west coast of Latvia, was an often cited example of these issues (Darst, 2001). Nutrient run-off from excessive fertilizer use in farming operations all over the Baltic watershed created expansive de-oxygenated dead-zones in the Baltic Sea (Darst, 2001; Junha and Klanvins, 2001). The expansion of these dead-zones encompassed approximately two-thirds of the Baltic seafloor as measured shortly after the disintegration of the USSR (Darst, 2001). DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane), a widely banned insecticide, was also extensively used in the Soviet style of agriculture. This contributed to heightened toxification of aquatic species (Darst, 2001). Industrial production also contributed to the degradation of the Baltic Sea. High levels of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), a common industrial by-product linked to a number of cancers, were recorded in ecologically and economically vital fish species (Darst, 2001). The unabated input of these pollutants caused prolonged harmful algal blooms, threatened the future viability of fish stocks, degraded the quality of the region’s drinking water raising legitimate public health concerns and doubts concerning the persistence of the unique ecosystems of the Baltic Sea region (Darst, 2001; Galbreath, 2013).

The bleak state of the environment and the centrally mandated civil projects drew public and moderate political condemnation across the former Soviet Union (Galbreath and Auers,
The call for environmental justice and higher environmental standards became a pervasive theme contributing to greater criticisms of the Soviet communist system (Darst, 2001; Steger, 2009; Zaharchenko, 1990).


During the preceding period of Soviet rule, Latvian and Soviet public policy was in a period of stasis. This period has been called the Brezhnev Stagnation due to the tightening of restrictions on public dissent (Galbreath, 2013). The 1970’s brought years of economic decline, pervasive environmental issues, and decreased living standards. These declines led to sentiment favoring progressive reform and sparked internal criticisms of the Soviet system of governance (Goldman, 1992; Zaharchenko, 1990).

Modest environmental reform was introduced by the Soviet government in the 1970’s with guarded East-West cooperation over the alarming ecological health of the Baltic Sea (Darst, 2001; Zaharchenko, 1990). These efforts were initiated by the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) beginning in 1973 (Darst, 2001). This commission revealed the initial stages of restrained but genuine commitment from Soviet officials to slowing the degradation of the Baltic Sea and indicates the growing concern over the state of the environment as a whole (Darst, 2001). The 1970’s to the early 1980’s saw a number of largely symbolic Soviet policies aimed at addressing concerns over the worsening environmental quality of the Baltic Sea (Darst, 2001). These were intended to be implemented via the modernization of wastewater treatment plants servicing the emissions from industrial plants, municipalities, and capping emissions from especially the pollutant-laden effluents from the numerous pulp and paper mills on the Baltic coast (Darst, 2001). This shift in emphasis prompted the planned construction of some 2,500 wastewater treatment plants in the Soviet-Baltic region (Darst, 2001).
The efforts to clean up the Baltic Sea coincided with moderate social unrest concerning the environment and preservation of the landscape in Latvia. In the 1970’s the Great Tree Liberation Movement rallied around preserving culturally significant trees and sacred sites from the expansion of collectivized farming operations (Galbreath, 2013; Schwartz, 2006). Once again, intellectuals and artists like the famed Latvian poet, Imants Ziedonis, were the leaders of this modest movement (Schwartz, 2006). This event highlighted the contemporary significance of the Latvian cultural and national identity, and its strong influence from the Latvian ancestral pagan value-base. The roots of these beliefs emphasize stewardship and cultivation of nature through small-scale individually owned farms embedded within the landscape (Schwartz, 2006).

However, due to severe restrictions prohibiting overt public dissent, these protests were contained to only the rumblings of activistic sentiment, called “soft dissent” (Schwartz, p. 67, 2006). This exercise in social action served as a critical precursor to the liberating environmental movement to follow in Latvia.


Dissatisfaction with the government initiated a colossal change to the political context and institutional arrangement with the declaration of Perestroika and Glasnost in the mid 1980’s. This policy agenda brought democratization, increased transparency, economic reform, and relaxation of anti-free speech laws. The development of this agenda by the former and final leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, also allowed for more direct criticism of the Soviet policies and the system as a whole compared to the restrained “soft” dissent of the 1970’s (Steger, 2009; Schwartz, 2006; Zaharchenko, 1990). Democratization policies played a critical role in this change. In Latvia this meant that for the first time they were able to challenge the Soviet policy monopoly and elect officials that reflected ethnic Latvian interests. This sharp
deviation from the Soviet policies of the past also focused on delivering more effective environmental reforms, responsible industrial practices, and laws allowing some private ownership or leasing of state land (Darst, 2001; Goldman, 1992; Zaharchenko, 1990).

High-level Soviet government commitment to improving the quality of the environment was elevated under this more progressive Gorbachev regime (Darst, 2001). Following the inception of Perestroika and Glasnost, the government created the Soviet equivalent of the Environmental Protection Agency, Goskompriroda (Darst, 2001). This agency was charged to take the lead in solving the extensive list of environmental problems, especially within the Baltic region (Darst, 2001). Goskompriroda intended to tackle these issues by arranging new laws that could effectively regulate polluters, thereby mitigating environmental damages, the most significant sources of pollution coming from industry and collectivized farms (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; Darst, 2001; Zaharchenko, 1990).

Unfortunately for the Baltic Sea, the high expectations for environmental health improvements never became a reality. A vast majority of the treatment facilities were never completed (Darst, 2001). As a result, the environmental quality of the Baltic Sea actually worsened (Darst, 2001). These issues were again attributed to ineffective management and a lack of adequate resources to complete the infrastructure enhancements within the Soviet satellites (Darst, 2001). Latvia’s capitol city and economic center, Riga, “had the second highest levels of air pollution and the second dirtiest drinking water in the Soviet Union… no wastewater treatment facilities… and even experienced a cholera outbreak in 1988” (Auers, p. 3, 2012). The agency’s shortcomings were readily apparent; “environmental inspectorates suffered from low pay, inadequate manpower and equipment, and insufficient resources to bring major polluters to heel” (Darst, p. 68, 2001). Again, by the end of the 1980’s prospects for the resolution of these
regional environmental concerns were no closer to actuality (Darst, 2001). However, this time the affected citizens of the Baltic region possessed a heightened awareness of environmental issues and a new set of institutional tools instigating a much different reaction to these unresolved issues.

Perestroika and Glasnost allowed for the progressive reform of political and social life. Reform brought about an intensified grassroots mobilization in the name of environmental issues across much of the Soviet Union (Steger, 2009; Zaharchenko, 1990). The adoption of this policy agenda meant the government would not as readily crackdown on the assimilation of non-governmental groups. The Soviet government’s loosening grip on political and social freedoms opened the floodgates to protests and the inception of “thousands of grass-roots organizations, many of them devoted to environmental protection” (Darst, p. 66, 2001). These groups were originally geared towards environmentalism, which as a result of these liberal changes developed political and social agendas; a factor distinctly missing from previous movements. For Latvians, this meant that organizations from the “nascent civil society… led by environmental, folklore, and religious groups… adopted specific political agendas” (King, p. 1, 2012). The changes in policy furthered attitudes that encouraged independent political thought, and made it possible to express different political opinions from the Soviet status quo (Dreifields, 1996; Galbreath, 2013). This allowed the common Latvian citizen to participate in political activities much more freely than before. Evidence of this are the Calendar Protests of 1987, in which a series of demonstrations publicly commemorated the victims of the mass deportations of 1941, the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1938, and the celebration Latvia’s independence in 1918 (Dreifields, 1996). Perestroika and Glasnost increased social and political freedoms and allowed dissatisfaction to be expressed over the government’s inability to solve the
environmental issues. This changed the game, and set the fuse to the powder keg that was Latvian environmental movement.


In Latvia, the escalation from disjointed grassroots environmentalism to a full-fledged movement was triggered by the Soviet mandate to construct a third dam on the culturally significant Daugava River (Darst, 2001; Dreifields, 1996; Galbreath, 2013; Steger, 2009; Schwartz, 2006). This activism followed the successful protests in Soviet Russia, resulting in the cancellation of plans to divert the Ob and Einsei rivers (Galbreath, 2013). This contributed to inspiring Latvian activists to challenge the authority of the Moscow to impose the construction of the Daugavpils Hydro-Project, a project that would irreversibly alter the Daugava River ecosystem that, as previously noted, has been considered the lifeblood of Latvian culture and landscape for millennia (King, 2012).

The campaign to halt this project began with the actions of Dainis Ivans, a journalist and teacher, and Arturs Snips, a writer and computer specialist (Dreifields, 1996; Galbreath, 2013; Steger, 2009; Schwartz, 2006). An exposé written in 1986 by Ivans and Snips in the popular Latvian weekly editorial, Literature and Art, or *Literatura un Maksla*, lambasted the proposed project. The editorial emphasized rhetoric that appealed to Latvian cultural heritage and national identity in concert with scientific evidence indicating the environmental repercussions of such a project (Galbreath, 2013; Schwartz, 2006). The concerns over environmental damage included increased siltation, loss of fish and wildlife species, eutrophication (excessive nutrient inputs causing algal blooms), and unnatural flooding patterns (Galbreath, 2013). Thus, the exposé politicized the destruction of the treasured Latvian landscape and its ecosystems at the hands of
the Soviet government. The article branded the proposed dam as irresponsible, unjust, and irrational based on the significant environmental problems and few economic paybacks to speak of (Galbreath, 2013; Steger, 2009).

The activists spotlighted the connection between the Soviet system of governance and the environmental woes in its satellite countries, thereby effectively generating an enormous public outcry. This spurred collective action from students and furthered the formal assimilation of grassroots environmental groups (Galbreath, 2013; Steger, 2009; Schwartz, 2006). Numerous other free-thinking Latvian publications and writers began to oppose construction of the dam, students took to the streets to collect signatures to petition against the project, cultural figures participated in patriotic demonstrations, and activists prompted an extensive letter writing campaign to the members of the Latvian Communist Party (C.P.) condemning the project (Dreifields, 1996; Galbreath, 2013; Steger, 2009).

Soviet policies that amended democratization also played an integral part in these events (Dreifields, 1996; Interview, 6/19.14). The Soviet Union’s policy of allowing more fair elections permitted the positioning of more moderate Latvian officials within the ranks of the Latvian Communist Party (C.P.) (Dreifields, 1996). At this time thirty-nine percent of the Latvian C.P. was ethnically Latvian (Dreifields, 1996). The combination of sympathetic Latvian C.P. insider support and rapidly escalating local opposition to the project prompted the Latvian Council of Ministers to order a review of the ecological impacts of the Daugava hydro-project (Dreifields, 1996; Galbreath, 2013). As a result, the Central Ministries in Moscow sent a delegation to reassess the dam’s potential environmental and social impacts (Galbreath, 2013). The delegation then ruled that the site for the project was “ecologically, economically, and socially unsuitable” (Galbreath, p. 58, 2013). Shortly after the revised interpretation of the potential regional impacts,
the USSR Council of Ministers cancelled construction of the dam in November of 1987 (Galbreath, 2013).

Momentum for the movement and nationalism surged after this victory (Darst, 2001; Dreifields, 1996; Galbreath, 2013; Steger, 2009; Schwartz, 2006). The Latvian Cultural Fund started the “Daugava Program” to foster the preservation of the historic landscape of the Daugava River Valley (Schwartz, 2006). Participants in the grassroots protests coalesced into the vocal and influential Environmental Protection Club (VAK) in 1987 (Galbreath, 2013). VAK then focused on halting plans to build a metro system underneath Riga due to the great potential for damage to the famous medieval architecture of the Old Town district, and to prevent the influx of thousands more foreign workers (Galbreath, 2013; Stukuls, 1998). The group organized protests at especially pollutant-heavy industrial sites like the Sloka paper and pulp mill, which later resulted in its shutdown in 1988 (Stukuls, 1998). As the activism became more political in nature, the members of VAK began to disperse, and were among the founding members of the various reform-minded political groups, depending on their partisan proclivity (Dreifields, 1996).

In 1988, political groups began to emerge with right-wing nationalists like The Latvian National Independence Movement (LNNK) and the Latvian Citizens Committee, who were among the most radical pro-independence groups (Auers, 2012; Galbreath and Auers, 2009; Interview, 6/17/14). The original leader of the Latvian environmental movement, Dainis Ivans, became the first leader of the more moderate “umbrella organization” (Dreifields, p. 58, 1996), the Latvian Popular Front (LTF), which included environmentalists from VAK, ex-communists, and pro-independence nationalists (Dreifields, 1996; Galbreath and Auers, 2009). These groups were contested by organizations representing the interests of the significant Russian speaking minority who were largely pro-Soviet and anti-independence (Galbreath and Auers, 2009).
The convergence of environmental and nationalist organizations prompted increased activism and created a public forum in collective opposition to the Soviet regime. This development also served to embolden future protests and allowed for the jump from environmental activism to pro-independence nationalism (Galbreath and Auers, 2009). Ultimately, these events led to an independence movement known as the Singing Revolution in Latvia (Smidchens, 2014). This designation owed to the peaceful cultural devices used to protest the Soviet government. The tactics consisted of those similar to the environmental movement, but also sit-ins and demonstrations in which folk song and dance were proudly displayed (Smidchens, 2014). This fostered even greater nationalistic sentiment and brought about the independence and establishment of the Republic of Latvia in 1991, and the re-adoption of the 1922 Latvian Constitution (Latvia in the 20th Century, 2014).

Contemporary Latvian Politics and Environmentalism (1991-Present)

After such fervent public response to environmental issues and the movement’s prominent role within the independence movement, one would expect environmental interests to be a significant aspect of current Latvian politics. However, this has largely not been the case. Galbreath (2009) outlines the depoliticization of the environment and the rebranding of the “green label in contemporary Latvia” (p. 334), beginning with the end of Soviet rule in Latvia. This has been attributed to the rise of other pertinent issues such as the development of a functioning democratic political system and the capitalist economy, as well as the incorporation of the significant Russian minority into this new system of government.

The Latvian political spectrum bears a general resemblance to groups that coalesced after the environmental movement and at the onset of the independence movement. Conservative nationalists, moderate-centrists, and Russian speaking minority groups make up the partisan lines
within Latvian politics (Galbreath and Auers, 2009). A particularly interesting aspect of Latvian politics is the willingness of political parties to merge and align interests with other political groups to attain the greater influence within the one-hundred member unicameral parliament, Saeima (Galbreath and Auers, 2009). The parliament then votes to form a governing coalition, which acts as the executive branch of the government. The allegiances between political parties is in some cases instigated by the need to reach the five percent minimum of the popular vote to secure any parliamentary seats, or to attain a larger portion of seats within the Saeima (Galbreath and Auers, 2009). A case that exemplifies this aspect of Latvian politics and serves as a telling illustration of diminished environmentalism in Latvia is the recent history of the Latvian Green Party currently known as the Union of Greens and Farmers, or the Zalo un Zemnieku Savienība (ZZS).

The Latvian Green Party

The Latvian Green Party, like most green political coalitions, arose from modest beginnings. The founding members were primarily from the influential groups comprising the green and independence movements, the Environmental Protection Club (VAK) and the Latvian Popular Front (Dreifields, 1996; Galbreath and Auers, 2009). Upon its inception in 1990, the Green Party had little financial backing, and thus formed alliances with other groups to support their campaign activities (Galbreath and Auers, 2009). In 1993, the party participated in its first election under its own banner, obtaining only 1.19 percent of the vote, securing no parliamentary seats (Galbreath and Auers, 2009). The following decade provides strong evidence to what Galbreath (2009) describes as the “political opportunism” (p. 342) of the Latvian Green Party. The party aligned with a laundry list of odd bedfellows: the nationalist Latvian Independence Movement (LNNK), Christian Democratic Union (KDS), Labour Party (DP), and most recently
the Farmer’s Union (ZS; Galbreath and Auers, 2009). To date, the most politically successful of these coalitions has been the Union of Greens and Farmers or ZZS. In 2002 and 2006, the party was able to capture eight and twelve seats in the Saeima respectively. In 2004, the executive branch was led by ZZS, as part of a minority led coalition, with Indulis Emsis becoming “the world’s first Green Party prime minister, although his government only lasted for ten months” (Galbreath and Auers, p. 333, 2009). The increase in political influence continued when the coalition reached its highest levels of parliamentary power in the 2010 by securing twenty-two seats. However, the global economic recession hit Latvia harder than any other European nation, resulting in a drop in GDP of nearly twenty-five percent (Weisbrot and Ray, 2010), prompted parliamentary dissolution and a referendum to select a new Saeima. This resulted in ZZS commanding thirteen seats, a nine seat decrease for the ZZS from the 2010 elections. The coalition has since rebounded and received approximately twenty percent of the popular vote, controls twenty-one seats in parliament, and is Latvia’s third most powerful political party.

The recent successes of the Green Party have been attributed to its alignment with the Farmers Union, and financial support from the controversial mayor of the port city Ventspils, Aivars Lembergs (Galbreath and Auers, 2009). Lembergs has been described as the “unofficial richest man in Latvia” (Interview, 6/19/14), an oligarch, and the ZZS is seen as his “pocket party” (Interview, 1/22/15). He derives his fortune from investments in the oil transit industry through the city he has governed since 1988 (The Economist, 2001).

The oil transit industry is identified by Galbreath and Auers (2009) as one of three main components of contemporary Latvian environmental politics. In this article the authors assign the colors green, black, and brown to symbolize the different sides of current environmentalism in Latvia. Green symbolizes the more western notion of ecological Preservationism. Brown
signifies the eastern concept of civic and ethnic nationalism, which is grounded in agriculture and the traditional role of the farmer within the ordered landscape. Lastly, the black element symbolizes the role of the oil transit industry in “capturing the ‘green’ agenda in Latvia” (Galbreath and Auers, 2009). The oil transit industry is based within the conglomerate of companies under the title Ventspils Nafta (Ventpils Nafta, 2014). This corporation is based around the handling of petroleum products at the Ventspils terminal, and transit of crude oil via their main diesel pipeline from the city to domestic locations and abroad (Ventpils Nafta, 2014).

The ZZS is by all accounts a strange political vehicle (Interview, 1/22/15). The combination of farmers and agribusiness, the oil transit industry, and environmentalists certainly raises uncertainty regarding the validity of this coalition as a legitimate “Green” party (Auers, 2012; Interview, 6/17/14; Interview, 1/22/15). Perhaps due to the seemingly taboo distinction of environmental politics in Latvia, environmental stewardship has largely been a topic addressed by individuals and civic groups (Aistara, 2013; Interview, 6/17/14; 1/22/14). Fragmented and small scale instances of environmentalism now characterize most Latvian environmental initiatives (Aistara, 2013; Interview, 6/17/14; 1/22/15). The curious circumstances surrounding Latvian environmental politics raises the question of why in a country that is so culturally and nationally tied to nature and environmental stewardship has the environment has become such a depoliticized issue (Galbreath, 2013; Galbreath and Auers, 2009; Interview, 6/16/14-A; 6/17/14; 6/19/14; 1/22/15).

**Analysis and Comparing Latvian Environmentalism to Other Movements**

This analysis will explore the Latvian environmental movement using the comparative analytic framework developed in Weber (1999). The sections of this framework designate the
critical aspects necessary to attaining a deep understanding of an environmental movement. This conceptualization can then be applied to better recognize the complexities of the event and help to analyze the development of ensuing policies and environmental paradigms. The sections of the comparative analytic framework include: primary missions, relationships of humans to nature, value of nature and natural resources, temporal outlook, the role of science and technology in decision making, approach to science, limits to growth, character of the movement, role of government, relationship of government to industry, and the role of public in administrative process. The analysis will also include comparisons of the Latvian environmental movement to the major environmental movements: Preservationism, Conservationism, Contemporary Environmentalism, and Grassroots Ecosystem Management. This will allow me to establish where the Latvian movement stands within the context of the most influential environmental movements.

**Primary Mission of the Movement**

“In Latvia, everything began with the movement to save the environment.” (Dreifields, 1996)

Dainis Ivans, Latvian journalist and politician, first chair of the Latvian Popular Front.

Some of the main ideological differences between the environmental movements pertain to the primary missions of the movements. The main mission of the environmental movement in question should, in theory, greatly influence the policy outcomes to follow. The primary mission of the Latvian environmental movement can be categorized into two different, yet connected, threads: those most concerned with Latvian nationalism and political reform, and those more impassioned by environmentalism. As Dainis Ivans, a Latvian journalist and politician, and also first chair of the Latvian Popular Front, notes: “In Latvia, everything began with the movement to save the environment.” (Dreifields, 1996) Yet, as Janis Brizga, Chair of the environmental
non-governmental organization, Zala Briviba, or “Green Liberty” adds: “The movement was [also] politically driven. We couldn’t demonstrate for political reasons; it was politically more acceptable to mobilize for the environment” (Interview, 6/19/14).

In terms of immediate goals, the movement mobilized to stop the construction of the Daugava River hydro-project (Darst, 2001; Dreifields, 1996; Galbreath, 2013; Steger, 2009; Schwartz, 2006). This was seen as imperative and time sensitive, and was reinforced by the fact that the Soviets had already succeeded in building a second dam on the Daugava River in the 1950s. This dam resulted in the flooding and submergence of a culturally significant rock cliff structure and natural spring, Staburags (Schwartz, 2006), and exemplified the loss of “beauty, natural riches, and historic places” (Schwartz, p. 72, 2006) at the hands of the central Soviet government. The prevailing sentiment at that time is best captured by Zile (1995) when she states, “The [Soviet] bureaucrats are ready to drown the Daugava, they are ready to build Latvia full of factories it does not need, to which workers will be brought from thousands of kilometers away” (Stukuls, p. 6. 1998).

With this as background, the objective of the Latvian environmental movement was to frame the Daugava River hydro-project in a way that would galvanize Latvians, generate broad public support, and, most importantly, stop the dam from being built (Steger, 2009). Thus, movement leaders worked to link directly the potential for continued environmental degradation and alterations to the historic landscape to the policies and mandates created by the central Soviet government. Steger (2009) describes this as politicizing environmentalism. In short, the Daugavpils Hydro-Project was portrayed to the Latvian public as yet another Soviet policy, among a long list of other inefficient and illogical policies, which simply didn’t work. Steger (2009) states this realization exposed the idea that centralized planning and social economic
ownership minimized environmental damage and promoted economic growth was a myth. In essence, Latvian environmentalists painted the Soviet system as the root cause of the environmental and societal problem (Steger, 2009). The economics of this issue were merely a supporting argument; the social injustices committed against Latvians by the Soviet government during the twentieth century (mass deportations, purges, and brutal public repression) were also at the forefront of these mass mobilizations (Dreifields, 1996).

Preceded by numerous other policies aimed at repressing the Latvian language, national symbols, folk traditions, and culture, the hydro-project was framed as an attack on the heart of what it is to be Latvian. Schwartz (2006) describes these policies as an attempt at decoupling Latvian culture from its people and land through intensive Sovietization and Russification. Furthermore, King (2012) states that if a population feels that its culture and or natural resources are under attack from an outside aggressor, they will inevitably believe that their very existence is under attack. This further cemented the sentiment that Latvians must protect their landscape or face extirpation by a foreign power. In this sense, the dam was perceived by the Latvian public both as an environmental tragedy in the making and as a direct result of the “communist and Soviet way” (Steger, p. 143, 2009). This was the final straw for the many Latvians who saw the Soviet system as systematically flawed and misguided, and thus in need of radical change.

Underlying the immediate objective (stopping the construction of the dam) was the aspiration to attain greater measures of sovereignty over domestic policy decisions (Interview, 6/17/14). At the height of the environmental movement this sentiment ranged from demands for increased autonomy, while still remaining a satellite of the Soviet Union, to calls for independence amongst more outspoken factions (Dreifields, 1996). Central to this objective was the devolution of powers over environmental and natural resource policy from the far-off central
government in Moscow to the more local governments. The history of Soviet rule revealed that one of the only avenues the government allowed even minimal levels of public dissent was over the environment (Dreifields, 1996; Interview, 6/17/14; 1/14/15). Other criticism of the Soviet system or politics was severely restricted and considered taboo. The leaders of these popular movements recognized the opportunity to make the jump from environmental activism to political reform motivated by nationalism, and finally granted feasibility to throwing off the leash of Soviet rule in Latvia (Interview, 6/17/14). This is supported by the incorporation and evolution of the grassroots environmental organization, the Environmental Protection Club (VAK), into the nationalistic and political minded organization, Latvian Popular Front and the other more nationalist political groups (Interview, 6/17/14). Brizga states, “Look where the leaders are now”, referring to the number of present-day center-right politicians, many of whom originally gained notoriety from the environmental and independence movements (Interview, 6/17/14). Ultimately, Latvian culture and nationalism being predisposed to environmentalism, the increased institutional and social freedoms that accompanied Perestroika and Glasnost, and the Soviet government’s unofficial policy tolerating environmentally concentrated dissent triggered the Latvian environmental movement and subsequent demands for independence.

However, the all-important underlying significance of the nationalist and pro-independence sentiment belies the ulterior motives of this movement. This very closely resembled the eco-nationalism described in Dawson (1996) seen in Lithuania, Ukraine, and Russia. Dawson asserts the reason for these movements in the former Soviet Republics was not environmental, but mostly motivated by nationalism and the desire for self-governance. The grassroots environmental activism that was a reaction to the industry-caused ecological threats, is interpreted as a “threat to the continued existence of a people or land” (Dawson; in Schwartz, p.
Either way, in Latvia the excessive Soviet industrialization was viewed as an “engine of Russification” (Schwartz, p. 70, 2006), and was resented for both its environmental (pollution, landscape alteration, etc…) and social-demographic consequences (influx of ethnic Russians for labor), thus forming the dual primary mission of the Latvian environmental movement.

**Relationship of People to Nature**

“Latvia’s cultural roots are based on nature and rural ways of life” (Interview, 6/19/14)

Einars Cilinksis, Latvian Environmental Protection and Regional Development Minister, Former member of Environmental Protection Club.

The context in which the participants of an environmental movement view nature has clear implications for the ensuing policy outcomes. For example, a more anthropocentric focus, like Conservationism in the U.S., pushed forward policy that focused on managing and extracting natural resources for human benefit. Hence, in the U.S., we find new policies and agencies in this vein such as the Forest Reserve and Management Acts of 1891 and 1897, and the founding of the U.S. Forest Service in 1905 and the Bureau of Reclamation in 1903, among many other examples. Yet, the affinity Latvian culture has for nature is different. Instead of “humans over nature,” the Latvian movement fit the “humans with nature” approach of the U.S. Preservation movement of John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club in 1894 (Weber, p. 241, 1999).

Without overtly romanticizing the bond Latvians and their unique culture share with nature, the philosophy underlying the Latvian movement was clearly a critical aspect of these events. As indicated by Schwartz (2006), the Soviet Union’s insistence on policies intending to distance Latvians from their cultural roots, land, and nature is evidence of the recognized importance of this association. The key connection incorporated in this relationship to nature is the coupling of traditional nature-centric beliefs with Latvian nationalism. This began with the rise to prominence of Latvian poets, artists, writers, archivists, and intellectuals during the first
National Awakening in the mid to late nineteenth century. These individuals fostered the development of a Latvian national identity based in part on the reverence of these ancient pagan traditions (Interview, 6/17/14). Their works are venerated in both ancient and contemporary songs, stories, and epic poems, and became the focal points of the Singing Revolution (Interview, 6/16/14). This highlighted the distinctness of Latvian culture in the face of an oppressive regime that promoted homogeneity and an obedient impressionable working class.

Another facet of these traditional beliefs, prominently portrayed in the works of Latvian cultural folk-icons, is the significance of individually owned small-scale farms embedded within the landscape (Schwartz, 2006; Interview, 6/19/14). A contributing aspect to the discontent and resentment of Soviet rule was the forced collectivization of the countryside into what essentially amounted to contemporary serfdom (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). It stood in sharp contrast to the fond recollections, passed on by the older Latvian generations, of the freedom and relative prosperity of the brief but influential period between the First and Second World Wars (Schwartz, 2006). But the family farm concept in Latvia holds more than a utilitarian function. Schwartz (2006) writes at length about the spirituality and the sense of responsibility to nature the small-scale farmer has for cultivating a uniquely Latvian sense for natural beauty (Schwartz, 2006). These ancient traditions fundamentally do not distinguish the farmer and farm from what is natural. This is clearly where the Latvian environmental ethic deviates from the ostensibly similar U.S. preservationist movement. The protection of nature is not focused on the preservation of wild untouched lands, but instead emphasizes the vital role of the farmer working the land and firmly embedded within the “ordered landscape” as a path to natural order and the protection of nature/natural resources (Schwartz, p. 48, 2006). This component accords with the U.S. Grassroots Ecosystem Management’s principle that focuses on the essential
interdependence between community, environment, and economy; none function properly, especially over the long term, without appropriate attention paid to each of these individual aspects as well as their connectivity.

**Value of Nature and Natural Resources**

“[To be] Latvian and nature is like one thing... Nature is a part of the national identity.” (Interview, 6/16/14-A)

*Member of the Board at Zala Briviba “Green Liberty”, a youth during the Latvian environmental movement.*

The way a people value nature and natural resources can directly impact the way a natural resource and landscape is used, including the development of policy provisions regulating the use of nature’s resources (Weber 1999). A heavy economic emphasis, such as that found during Soviet times, suggests that nature is first, second, and always the provider of commodity goods and services to society. Preservation for the sake of preservation finds little purchase within this approach because nature has its highest value only in relation to humans, which is much like U.S. Conservationism.

But the Latvian environmental movement’s approach to the valuation of nature is grounded in folk traditions and deep-rooted environmental values associated with the Latvian agrarian landscape ethic (Schwartz, 2006; Interview, 6/16/14-A; 6/17/14; 6/19/14). As such, the focus is on the health, or quality, of nature and the sustainable use of natural resources, while support for programs promoting environmental quality was distinguished as a source of nationalistic pride. The Soviet policies came to symbolize an attack on the integrity of the natural and cultural aspects of the landscape (Steger, 2009). This was clearly demonstrated by the passionate reaction from the Latvian public to the proposed Daugava River hydro-project, and their willingness to engage in environmental activism in the face of potential violent reprisal from the Soviet government. At these demonstrations, the once illegal horizontally striped
crimson-white-crimson Latvian flag was prominently displayed, and choruses sang banned nationalistic and folk songs (Steger, 2009). Ultimately, Latvian cultural roots, which impassion environmental stewardship, provided the cohesive element pairing nationalism to environmentalism. Steger (2009) provides an enthusiastic quote from a former leader of the environmental movement describing how “culture exploded!” (Steger, p. 141, 2009) Latvian culture incorporates and has great respect for both the intrinsic and tangible value of nature (Interview, 6/16/14-A; 6/16/14-B). Thus, nature’s value is appraised greater than merely its economic value.

The traditional agrarian ethic also contributes to how Latvian culture and the environmental movement value nature, and also further reveals the interesting differences between the similar western Preservationist Movement and the Latvian movement. Schwartz (2006) argues of a fundamental difference between the Western environmentalist ideal of promoting a “pristine nature” devoid of human alteration, versus the more Eastern European perspective which prefers the role of humans as the “caretaker” within the landscape (Galbreath, 2013; Schwartz, 2006). This Eastern view is a clear feature within the Latvian cultural environmental philosophy. Traditional texts represent the small-scale farmer as embedded within the landscape and having an inseparable relationship to the land through cultivation (Schwartz, 2006). Schwartz (2006) describes the depth of this relationship by explaining that stewardship and “cultivation connected Latvians not only to nature, but also to the primordial roots of their identity as Latvians” (Schwartz, p. 62, 2006; Interview, 6/17/14; 6/19/14). The caretaker ideology and Latvian agrarian culture assert the role of humanity is to act as stewards of nature by nurturing a cultivated landscape (Schwartz, 2006). This notion is so deep-rooted that “agricultural labor is seen as an integral aspect of nature itself, and also as a redemptive
fulfillment of an intrinsic human need” (Schwartz, p. 46, 2006). This ideology was clearly at odds with the Soviet philosophy’s valuation of nature and natural resources, with its much heavier emphasis on economic gain (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; Schwartz, 2006; Zaharchenko, 1990). This was demonstrated by what Soviet leaders understood as the superior economics behind the ironically inefficient collectivized farming system (Schwartz, 2006). This policy attacked the core beliefs of the rural Latvian way of life by forcing the abandonment of the solitary homestead for the collective agriculture compounds (Schwartz, 2006). The sheer difference in scale of the ecological impacts attributed to the Soviet system of agriculture, as compared to the individual farmstead, was also a point of contention (Galbreath, 2013; Schwartz, 2006). The underpinning perspectives that provided the basis of how the Latvian environmental movement valued nature and natural resources was a balance between the productive use of natural resources while still respecting and sustaining the historical and intrinsic values associated with good stewardship (Interview, 6/17/14; 6/19/14).

**Temporal Outlook**

“A large empire can assert itself like a Goliath. A small nation like the Estonians [or any of the Baltic nations] needs the wisdom and cleverness of a David. Living under foreign powers for hundreds of years, we have developed a strategy of self-preservation” (Smidchens, 2014)

Ingird Ruutel, Estonian ethnomusicologist, speaking at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC in 1998.

The temporal outlook that guided the actions of the leaders of the Latvian environmental movement can be described as a very balanced perspective. This is because the nationalist and pro-independence factions within the Latvian movement embraced both short-term and long-term perspectives. In the short term, the outlook was to emphasize the need to immediately save the environmental integrity of important landscapes and historic sites from Soviet policies. Avoiding the loss of other sacred sites, like Staburags, was certainly a factor (see Old town Riga
anti-metro protests; Interview, 6/17/14). The more politically driven factions wished to focus immediately on environmental issues in order to animate the Latvian public and spark the collective demand for more widespread reform. This “backdoor” method for promoting national political independence was believed to be safer and less controversial, thus less likely to ignite a violent reaction and bloody suppression so often associated with open political rebellion the USSR. In this sense, participants thought that leading with the “environmental way” was also more likely to be successful in making headway against Soviet control (Interview, 6/17/14; 6/19/14; 1/14/15).

The movement participants coming from the environmental wing of the overarching Latvian environmental movement, however, tended to embrace a longer term outlook focused on curbing industrial pollution and large-scale civil engineering and public works projects. According to this view, stopping such projects would avoid irreversible, long-term environmental damage and hinder further exploitation of limited Latvian natural resources, which were largely for the benefit of the greater Soviet Union, not Latvia per se. As previously mentioned, another critical factor contributing to the call for political reform was curbing the immigration of foreign workers to accommodate the Soviet controlled elements of the industrial economy in Latvia (Dreifields, 1996; Schwartz, 2006; Interview, 6/17/14). Schwartz (2006) provides a description of the prevalent Latvian sentiment that the migrant industrial worker as embodying the antithesis of the Latvian environmental ethic, this was because the migrant worker no longer had a fatherland or national identity, thus desensitizing them to the destruction of the Latvian landscape (Schwartz, 2006). The worry was that the programs promoted by Russification would gradually come make Latvians the minority in their homeland and make the Latvian environmental ethic that much harder to implement.
The unique nationalist influence makes the “balanced” temporal outlook of the Latvian environmental movement distinct from three of the four major U.S. environmental movements. The Preservationist and Contemporary movements are known most for their long-term temporal outlooks focused on protecting nature and the continued viability of natural areas and resources for future generations. The idea of industrial and economic vitality ranks much lower on their list of critical components for a healthy, successful society (Weber, 1999). Opposing this, the Conservationist movement tends towards short term considerations, with human and economic needs for the present taking precedence over longer term environmental protection considerations. Only the Grassroots Ecosystem Management Movement, starting at roughly the same time (the late 1980s and early 1990s) in the U.S., promotes a balanced temporal outlook that seeks to give equal attention to both short-term human needs and the long term of needs of nature and future generations (Weber, 1999).

**Comparative Analytic Framework: Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Latvian Environmental Movement - Case Study</th>
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| Primary mission(s) | -Mitigate and cease irresponsible industrial practices, civil projects, and Russification prevalent under the Soviet system.  
-Highlight the connection of the Soviet policies to the degradation of the Latvian landscape.  
-Attain Latvian sovereignty over the policy decisions regarding local environmental issues. |
| Relationships of Humans to Nature | -Humans with nature… Humans embedded within nature.  
-Heavy influences of nature on folk traditions and beliefs, distinctly tied to Latvian cultural heritage and national identity  
-Small scale farming central to Latvian culture and national identity. |
| Value of Nature and Natural Resources | -Intrinsic value critical.  
-Integrity of the environment is a source of nationalistic pride, a part of their national identity.  
-Folklore, traditions, and rural ways of life inextricably tied to the aesthetics of nature, stewardship, and specific cultural sights. |
Temporal outlook

- Balanced perspective.
  - Short term: Save the environment and landscape and use the polarizing environmental issues to spark political and economic reform.
  - Long term: Avoid irreversible damage to treasured historical/cultural landscape for the use of future generations of Latvians.

Role of Science and Technology in Decision Making and Approach to Science

Weber (1999) also finds that a key comparative element that helps to distinguish one environmental movement from another is the treatment of science and technology. In the Latvian case, the approach to science and technology was similar to the U.S. Preservationist Movement in that science was very much subservient to the importance of the essential spiritual qualities of nature (Schwartz, 2006; Weber, 1999; Interview, 6/16/14-A; 6/16/14-B; 6/17/14). Zaharchenko (1990) attributes most of this to the Latvian emphasis on local place-based knowledge stemming from a deep understanding of having worked and appreciated the natural qualities of the landscape. And this perspective was reinforced by the fact that it was passed down through countless generations (Interview, 6/17/14; 6/19/14). Of course, this was also in stark contrast to the distaste Latvians had for the Soviet “soulless technocratic state” with its heavy reliance on science and technology as the backbone of national prosperity (Galbreath, p. 335, 2009).

Given this, the role of science in the Latvian case was often relegated to providing supplemental evidence to help persuade both leaders in Moscow and Riga, as well as the Latvian public, of the many benefits of environmental protection. The approach was highlighted by Ivans and Snips (1988); in their article on the Daugava River Dam hydro-project they provide evidence that the arguments made to derail the dam relied on ecological and cultural components. Major potential issues owing to dam construction included silt accumulation (and entrapment of heavy
metals), eutrophication, fish loss, and flooding. But there was also considerable emphasis on patriotic rhetoric and reminding people of the cultural and historical importance of the area to be impounded under water behind the dam (Galbreath, 2013).

Limits to Growth

The idea of a "limits to growth" is that there are biophysical constraints on the ability of industrial societies to continue historical trajectories of population growth and resource consumption. It is another important component by which we can distinguish one environmental movement from another (Weber, 1999). The Soviet approach to the “limits” debate matches that of the U.S. conservation movement, which “believes that the limits to growth are more apparent than real and can be overcome through scientific advances as well as top-down management by public sector experts” (Weber, p. 244, 1999). From this perspective, this is because inevitable scientific and technological advances “solve” production shortages as they arise by expanding the stock of available resources. For example, new plant hybrids increase crop yields or advances in drilling equipment make possible the exploitation of previously inaccessible mineral deposits. Second, “expert” top-down management of nature by government bureaucrats increases yields from nature. Using scientific management to guide resource development, timber harvest yields on public lands can be increased both in terms of yield per acre and through more frequent harvesting. Hence, while limits exist, they can and generally are forestalled—at least in theory.

Yet, the Latvian environmental movement’s approach to the question of “limits on growth” was almost the opposite and in full agreement with the U.S contemporary environmental movement that there are inescapable and insurmountable limits to growth. We see this as a constant theme within the Latvian environmental movement--the need to curb what they saw as unsustainable industrial growth (Interview, 6/16/14-A; 6/17/14). Galbreath (2009), for example,
designated the Latvian case as an example of “‘bioregionalism’ and the concern over not being able to develop, protect, or pass on ancestral lands in healthy natural condition and capable of providing necessary ecological support for plant and animal species dependent on the same (p. 335). Since Latvia is a relatively small country (24,938 sq. miles), or approximately the size of West Virginia, there was the real threat of no longer having adequate natural resources for future generations of Latvians regardless of whether independence was to be achieved or not.

In short, the Latvian case displays the same overall approach to “limits” as the U.S contemporary environmental movement, namely that the seemingly limitless growth experienced by industrial societies in the twentieth century was an unsustainable illusion. Societal dependence on "ghost acreage"--technology now allows each human to produce and consume roughly ten times more than previously was possible--and an unsustainable rate of resource withdrawal from the earth's fossil "savings bank" only allows humanity to temporarily transcend the ecological carrying capacity of the globe. No amount of knowledge [or science] can permanently repeal the laws of nature. Moreover, as the earth’s population and the reliance on technological "fixes" increase, more exponential growth in resource demand and industrial wastes will occur. The end result of this "exuberant" posture--ecological overshoot and catastrophic human decline primarily through unavoidable widespread famine--is inevitable according to contemporary environmentalists unless society learns to recognize the limits to growth (Weber, 1999; Catton, 1980).

**Comparative Analytic Framework: Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Latvian Environmental Movement- Case Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of Science and Technology in Decision Making</td>
<td>-Spiritual, Cultural, and political aspects of movement more important than science and technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach to Science</td>
<td>-Environmental science used as evidence to make the case</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
against foreign oppressor.
-Demonstrated the tangible connection of Soviet policies to degradation of the Latvian landscape; and thereby the marginalization of ethnic Latvians.

| Are There Limits to Growth | - Yes, finite natural resources, especially in a small country like Latvia |

_**Character of the Movement**_

The origin and well of support for an environmental movement shapes the resulting policy outcomes and chances for the movement to succeed. Perhaps the most defining characteristic of the Latvian environmental movement was the grassroots or bottom-up development of these events (Dreifields, 1996). The actions of Ivans and Snips to research and publish findings on their concerns over the environmental and social implications of the Daugavpils Hydro-electric station reveal these small scale beginnings. Dreifields (1989) describes their actions as meeting the standards of “a classic grassroots initiative in any country” (Dreifields, p. 17, 1996). This report then catching the public attention and emboldening students and others to join the cause identified the friction between the desire for domestic precedence over policy decisions versus the Soviet methods of exhaustive centralized planning and top-down political decision making (Steger, 2009). This aspect of the Latvian environmental movement clearly aligns with the Grassroots Ecosystem Management movement’s distinctive “grassroots (place-based), pluralistic” (Weber, p. 248, 1999) character.

Prior to Glasnost and Perestroika, this kind of public dissent was a non-factor in Soviet politics and government. Objections to the Central Ministries were very much restrained and came either internally from members within the Communist Party or from brave individual outspoken critics (Dreifields, 1996). The Great Tree Liberation Movement is an example of the cultural and educated elite objecting to these top-down mandates prior to the Gorbachev era.
(Schwartz, 2006). Other examples include the Latvian poet, Gunars Freimanis, who wrote a poem bidding farewell to the sacred site Staburags before its intentional flooding following the construction of the Plavinas Hydro-station in the 1950’s. This form of protest landed Freimanis in a Soviet labor camp for “anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda” (Bungs, p. 18, 1987).

Currently in Latvia, the depoliticization of the environment has led to more emphasis on environmental non-governmental organizations. Some of the NGOs active in Latvia are the World Wildlife Fund, Latvian Fund for Nature, Green liberty, and The Environmental Protection Club (VVK). The ZZS has had taken very limited environmental initiative since their rise in political power (Interview, 1/22/15). This has certainly contributed to the importance of environmental NGOs in Latvia for advocating environmental initiatives, and increased the cynicism environmentalists have for the legitimacy of the ZZS being a “true” Green party and representing their interests on the political stage (Interview, 6/17/14; 1/22/15).

**The Role of Government, Industry, and the Public**

A crucial part of the Weber (1999) comparative analytic framework is that Perestroika and Glasnost fundamentally changed the public-government relationship. Due to reasons outlined early, the government was widely viewed in an adversarial light (Interview, 6/16/14-B; 6/17/14; 1/14/15). The repressive policies (Bilingual Education Laws 1957-58, forced migrations and deportations) and top-down mandates contributed to this notion that the Soviet government was attacking the essence of what it is to be Latvian (Dreifields, 1996; Schwartz, 2006; Steger, 2009). This was vested in among other things as the differences in the Latvian and Soviet perceptions regarding nature and the use of natural resources. Economic growth and industry centric policy dominated the Soviet ideology before the Gorbachev era, and failed to be adequately addressed after the decline of the environment became impossible to continue to
ignore (Darst, 2001; Steger, 2009). Soviet communism was based on the government presiding over industry, and contributed to the irresponsible reliance on economic growth via industrial enterprises (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; Zaharchenko, 1990; Interview, 6/17/14; 6/19/14). Cold War hostilities fueled this emphasis; incentivizing the Soviet Union to sacrifice the environmental health for economic gain (Zaharchenko, 1990). The plight of the Baltic Sea, due to ineffective regulation and the inability of regulatory agencies to rein in major polluters, is a prime example of this.

After Perestroika and Glasnost the role of the public and the responsiveness of the government to their collective action significantly changed. The people were now able to more greatly influence policies via more transparent and fair elections, and increased freedom to criticize and protest the government (Dreifields, 1996). Electing less hardline communist officials within the ranks of the Latvian C.P. developed insider Latvian support and provided a voice for the Latvian people that could reach the Central Ministries and effect domestic policy (Dreifields, 1996). This was evidenced by the successful protests following the planned construction of the Daugavpils Hydro-electric Station, the Riga metro project, and VAK’s demonstrations at the Sloka Paper Mill (Stukuls, 1998). This change was revealed because some members of the Latvian C.P. politically began to champion these causes due to the public outcry, prompting the Central Ministries to change their decision and yield to the protestor’s demands (Dreifields, 1996). The relationship of the government and industry also significantly changed. Concerted attempts at curbing industrial pollution became a priority during the Gorbachev era. Although these attempts were largely unsuccessful, they nonetheless show a change in the Soviet policy agenda to reflect the rising discontent over the degradation of the environment (Darst, 2001).
“Material welfare has become more important to politicians [than the environment]” (Interview, 6/17/14).

Janis Brizga, Chair of environmental non-governmental organization; Zala Briviba “Green Liberty”, Student activist during the Latvian environmental movement.

After independence, industry has remained an important aspect of Latvia’s transition to capitalism and in becoming a blooming democratic nation. The presence of individuals with stakes in industry who wield considerable political power became a significant factor in Latvian politics (Interview, 6/17/14). An excellent example being the ZZS’s relationship with Aivars Lembergs, as well as other political figures regarded as oligarchs due to their prominent roles in government and industry (see the Economist on Lembergs, Skele, and Slesers). Furthermore, a persistent factor in the development of the Republic of Latvia has been the precedence of economic and social issues over other policy issues (Interview, 6/16/14-B; 6/17/14; 6/19/14; 1/22/15). Chief among these topics were economic development and the subsequent responses to the economic recession during the 2000’s, and social issues regarding the considerable ethnic Russian-speaking minority. The priority taken by these pressing issues have affected the presence of environmental policies in Latvian political discourse (Interview, 6/17/14; 1/22/15). Domestic environmental policies are viewed by the government as “an obstacle to development” (Interview, 6/17/14).

The greatest political influence on the environment in Latvia originates from their membership within the European Union (EU). There actually exists a persistent sentiment in Latvian politics that EU environmental standards are too restrictive to achieve desired levels of economic development (Interview, 6/19/14). The Latvian government has remained largely “skeptical” of international environmental standards and capping carbon emissions (Interview, 6/19/14). Thus, the environmental standards and policies from the EU, and local non-government initiatives have dominated the environmental discourse and policies in Latvia (Aistara, 2013;
Interview, 1/22/15). Friction certainly exists between this new source of top-down environmental regulation in the EU and the Latvian public (Aistara, 2013). This new relationship was demonstrated by civic led activism described in Aistara (2013) over the top-down EU regulation on the sale of non-registered heirloom tomato seeds, in what Aistara calls “Latvia’s Tomato Rebellion” (p. 1). Dr. Daunis Auers, from the Stockholm University of Economics in Riga, maintains that even though the environment has become a widely unpopular issue politically in Latvia, the country remains surprisingly ‘green’ due to widely popular civic initiatives and the impact of relatively stringent EU standards (Interview, 1/22/15). For example, “Liela Talka” or “big clean-up” is a national event in which during one day annually thousands of participants go out to clean areas and pick-up solid waste to sustain the natural beauty of their landscape.

To the people of Latvian the environment and stewardship of nature remains a curious topic (Interview, 1/22/15). Culture and national identity uniquely tie Latvians to nature and the landscape; however, like the politics in so many other nations, the precedence of other pressing political and social issues remains a deterrent to making the environment a greater political priority (Interview, 6/16/14-B; 6/17/14; 6/19/14; 1/22/15).

**Comparative Analytic Framework: Table 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Latvian Environmental Movement- Case Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Character of Movement</strong></td>
<td>Latvian Environmental Movement - Grassroots popular support and students followed by support from cultural, educated, and political elite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Post-Independence</strong>- NGO and civil society led environmentalism. Green Party (ZZS) has questionable environmental agenda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of Government</strong></td>
<td>Latvian Environmental Movement – Soviet system was top-down, but became locally more representative of Latvian public. Soviet government unsuccessfully attempted stepping up environmental policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Post-Independence</strong>- Powerful Green Party, but depoliticization of environmental issues. Influence of European Union and EU environmental standards.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Relationship of Government to Industry

**Latvian Environmental Movement** - Soviet government ineffectively addressed environmental issues. Instated new regulatory agencies but ineffective to solve environmental issues (Goskompriroda).

**Post-Independence** - necessary for economic development, much more small scale. (See importance of small scale farming in ZZS/Green Farmers political party)

### Role of Public in Administrative Process

**Latvian Environmental Movement** - Allowed for more pro-Latvian elected officials, development of grassroots NGOs, increased activism, and expansion of free speech rights.

**Post-Independence** - Involved, NGOs and civic initiatives important.

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**Policy Recommendations**

The disconnect between the long-established Latvian cultural proclivity towards environmental stewardship and the relative absence of an environmental protection policy agenda at the national level in the aftermath of independence is very much likely the result of the necessary prep work required by the EU for admittance, in that EU authorities require member states to adopt and abide by a whole host of relatively stringent environmental protection mandates before they can become members in good standing. At the same time, it also could be vested in the development of frameworks for self-governance. Even though the environment has become an unpopular topic politically in Latvia, aspects of the nature-centric cultural/national identity still fosters a culture of civic green initiatives, albeit scattered in pockets around the country, which help much of Latvia maintain its historical reputation as an environmentally friendly culture. This tendency was first demonstrated in the grassroots-initiated Latvian environmental movement and subsequent independence movement, and currently represented by environmental NGOs and the more fragmented, place-based, civic-led, and agrarian-focused environmentalism (Aistara, 2013; Interview, 6/17/14; 1/22/15). The trend toward local, civic
environmentalism is due to the fact that since independence Latvian politics has largely been preoccupied with strengthening the economy through development (especially by means of attracting foreign investment), and addressing difficult social issues stemming from the, at times, divisive relationship between Latvian language speakers and the significant Russian-speaking minority (Auers, 2012; Dreifelds, 1996; Schwartz, 2006; Interview; 1/22/15). Schwartz (2006) attributes the reasons this policy focus as to the dominance of “center-right politicians [who] have toed the neoliberal party line on trade and macroeconomic policy and other matters of greatest interest to international lenders” (Schwartz, p. 10, 2006). But is also in recognition of the need to more fully integrate the Russian speaking population into the fabric of the new country.

With environmental protection policies largely relegated to the backburner at the national level (Auers, 2012; Galbreath and Auers, 2009; Schwartz, 2006; Interview, 6/17/14; 6/19/14; 1/22/15), this means that some local areas still face the kinds of environmental damage, natural resource scarcity, and cultural as well as aesthetic issues of importance that were described earlier in this thesis. How have these affected local places responded? The short answer is: in the same way that U.S. localities and watersheds in the American west have responded. Put differently, we find local groups and citizens banding together in a number of prominent examples of civic-led environmentalism much like the U.S grassroots ecosystem management (GREM) movement ala Weber (1999) that started in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Instead of waiting around for environmental protection to make it to the top of national policy agenda, these local places have instead opted for taking action on behalf of the environment themselves. And while the Latvian cases of civic environmentalism are not the same kinds of collaborative governance arrangements as U.S. GREM, they are examples of the kinds of “self-governance” approaches to addressing “place-based” environmental issues noted by Weber (1999) and made
famous by Ostrom (1990). More specifically, these Latvian communities are facing their own “tragedies of the common” (Hardin 1968), in which public policies of the ex-Soviet Latvian government and the newly independent Latvian state both incentivized the destruction of nature for economic purposes. These local pockets of civic environmentalism, however, as per Ostrom (1990) are fighting back to provide an alternative solution to the classic “commons” dilemma. In other words, instead of choosing top down, government-led (Leviathan) regulation, or exhaustive privatization of environmental assets (the market model), they are choosing and valuing institutional arrangements that encourage local “self-governance.” This system relies on the devolution of policy and decision-making power over local natural resource and environmental interests to the community of people that are nearest and in many cases most dependent on these common pool resources (Ostrom, 1990).

To ensure the fair use and management of a locality’s natural resources, Ostrom (1990) suggests the formation of a “workable” set of rules developed by the actual users of a resource. A crucial part of this is what Ostrom (1990), like Weber (1999); emphasize incorporating local knowledge in crafting sound environmental policies. According to this view, a centralized authority structure simply does not have the capacity to tailor each environmental policy or institution to the myriad of local, and by nature place-specific, environmental issues (Ostrom, 1990; Weber, 1999). By including stakeholder input in the deliberation stage of policy development, policy outcomes are easier to legitimate in the eyes of the most immediate stakeholders, which tends to the broad embrace, or ownership, of outcomes, and thus improves the chances for user compliance with policy decisions (Ostrom, 1990; Weber, 1999).

Also, allotting more policy power to smaller groups, over more manageable tracts of ground further improves the chances of policy success. This is vested in the notion that the
smaller the group, the more likely users are to gravitate towards and align behind a common interest, especially when that interest is a common pool resource whose management influences the daily lives of individuals and the prosperity of entire communities (Olson, 1968; Ostrom, 1990; Weber, 1999). Ostrom (1990) provides the example of the unique inshore fisheries management scheme devised by a local fisheries cooperative in Alyana, Turkey. As Ostrom (1990) puts it, the local cooperative in essence created a “self-governed common-property arrangement in which the rules have been devised and modified by the participants themselves and also are monitored and enforced by them” (p. 20). The result, after much evaluation and modification, was an “ingenious system for allotting fishing sites to local fishers” (Ostrom, p. 20, 1990) in a way that allows for the fishery to adequately recover from harvests. This example of a grassroots initiative to protect a vital common pool resource certainly draws some interesting parallels to the Latvian case study, but more importantly to this thesis, Latvian political reluctance to approach environmental issues, suggests great value in the potential use of self-governance styles of environmental management.

This form of natural resource management attempts to provide a greater degree of flexibility, which is a far cry from the “privatization model”, in which individual property rights are assigned to all ecosystem services, or the “leviathan model” that relies on the broad stroke of top-down or centralized environmental policy. Perhaps, by implementing the place-based policies described in both Ostrom (1990) and Weber (1999) to the fragmented and local agrarian focused environmentalism currently seen in Latvia (Aistarta, 2013; Interview; 6/17/14; 1/22/14), would provide policy that is perceived as more legitimate in the eyes of local stakeholders, and crafted with a greater propensity to form to the environmental, social, and economic parameters unique to each case study.
Interestingly, the Latvian approach to environmentalism after independence both matches and departs from similar movements found in other post-communist states. The Latvian case matches these other movements in that the expected relative weakness of the new national government was hoped to stimulate decentralization with subsequent strengthening of local governments capable of generating more timely and effective responses to environmental issues (DeBardeleben and Hannigan, 1995). But it also differs from other post-communist states because instead of opting for more market-based approaches as a response to their commons problems, Latvian communities chose a more collaborative, civic-based approach to resolving environmental problems. And while national opinion polling in post-communist countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, and others show declines in environmental concern among the citizenry just like Latvia, these pockets of civic environmentalism are resisting this larger trend with actions and policies designed to protect their local places from further degradation. Whether this will ever translate into a broader national movement, or stay fragmented and localized, is impossible to know. An optimist might argue that once Latvia is on a steady upward path of economic growth and job and wealth creation, and once headway is made on current social problems, perhaps, as with advanced industrial nations, environmentalism will become a national priority once again. A pessimist, however, might focus more on recent events involving Russian foreign policy and the potential for Russian annexation of the Baltic States much like the Crimean region of Ukraine. This view suggests that it will be quite some time before there is a place at the top of the Latvian national policy agenda for a strong environmental movement to take affect and influence national policies. In this more pessimistic scenario, it will be interesting to see if the localized, fragmented, civic-based environmentalism that has made itself known since independence expands its hold on the Latvian countryside and
if this will be sufficient enough to provide the kind of environmental protection in keeping with Latvia’s long tradition of environmental stewardship.
References


