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### Citizens or Consumers?: Environmentalism and the Public Sphere in Postsocialist Hungary

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Publication Date  
January 1999

#### Abstract

Much of the most vital activism of the post-1989 environmental movement in Hungary addresses the development of consumer culture and the expansion of transnational corporations in East-Central Europe. In actions against McDonald's conquest of the urban landscape and the ubiquitous presence of advertisements for transnational corporations, activists contrast cherished notions of decentralization and local control with the emergence of an imperialistic, global consumer culture. These issues came to the forefront of environmental debates while I was living in Hungary from 1995 to 1997, conducting ethnographic research on environmental groups. This paper will present several cases of Hungarian

activism against well-known transnationals, examining how issues of the public sphere-public space, public access to information and debate, and public participation-are redefined as "environmental" struggles.

I begin with an account of the environmental movement's role in the democratic opposition movement of the 1980s and then launch into discussion of Hungarian environmental activism in the 1990s. In the next section, I introduce the major environmental groups involved in anticorporate activism and discuss Hungarian environmentalists' response to the expansion of McDonald's and Coca Cola's attempts at holiday "goodwill marketing" in Budapest, the capital city. The last section delves into the political implications of environmentalist, anticorporate activism for the public sphere in Hungary, focusing on issues of local control of public space, marketing and public debate, and the political dilemmas of public participation in a consumer society.

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