



LACROSSE—IT'S A WAY OF LIFE

dir. Lívía Šavelková, Tomáš Petrůň and Milan Durňak

GLOBAL LACROSSE VILLAGE/

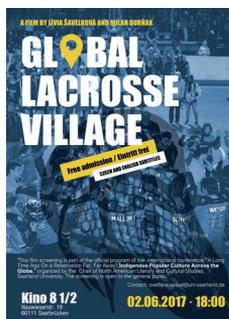
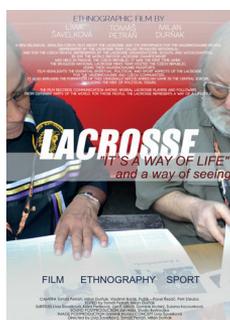
LAKROSOVÁ VESNICE

dir. Lívía Šavelková and Milan Durňak

ON THE SHORE/NA BŘEHU

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(Film Reviews)



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Lacrosse, which is originally a game played by the Haudenosaunee (or Iroquois League) has been popular mostly in Canada and the United States; however, it has also spread globally. These three documentaries portray the sport both in the Czech Republic and on an international arena. Produced in both Czech and English, all three films provide translations through subtitles. The first two documentaries, *Lacrosse—It's a Way of Life* and *Global Lacrosse Village* focus on international lacrosse events held in the Czech Republic (in 2011 and 2015), while *On the Shore* follows the Czech national lacrosse team to the 2019 World Indoor Lacrosse Championship (WILC) in British Columbia, Canada. As such, although they center on different

cultural and political aspects of the transnational encounters that take place during the tournaments, they also provide a chronicle of the Czech lacrosse community that spans almost a decade. They may thus be seen as three parts of a documentary series.

Lacrosse—It's a Way of Life documents the 2011 World Indoor Lacrosse Championship which was held in Prague, Czechia. Although international lacrosse tournaments had taken place in Czechia before, this was the first time that the Iroquois Nationals lacrosse men's team visited the country. As lacrosse originated in their culture, the presence of the Iroquois Nationals at the tournament meant a great deal to the Czech lacrosse community. The film focuses on this cross-cultural encounter, the different preconceptions that the two groups had of each other as Native Americans and Eastern Europeans (or "exotic others," see Šavelková 2017) and on the connections built and understandings created during the course of the Championship. From my perspective, this is the most captivating aspect of the film. The documentary also attempts to explain the meaning of lacrosse to the two groups. For the Haudenosaunee (which comprise the Onondaga, Mohawk, Seneca, Oneida, Cayuga and Tuscarora Nations) the game is a gift from the Creator, a medicine, and thus holds deep spiritual value. For the Czech community, lacrosse has its roots in the scouting and woodcrafting organizations of the late 1970s. The scouts and woodcrafters read about it in the limited sources available to them under Communist censorship, and were drawn to it as a Native American game. They made their own wooden lacrosse sticks and created a Czech version of the game, only later switching to the international rules of box lacrosse. As such, lacrosse for the Czechs may be seen in a way as a form of escapism from the Communist reality of the time. This stands in contrast to how the game was appropriated by settler societies in Canada and the US. There are more political issues touched upon in the documentary, including the fact that the Iroquois Nationals team were able to enter the Czech Republic on their Haudenosaunee passports, which is an assertion of their sovereignty. Šavelková (2017) has also written about the process of cross-cultural filmmaking based on this documentary and the different ethical dilemmas and editing choices the creators were faced with, offering an engaging insight

for scholars interested in visual anthropology and the representation of Indigenous Peoples in Europe, particularly in the Eastern European context.

Global Lacrosse Village takes its viewers to the Czech town of Radotín, where the Aleš Hřebeský Memorial (AHM), which is considered the most prestigious box-lacrosse event in Europe, has been taking place annually since 1994 to commemorate a local lacrosse player who died tragically the year before. In 2001, the tournament hosted international participants for the first time and has been growing in number and rank ever since, welcoming teams not just from the US, Canada, and Haudenosaunee lands, but also countries such as Turkey, Scotland, and Finland. It has become a truly global event, hence, the title of the film. The documentary tells the story of the development of lacrosse in the Czech Republic and the growing popularity of the sport which has made the Czech team the box-lacrosse leader in Europe and a strong competitor against teams from North America. It also depicts the unique character of the tournament in Radotín, with various participants emphasizing its communality, camaraderie, friendships made, and attractions organized, such as the roasting of a pig in the evening. The various international participants also talk about the development of lacrosse in their home countries, which to my surprise, has largely become popular thanks to its portrayal in the 1999 movie *American Pie*. Last, the movie shows how lacrosse has developed into a truly transnational sport, with various Haudenosaunee and non-Indigenous US and Canadian players and coaches supporting and working for different teams around the world. The film is accompanied by a book written by Šavelková in Czech, titled *Stvořitelova hra na cestě světem: Identita Irokézů v procesu revitalizace a globalizace* [The Creator's game on its way throughout the world], which provides a more thorough historical context of the Haudenosaunee game (and its stick and ball game equivalents in other Indigenous communities in North America), as well as a broader analysis of the phenomenon of the globalization of lacrosse.

The last documentary created by Šavelková and Durňak, *On the Shore*, shows an up-close portrait of the Czech national lacrosse team during the World Indoor Lacrosse Championships

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in Langley, British Columbia in 2019. The filmmakers follow the day-to-day lives of the team over the course of three weeks, documenting the impact of the matches on the team's mental and physical health. The film also shows the generational change within the team, with members who are both middle-aged and very young representing the country, and the formation of a collective identity of the group. Interestingly, three Canadian and US players of Czech origin are also included in the national team. Furthermore, it points to the fact that the American and Canadian teams are part of national leagues, which provide funding for the players and coaches, whereas European teams are not, and therefore rely purely on the volunteer engagement and work of players, coaches and organizers. Of these three films, this one focuses on the game itself and the emotions accompanying it the most. It is also the most intimate portrait of the three.

From an anthropological or trans-cultural studies perspective, perhaps the first two documentaries are the most interesting ones, as they focus more on the cultural encounters that took place between the Haudenosaunee and Czech lacrosse players in Prague, and between players from the various international teams at the tournament in Radotín, as well as showcasing the growing popularity of the sport worldwide. Perhaps though, the fact that *On the Shore* does not focus on these issues as much, at least partially reflects the fact that both the Czech lacrosse players, as well as the movies' creators themselves were no longer as preoccupied with these issues themselves, after almost a decade since the first championship in Prague, and playing in (and witnessing) international lacrosse tournaments. Instead, they centered more on the team, its struggles, and the intergenerational shift within it, as the sport itself has been present in the Czech Republic for a few decades now.

Bio: Zuzanna Kruk-Buchowska is an assistant professor at the Faculty of English at Adam Mickiewicz University (AMU) in Poznań, Poland. Her scholarly interests are in Native American and Indigenous Australian higher education, food sovereignty and Indigenous knowledge systems. Her book, *Negotiating Native American Identities: The Role of Tradition, Narrative and Language at Haskell Indian Nations University*, was published in 2016 by AMU Press. Currently, she is conducting a study, "Indigenous Food Sovereignty in a Local and Transnational Perspective," as a Visiting Fellow at the Monash Indigenous Studies Centre at Monash University in Melbourne.

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