

The Oberlin  
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East European and  
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Studies

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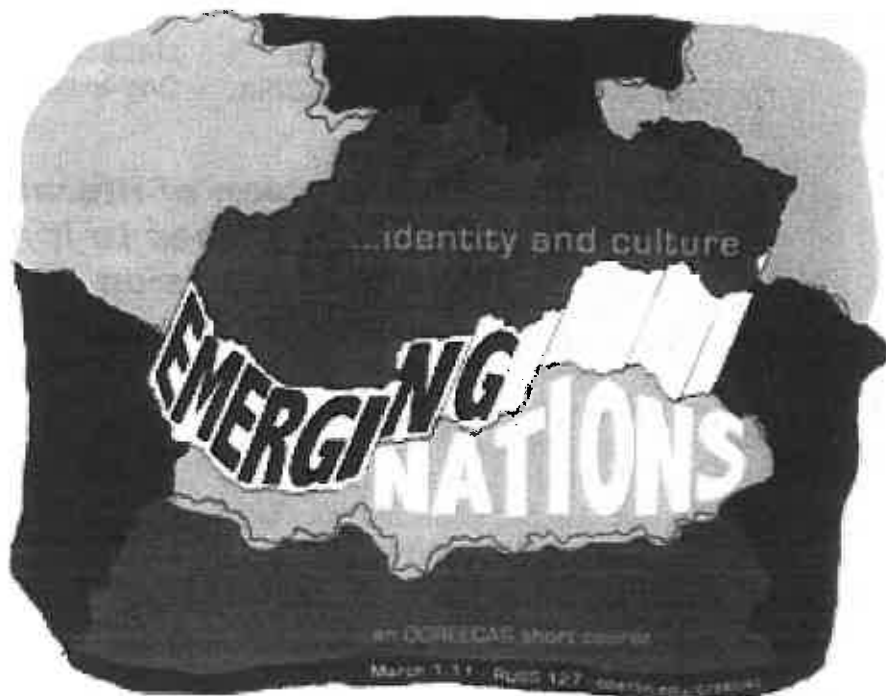
Vladivostok: Times of  
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Editors:  
Sabrina Jaszi  
Nicole Ouellet

[www.oberlin.edu/ocreecas](http://www.oberlin.edu/ocreecas)  
[ocreecas@oberlin.edu](mailto:ocreecas@oberlin.edu)

# OCREECAS NEWS

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*Image by Michael Gervasi*

From March 1-11, six speakers gathered in Oberlin to address the issues of identity and culture in the small nations of Central Europe. The 2007 OCREECAS short course focused on nations that have hitherto been defined by the tumultuous and unpredictable nature of their existences, and have only now begun to enjoy a small amount of stability in the political and social spheres. As artistic freedoms, eradicated by the Soviet Regime, are restored, artists and writers must rise to new challenges and answer questions of national identity.

Speakers addressed a variety of topics relating to culture, and two films were also screened. The short course was orchestrated by Charles Sabatos, an OKUM Postdoctoral Fellow in Comparative Literature, visiting Oberlin for the 2006-7 academic year from the University of Michigan. Mr. Sabatos specializes in Czech and Slovak studies, and has taught two courses at Oberlin this past year, one on culture and literature of Prague, the other on the Central European novel. Students Milena Evtimova and Sabrina Jaszi share their impressions of the course:

**Week 1**

The first week of lectures focused on cultural and social issues in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe during the Communist period, perpetuated through the post-communist period.

Jonathan Larson, a professor of Anthropology at Miami University of Ohio, presented his work,

"Criticism, Taste, and Democratization in Slovakia," on March 3. He shared his experiences in Slovak schools, and his observations on how

teaching literature to Slovak children has affected their perception of politics. During his time in Slovakia, Larson turned his attention to the link between Slovak classrooms and the political situation in the country. The predetermined ways of looking at literature as a reflection of reality was connected with the fact that Slovak children take everything they see on TV and other media to be real.

"The erosion of literature and approaches to it may lead to the erosion of individual thought," Larson said. In Slovak schools students are "not taught the difference between literature and pulp," which he blamed on the way literature was taught during the communist period, when all communist writers were viewed as "engineers of human soul." Larson observed that in post-communist societies, literature rarely exists for its own sake, or for the purpose the authors wrote it. Instead it exists as a vehicle for teaching various lessons and points of view.

Deborah Michaels, a doctoral candidate in Education at the University of Michigan, followed Larson with a lecture on Romani identity and culture. Michaels covered the history of the Roma from their migration from India to the issues of language and culture that they encounter in the countries they settle in.

***"The erosion of literature and approaches to it may lead to the erosion of individual "thought"***

The Roma have been forced to adopt and adapt, as Michaels pointed out—they not only absorb the host cultures but also adapt to them by changing their language, religion, and sometimes even myths and legends to carve out a place for themselves within the culture.

One example that Michaels gave was an Egyptian servant who, according to legend, came to France with the Virgin Mary. The Roma population in France claimed that this servant woman was Romani and thus

recognize her holiday as their own. For decades the way governments in Europe have tried to deal with the Roma "problem" has been to forcefully assimilate them. With the European Union approaching, the situation of the Romani population in Central and Eastern Europe has become an increasingly disputed issue.

The last lecture of the day was by Oberlin's own professor of Hispanic Studies László Scholz, whose informal lecture addressed the issue of translation in Hungary during the communist and post-communist periods. He began by comparing the percentage of books published in translation in the United States in 1994 (2.7%) and 1997 (2.2%), and in Hungary (45-55%). In Hungary, he said, translation has always played an important role.

There have been some changes in the process of translation. Before 1989, teams of translators - often members of the upper middle class fluent in foreign languages or writers banned from publishing their own works - were hired by the state. In the post-communist environment, most translators are students, volunteers, or writers. Scholz also addressed the importance of translation in a country's literature. "A nation lives in its language," he said, providing an apt conclusion for the day's lectures.

~Milena Evtimova '07

**Week 2**

The second Saturday session featured three speakers from the Slovak capital, Bratislava. The first, Jozef Kovalčík, professor at the Bratislava College of Fine Arts, enlightened students on the subject of Czech and Slovak visual art. He identified and showed slides of the six most influential contemporary Czech and Slovak artists, who ranged from painters, to mixed media, to video artists. Three of these artists belonged to an older generation that Kovalčík said greatly valued and represented through their work the isolation of their countries under Communism. The three remaining were part of a younger, current generation, which takes a great deal of inspiration from the West.

Next to speak was Zuzana Uličianska, the cultural editor of SME, a Bratislava daily. Uličianska spoke about the performing arts in the Slovak Republic. She shared with students her experiences with the comedy of errors surrounding the building of a theatrical center in Bratislava, as well as the highlights of the Slovak theatrical scene. These included slides and descriptions of famous actors, popular productions, and audience reactions to a Slovak adaptation of *Rent*. She also showed photographs from a Slovak theatrical awards ceremony where winners received not a golden statuette, but what appeared to be a 2x4, representing a plank from a theatrical stage.

Uličianska spoke candidly about the sometimes narrow-minded audiences in Slovak theatres, and the dwindling popularity of theater. During the building of the Bratislava theatrical center, it had been suggested that they can the idea and turn the whole thing into a ciniplex. She joked that the many depressing productions put on in Slovak theaters might be evidence of the national mood.

Last to present on Saturday was novelist Michael Hvorecký. At 30 years old, Hvorecký was the youngest of the bunch and - dressed smartly in a suit

paired with Converse sneakers - immediately a hit with the students. His reading of a translated short story, based on his own misadventures at conferences abroad where he represented the Slovak Republic, playfully ridiculed the many misconceptions and ignorances entertained by foreigners about the nations of Central Europe. As well as regaling students and staff with his writing and humorous anecdotes, Hvorecký spoke about the financial difficulty of practicing his craft in Bratislava where he is one of the last remaining free-lance writers (although he enjoys a relatively successful career). His works have been translated into Czech, Polish, and most recently German.

It became evident that Hvorecký is not only a writer but an important organizer of cultural events. In 2000 he founded the "Wilsonic" music festival in Bratislava. As well as writing novels, he is



Kovalčík, Uličianska, Sabatos and Hvorecký

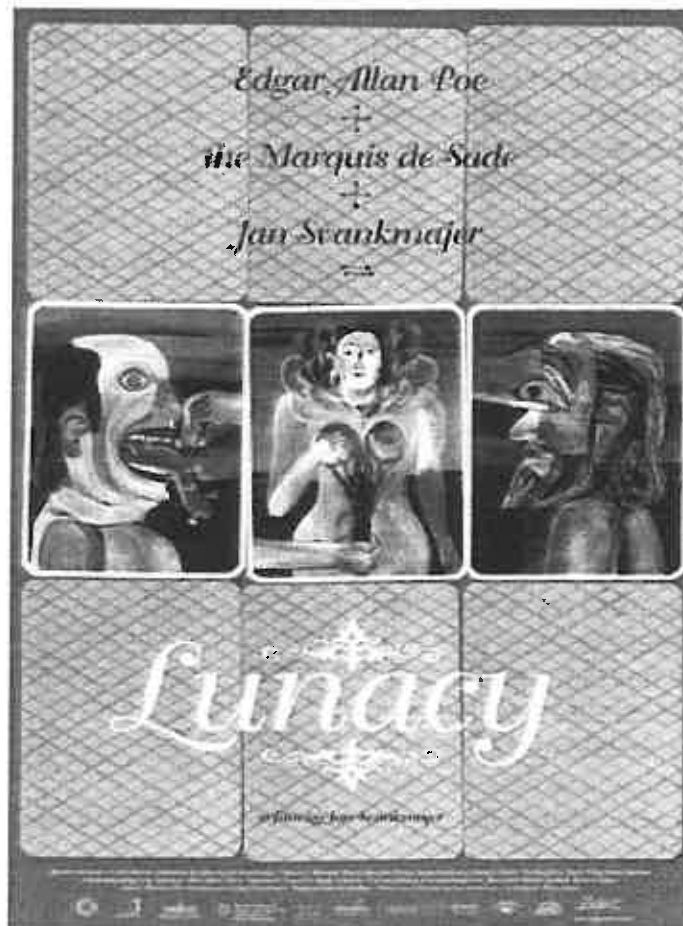
the author of theatrical plays and regularly writes articles for newspapers and journals in and outside of his home country. Unlike in the United States, where would-be writers vie for positions of influence in the literary world, the contemporary literary scene Bratislava relies heavily on its authors, Hvorecký included, to cultivate and sustain it.

The finale to the ten-day long course packed with cultural insight was fittingly enough a screening of Jan Svankmajer's newest film, *Lunacy*. For enthusiasts of the Surrealist master of stop-motion filmmaking, the screening was a real treat. Newcomers to the director may have been somewhat shocked by what they saw, but enjoyed it nonetheless.

***"Hvorecký playfully ridiculed the many misconceptions and ignorances entertained by foreigners about the nations of Central Europe."***

Svankmajer's creation, which he describes as a "philosophical horror film," combines live action with stop-motion, loosely based on two short stories by Edgar Allen Poe, as well as the story of the Marquis de Sade. Incorporated in the story are the themes of insanity, sex and violence, as well as a great deal of animated meat.

~Sabrina Jaszi '07



## Czech at Oberlin?

A plaque hangs in the ground floor corridor of Bosworth Hall, honoring Louis F. Miskovsky, "Bohemian Patriot." This designation shows the original meaning of "Bohemian," which did not refer to free-thinking and artistic individuals, but was the ethnic term for natives of Bohemia, now known as the Czech Republic. It also reveals a forgotten piece of the history of Oberlin College, which had one of the earliest programs of Czech studies, probably the first, in the United States. Most Slavic departments in the United States, whose origins often date back to the Cold War era, focus largely on Russian language and culture. At Oberlin, the cornerstone of Slavic studies from the beginning was Czech language and literature.

In 1885, Oberlin College established a Slavic department within its theological seminary, in connection with the Schaufler Missionary Training School (later the Schaufler College of Religious and Social Work.) The purpose of this department was "training young men for missionary work among the immigrants from Slavic peoples" - in other words, Protestant ministers working among the largely Catholic Slavic immigrant communities of Cleveland and other cities of the region. Courses offered included theology, oratory, church history, Czech grammar and literature, including particularly "the Middle or Protestant Period of Bohemian Letters." The Czech focus of this theological program was quite logical, since Bohemia

Under the direction of Louis Miskovsky (1863-1924), the Oberlin Slavic department lasted for almost forty years. Miskovsky, who had immigrated from his native town of Kutná Hora, Bohemia to New York with his family, came to Oberlin as a student. Following his graduation from Oberlin in 1891, Miskovsky studied in Prague, where he took a philosophy course with Tomas Masaryk, later the founder and first president of Czechoslovakia. At the end of World War I, Miskovsky went to Washington, DC, and

played a significant role in supporting Masaryk's claims for Czechoslovak sovereignty. (For much of his career at Oberlin, Miskovsky lived at 121 E. Fuller St., now the Fuller Co-Op.) The Oberlin College Ar-



chives still holds a triumphant postcard that Miskovsky sent back from Washington at the time of his homeland's independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Unfortunately, just as an independent Czechoslovak state arose in Central Europe, this promising connection with Oberlin was cut short. In 1921, with the changing political and social climate, the Slavic department was discontinued. New restrictions on immigration from southern and eastern Europe reduced the waves of Slavs arriving in American industrial cities, and preaching in their native languages was no longer seen as a priority. Disappointed in his struggle to save the department, Miskovsky died less than three years later. In 1961, the memorial plaque for Miskovsky was dedicated in Bosworth

where it still hangs today. The interrupted tradition of Slavic studies was resumed in the 1950s with the establishment of a Russian department, but this did not include the teaching of other Slavic languages such as Czech. However, Oberlin does have a more recent link to Czech culture: the late Czech poet and scientist Miroslav Holub visited here several times in the 1980s and 1990s, and his poetry has been published in translation by the Oberlin College Press.

~Charles Sabatos

*An OKUM Post-doc fellow in Comparative Literature in 2006-07, Charles Sabatos enjoyed the opportunity to bring the Czech studies back to its American birthplace, offering courses on the modern literature and culture of Prague, and the Eastern European novel. Sabatos wishes to thank the Oberlin College Archives for their help in finding materials relating to Louis Miskovsky and the Oberlin Slavic Department.*

## Upcoming Events

### **Georgian Culture: Food and Song** Fall 2007, 2nd Module

The course will take an interdisciplinary approach to the topics of song, food, and feature the following events:

- guest lectures by Oberlin alum Avery Book and Georgian songmaster Carl Linich
- a concert by the Zedashe Ensemble
- Darra Goldstein on feasting and Georgian food
- a traditional Georgian feast

Check the OCREECAS website for further details



Zedashe Ensemble

## Oil and Water

While water is essential to life in a biological sense, oil is essential to the modern way of life in just about every other way. The Spring '06 OCREECAS short course "Oil and Water" addressed the necessity of these resources and the complexity of their relationship to nature and society as they exist in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The former Soviet countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia are facing new and powerful economic and political change that is compounded by the recent discovery of vast oil reserves and persistent water problems in the region. "Oil and Water" examined the impact of the Soviet cotton industry on the region: the Aral Sea has lost more than half of its volume over the past half-decade and an ecological disaster continues to affect local populations.

Neighboring Azerbaijan, which is located on the western side of the Caspian Sea, has recently received a vast amount of foreign investment to exploit its oil reserves. "Oil and Water" discussed both the possibility for great economic improvement and the government corruption resulting from the newfound wealth. In order to reach western consumers, a multi-billion dollar pipeline has been completed which passes through Georgia and ends at the Turkish port of Ceyhan. American and European geo-political interests, security issues, and environmental impacts in the region were discussed in depth over the course of the week. Turkish port of Ceyhan. American and European geo-political interests, security

issues, and environmental impacts in the region were discussed in depth over the course of the week.

Organized by Stephen Jones, Professor and Chair of Russian and Eurasian Studies at Mount Holyoke College, professors from other universities were able to share their expertise with Oberlin students. Michael Klare, Professor of Peace and World Security Studies at Hampshire College, lectured on "Oil, War, and Geopolitics: The Foreign Policy Implications of America's Dependence on Imported Petroleum." Two days later, Geoffrey Dabelko, Director of the Environmental Change and Security Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, spoke on "Water: Conflict and Cooperation."

"Oil and Water" demonstrated Oberlin College's commitment to the multi-disciplinary

exploration of the region in a unique setting. The issues raised are relevant to people interested in a wide range of different fields. In fact, "Oil and Water" synthesized international politics, economics, ecology, geography, business, and the region's culture and illuminated how closely they are interconnected. In exploring a peripheral region of the world, the OCREECAS short course demonstrated the extent to which globalization can be both an instrument for economic exploitation, like in Azerbaijan, or, as in the case of Central Asia, for international development.

~Andrew Echilin '09

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## Oberlin Winter Term in Russia

Steam rises from the cracked ice of the Neva. Slanting rays from the late rising sun glance off the frozen river and the golden spire of the Peter Paul Fortress, lighting up buildings painted like Easter eggs: moss green, pale pink, warm gold. I press my face to the fogged glass of the bus window, inhaling my first view of the Venice of the North. It is a cold, cold, cold January morning in 2006, and we—20 Oberlin students with two Russian professors—have just arrived in St. Petersburg on a midnight train from Moscow.

The two-week study tour was led by professors Arlene Forman and Amanda Blasko and sponsored by the Russian Department and OCREECAS. Open to any student enrolled in a course in Russian language or culture, the tour was implemented to give first year students and non-majors a first-hand experience of life in modern Russia. During the first half of the trip, Oberlin students spent a week in Moscow touring the city and surrounding areas, attending lectures on contemporary Russian life, and participating in cultural exchanges with professors and students from the Moscow University of Service.

During the second half of the tour, our group headed to historic St. Petersburg to see sites ranging from the famous Hermitage Museum to the Baltika beer factory, and to retrace the footsteps of literary giants such as Dostoevsky along the city's many canals. The structure, flexibility and diversity of the study tour, made possible by our professors' expertise, afforded us a level of access to Russian life impossible for the conventional tourist.

We landed in the Moscow airport on the evening of January 11th, exhausted

yet exhilarated to have finally arrived. We were greeted at the airport by several students from the Moscow University of Service, who would be translators and friends for the remainder of our stay. Still gaping



at the sea of fur hats and stern, pale faces of the airport terminal, we were ushered into the plush interior of our tour bus. Our professors urged us to stay awake, as this was our one chance to see Moscow for the first time. Despite my best efforts to remain conscious, I drifted off against the seatback, only to be awaked by the bus driver barking, "Out! Out! Out!" Dazed and frantic at what I took to be a bizarre Russian version of a Chinese fire drill, I scrambled out of the bus, carrying my

***"For me, the entire trip was characterized by a sense of the fantastic, the unexpected, the larger-than-life."***

luggage and wrapped in a winter coat resembling an alpine sleeping bag, only to be confronted with the towering grandeur of the walls of the Moscow Kremlin. To my tired eyes, everything seemed to be etched in sharp relief against the cold night air and magnified to an almost unnatural size. To our left was a Christmas tree a hundred feet high, a giant Soviet era statue, and, incongruously, a small Shetland pony and man cradling a monkey in a snow suit. Our student guides led us through the gates of the Kremlin, where we beheld the



Candyland-like turrets of St. Basil's Cathedral and the low, marble expanse of Lenin's tomb. Before we had a chance to absorb it all, we were quickly herded back into the bus, which sped onward toward our hotel.

For me, the entire trip was characterized by a sense of the fantastic, the unexpected, the larger-than-life. Our itinerary was filled with events and destinations that covered every aspect of Russian life: we toured the celebrated Mosfilm movie studio where nearly every Soviet-era movie was filmed; we donned crisp white hats and aprons and nibbled on candy fresh off the assembly line at the Red October chocolate factory; we sat in the control room as scientists communicated with cosmonauts aboard the manned satellite Mir. We were even allowed to watch the most popular Russian soaps being filmed and take our pictures on the set of the Russian version of *The Nanny*. We spent several days in the company of fellow Russian college students, who graciously helped us navigate the glittering, cavernous maze of the Moscow metro and showed us the city's nightlife, which somehow manages to thrive despite - or perhaps because of - the subzero chill of Moscow nights.

Our week in Moscow culminated with a visit to Maria's Children, a camp and center for Russian orphans which has ties to Oberlin College. Our group had spent the previous month gathering art supplies for the campers, and our gifts were rewarded with the chance to draw, paint, sing, and share dinner with our new friends.

Our week in St. Petersburg passed in a flurry of sightseeing, school visits, cultural events, and still more record-breaking cold weather. By day, we toured the crumbling, 900 year-old fortresses of historic nearby Novgorod; by night we were wooed by the sounds of the St. Petersburg symphony, just as Pushkin was nearly two-hundred years earlier. We wan-

dered the luminous halls of the Hermitage museum, awed by the acres of art and perplexed by the Russian signs. One night, we were treated to a one-man play performed by candlelight in a tiny garret attic. The next day we were given a private, two-mile long tour through the Baltika beer factory—the second largest in Europe—and taste-tested the company's signature brews. We visited the revered "dom-mu-see" of Doestoevsky and retraced Raskolnikov's path through the Haymarket. Throughout the trip, Amanda and Arlene patiently helped us understand all things Russian, whether it was a



rapid-fire translation of a tour guide's speech or the correct way to order two potato pancakes.

Our two-weeks passed quickly, and left many of us with the desire to return to Russia again, armed with more time and better language skills. My brief glimpse of urban Russia revealed a rapidly changing country in which centuries of history collide with the boisterous, if somewhat aggressive, capitalism of the post-Soviet era. As our Russian peers—the first generation too young to remember life in the Soviet Union—come of age, Russian life will undergo still more changes. I, for one, will be back to witness it firsthand.

~Sadie Nachtiegal '09

## Summer on Lake Baikal

Usually, when preparing to visit a foreign country, people brush up on phrases such as, "bus stop," and "Where is a restaurant?" or "I don't speak \_\_\_\_." When I set out for Siberia, I hoped that my one year of Russian language study would allow me to at least navigate my way around a city, if not carry on full conversations. However, I was one of the unusual tourists for whom the most important words were not "café" and "restroom," but "campfire," "mosquito," and "ax."

In August of 2006 I traveled to the city of Irkutsk as an eco-tourist volunteering to promote ecological tourism around Lake Baikal. When I first learned the statistics about Baikal - that it is the deepest lake in the world, containing one fifth of the Earth's fresh water with a surface area equal to that of Lake Superior - I was doubtful. Wouldn't I have heard of the world's deepest lake before? But I stopped doubting as each Russian whom I told about my planned trip exclaimed, "Oh Baikal, the pearl of Siberia!" The founders of the Great Baikal Trails Association (GBT) share a reverence for their lake, and as soon as I breathed the fresh air of

myself, cupped in wooded mountains, I understood their sense of awe.

While Baikal's depth (close to a mile at its deepest point) enables it to hold more water-purifying organisms than most lakes, industries such as the Baikalsk Pulp and Paper Mill threaten its cleanliness. Industrial pollution is a cause for concern, as an estimated 1,500 found species in and around the lake are found nowhere else on earth. The sense of wonder that moves people to build their dachas by the lake and brings them flocking to its shores on holidays has also inspired some to protect this sensitive eco-system through environmental activism. GBT promotes eco-tourism by building of hiking trails around the 400 mile-long lake. Each summer since they began in 2000, GBT founders have led groups of Russian and foreign volunteers on working vacations.

When I decided to take part in a project, I envisioned two weeks of good good hard work, never expecting that the team leaders would make it such a rich experience.

From the moment I walked into the little apartment that serves as GBT's office, meeting space, storage room and hostel, I could sense what a special organization I had found. Someone rustled up tea and



cookies, and immediately people began pointing to the map of the lake that hung on the wall, exclaiming, "you must go here, it is so beautiful," "...and here you can see the famous Nerpa, the freshwater seal," and "...be sure to visit this island,

spice packets.

Traveling alone to Siberia to work in the woods sounds adventurous, even daring, but we were taken care of from the moment the project began. When we first arrived at the village where we were to



they have no electricity..." Everyone who passed through the little office was either invigorated by fresh air and campfire stories, or full of excitement to get out to the lake. My team consisted of Russians, Germans, French, a Mongolian, and two Buryat, from the region of Buryatia east of the lake. Sasha, a GBT staff member, was our brigadier, and two Russian girls who volunteer regularly with the organization served as our translators and food managers. The translators, I soon realized, were like our camp counselors. Each evening they had new games and songs to share around the fire, and for the German men, who had no idea how to make soup when it was their turn to cook,

***"Everyone who passed through the little office was either invigorated by fresh air and campfire stories, or full of excitement to get out to the lake."***

camp, a group of forest workers met us to help carry food, medical supplies, tents and tools. Before we could make the hour-long hike to our campsite, however, a trip to the village for cheese and sweets, followed by a hot lunch, was in order. And

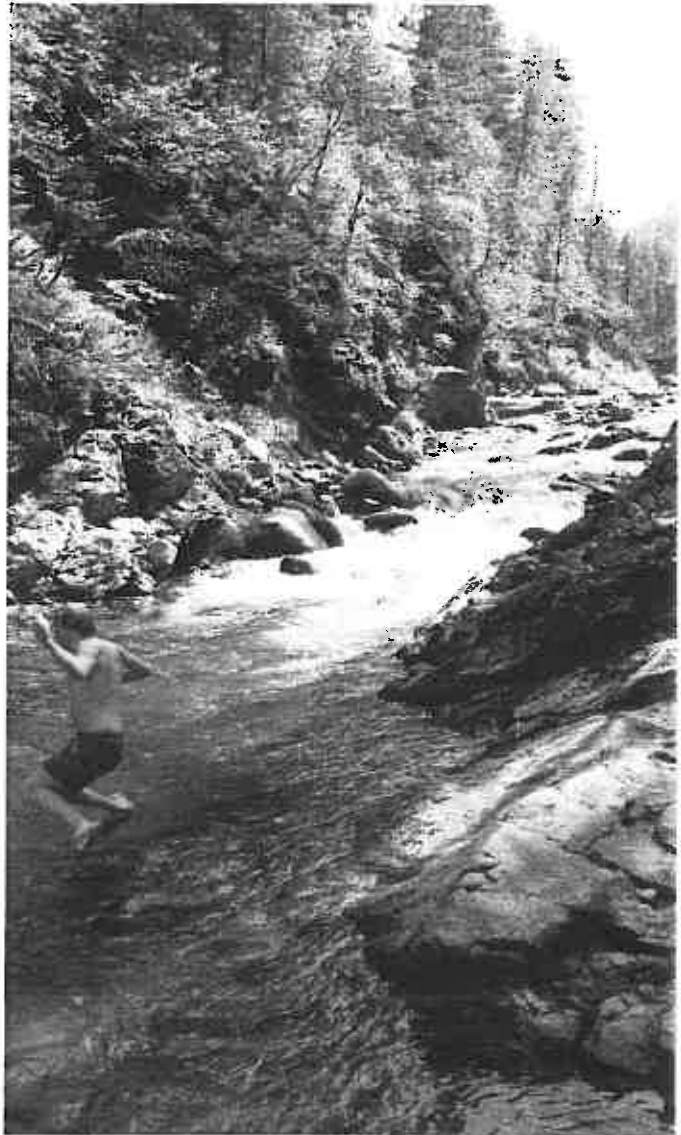
that set the tone for the trip: always a good meal before working, complete with cookies, tea with jam, instant coffee and sweetened condensed milk.

Life is especially vibrant when you are living outdoors. The most delicious food I have tasted was the soup from cans and hunk of cheese cooled in the river after a morning of building stone steps. And there is nothing like a day of work in

degree Celcius water and clearing trails hadn't been enough to work up an appetite, we probably would have done it just with all the laughing we did. Most of us knew at least some Russian or English, but with no language which we could all speak fluently, any attempt at a sophisticated sentence was a lost cause. With our communication tools reduced to 50 words and abundant gestures, we discovered our kindergarten senses of humor, and everything became funny. In place of nuanced conversation, we entertained ourselves with hide-and-seek and memory games. It is a testament to the wonder of Lake Baikal that we all felt we had made a second family after our weeks together.

What stays with me most from the experience is the sincere hospitality of the people at GBT. As Sasha explained earnestly, we were not just volunteers, we were guests in their country; they wanted to show us all that they loved about their culture. On our days off they took us into the village for a banya, the Russian sauna, and a picnic by the lake with smoked omul, the local fish delicacy. Being with these Russians who love their lake so dearly, it did not take long for me to fall in love with Baikal, and to understand when our translator Olga beamed as we sat by the water, saying, "Now we are the happiest people in the world, because we have Baikal."

~Elisa Saltet '07



## Vladivostok: Times of Change

Vladivostok sits on the coast of Russia's Primorye region, far closer to the booming economic and population centers of Asia than to Moscow. An OCREECAS grant for post-graduation volunteer work brought me to that far edge of Russia from August to December 2006, to work with the non-profit organization Initiative Network of Regional Activists (Initsiativnii Set' Aktivistov Regiona) or I.S.A.R. Working with this pioneering organization .

(I translated the website [www.isardvrc.ru](http://www.isardvrc.ru), correspondence, a grant application, and other documents) in a time and place of continued social and economic transition gave me a new understanding of the importance of civil society for the Russian Far East's development.

Vladivostok, a closed military and industrial city from 1948 to 1992, opened its eyes in the early 90s to find Japan, China, and the rest of the world close at its shores, hungry for new markets and raw resources. Following the Russian Far East's economic and political collapse in the early 90s, Russian and foreign entrepreneurs and "bandits" stepped in to fill the void, creating tremendous change which continues in uncertain steps to recreate the region's economy and even its social structure.

From an airplane window, the mist-shrouded mountains rising from the Sea of Japan stretch to the horizon. They remind me more of a Chinese print than of Russia. Vladivostok itself looked more like an outpost wedged between mighty forest and sea than the "Ruler of the East" that its name suggests. But many think it can live up to its name.

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As a meeting point of Asia and Russia, the city is filling with global companies, modern technology, and even tourists. On street corners, Korean pyanse are sold along with hot pirozhki, and construction workers are mostly Chinese and North Korean.

The local and federal government has been publicizing plans to turn the nearby Russian Island into the venue for the 2012 Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit. Currently the island is home to abandoned, overgrown military bunkers.

As Vladivostok resumes a semblance of order, the government wishes to unleash the power of the city's natural resources and geographic position. The goal is to remake the city into a regional economic center. But not everyone is open to such plans. The tensions of a society in flux still ripple to the surface in the form of racism and anti-Semitism on the streets and in the government. Corruption cripples the government's promises to the people and allows



businesses to exploit the land. And environmentally, it is not ready for innovative development, as it lacks basic infrastructure.

Many business and government leaders see the Russian Far East as a trove of natural resources to be quickly sold off to feed Japan and China's appetites for energy. Simply exploiting natural resources, however, has not - and most likely will not - bring about sustainable economic reconstruction. It ignores the need for rebuilding infrastructure and industry, creates relatively few jobs, and exploits public lands for private profit. While local and federal officials claim to be concerned with issues other than immediate profit, their actions speak otherwise. Unwillingness to invest in long term sustainable development, to enforce environmental laws, to crack down on hate crimes, or to face corruption, damages quality of life and stands squarely in the way of a vision for a prosperous, international city.

The government also, unfortunately, does not welcome the aid of civil society in addressing these serious obstacles to redevelopment. By working with I.S.A.R., I learned about small and large

groups that are combating illegal trafficking, protecting the Siberian Tiger and Amur Leopard, fighting for clean air and water, and acting as the only watchdogs on oil company practices, to name just a few issues. Not only are these organizations effecting positive social change on a local and regional scale, several work with national and international partners, playing a vital role in making Vladivostok a developed, beautiful, and globally connected city.

I.S.A.R. in particular has implemented a wide range of projects. Their recent and current projects have included helping students lead trainings on legal rights, publishing an environmental education magazine, and following and challenging oil terminal and pipeline development. One recent program called "Clean Shore, Living Sea" united groups throughout the Russian Far East, and was presented at a conference in Japan last fall. I.S.A.R. is currently seeking funding for an energy conservation project, which is unique and badly needed in the region to combat energy waste, poor quality of life, and poverty. In addition, the organization offers training, resources, and, when



funding is available, grants to activist individuals and groups. Their main challenges are government opposition, bureaucracy, and finding funding.

Third sector organizations like I.S.A.R. have a vision that can help improve the economy and environment of Vladivostok and the region. But will their voices be heard, ignored, or silenced? Vladivostok has departed on a road of change. It is not clear whether its leaders will cede openness for nationalism, make Primorye a raw resource provider at the expense of a sustainable economy, or risk the government-business collusion to heed voices from civil society. Against the odds, third sector organizations like I.S.A.R. are growing. Their vision of tolerance, fighting poverty, and sustainability may someday lead Vladivostok into greater cooperation with its neighbors and development of a world where the environment, people, and economy can all thrive.

~Anna Brown '06

