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Photo by Georgia Skoirchet '09

A Glimpse of Work at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews

"What did you do last summer?" asked a volunteer from a local monthly newspaper in my hometown. I responded to his question by saying I went to Poland as an intern for a new Museum about to be built. He responded with uncertainty, "come again?" I repeated my statement and he decided to quote my summer experience in the paper. Somehow the news got around and by now, even the secretary at my grandmother's dentist knows what I did last summer. Few people know the specifics of my experiences during my OCREECAS internship at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews and so this is where I will begin.

My first assignment at the Museum was to familiarize myself with the project's mission and history. The director handed me the sole copy of the English version of the Museum's master plan. According to this plan, the Museum will open its doors to the public in 2010. However, when I came to the Museum over the summer, the pro-

jected expenditure was \$65 million U.S. dollars, which would require more time for fundraising. Since then, project planners foresee the Museum opening in 2011.

Over the following three months, the Museum staff assigned me various tasks in the education, history and development departments. My experience at the Museum provided me with a better understanding of my own Polish Jewish ancestry and helped perfect my learning of the Polish language. Most memorably, however, I had the opportunity to work

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During the first week, I attended presentations by visitors from the U.S. Embassy; a staff meeting directed by the Museum's director, Mr. Jerzy Halbersztadt; and a viewing of the 3-D representation of the future Museum by the Museum's web developer. I was impressed by how each member of the staff was passionate and knowl-

edgeable about the history of Polish Jews. At first, I was surprised by how many of the Museum staff were not Jewish yet they were fascinated by Polish-Jewish culture and history. During my internship, I learned that there really are members of Polish society with a deep appreciation and interest in Jewish history.

I say this because more than 100,000 Jews visit Poland each year, but unfortunately many visitors to Poland have preconceived ideas about Polish-Jewish relations based upon events in the last century culminating in the Holocaust. Many are unaware of a vibrant Polish-Jewish culture, which developed over the last eight centuries.

Jews began settling in Poland in significant numbers in the 13th century and by the 16th century, Jews in Poland were the first Jews in Europe to win the right to self-rule. Record numbers of Jews from the diaspora took residence and remained in Poland until the outbreak of the war.

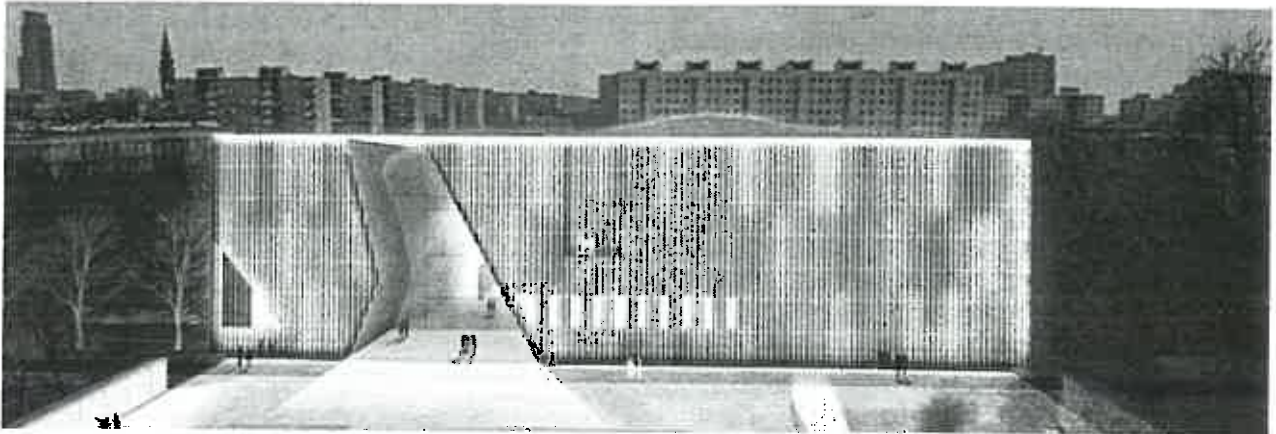
The project of the Museum of the History of Jews in Poland was first conceived in



Polish President Lech Kaczynski participates in laying the foundation stone in the presence of the museum's director Jerzy Halbersztadt, Warsaw's Mayor Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, Rabbi Lau and others at the June 26th groundbreaking ceremony.

1996 by Yeshayahu Weinberg, a founding director of Tel Aviv's Diaspora Museum and the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. The Museum project was chartered in January 2005 under the terms of the first public-private partnership of its kind in Poland. Lech Kaczynski, Waldemar Dabrowski and Professor Jerzy Tomaszewski signed an agreement establishing the joint cultural institution and dedicating a site for the construction of the Museum.

in the former Warsaw Jewish Quarter, which was designated as the Warsaw Ghetto in 1940. More than 200 guests were in attendance and honorary speakers included the President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Kaczynski, Mayor of Warsaw, Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Kazimierz Ujazdowski, Chairman of the Jewish Historical Institute Association, Marian Turski and the Head Rabbi of Tel Aviv, Rabbi Lau.



A visual representation of what the The Museum of the History of Polish Jews will look like in 2011. The future Museum of the History of Polish Jews will be built atop what was once the war ruins of Warsaw's former Jewish ghetto.

I believe visitors to Poland have the propensity to place too much emphasis upon anti-Semitism in Poland. It is true that forms of anti-Semitism persist in contemporary Poland. On the other hand, besides America and Israel, no other country in the world publishes a greater volume of books on Jewish subjects including, commentaries on the Torah, history books about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, and poetry and prose about Polish-Jewish and Jewish identity. Many Poles are interested in learning about how Jewish history is part of their own nation's history.

On June 26, 2007, the Museum's Ground-breaking event took place in honor of the launching of the Museum's two-year construction phase. The opening ceremonies occurred at the site of the future Museum

Following speeches, a highlight of the event was the signing of a formal Construction Act by the Founders of the Museum. To conclude the ceremony, the document was sealed underground with a glass casing also holding fragments of the buildings and streets destroyed during the Ghetto Uprising in 1943. Across from the site of the new Museum resides Nathan Rappaport's Memorial of the Warsaw Ghetto. This memorial commemorates the heroic efforts of the Uprising in '43, which was a month-long fight organized by members of the ghetto attempting to prevent further deportation of ghetto residents to the concentration camps.

In the evening, historic film footage of Jewish life in Warsaw during the summer of 1939 was projected onto an outdoor

screen accompanied by a live musical performance. Residents of Muranow, whose neighborhood will soon house the Museum, were invited to attend this event. Familiarizing visitors with the educational and cultural mission of the Museum was also accomplished a week later. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, head of the core exhibition, addressed the latest Museum developments at the Jewish Cultural Festival in Krakow, Poland.

Following this presentation, one audience member inquired about which languages were to be included in the Museum's permanent exhibition. Ms. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett responded by asking, "Which languages do you think ought to be included?" The first person to respond suggested Yiddish and this idea was followed by the question, "If you include Yiddish, the traditionally spoken language of Eastern European Jewry, who will be able to read this in the decades to come?" First of all, few Jews reading and speaking in Yiddish will be living in the future and therefore the display of Yiddish text would seem superfluous. On the other hand, it was argued that by excluding Yiddish, the Museum would fail to honor the cultural significance of the Yiddish language to the history of Polish Jews.

I frequently attended staff meetings involving lively discussions where we asked questions such as: what languages will be incorporated in the core exhibitions; what historical events ought to take precedence in the content of the Museum's narrative; and what will engage an international audience of all ages, faiths and ethnicities. Now that I participated in the process of planning a state-of-the-art Museum, I am much more appreciative of the amount of time and continuous effort put into Museum planning and development.

~Paula Sliwinski '08

OCREECAS Interns Step into the Future

You might have heard people say Moscow isn't the "real" Russia; that you have to leave the biggest cities to really understand the country. I'd add that at the same time the experiences sought and extent of participation in local life are just as important. Current and recent Oberlin students are lucky on both counts, as OCREECAS activities – especially the internships in Russia – enable students to explore an amazing range of places and issues.

These experiences are not ones soon forgotten. In my case, OCREECAS grants sent me to Russia twice, during college to work with the Great Baikal Trail Association and after graduation to work with an environmental group in Vladivostok. But "twice" isn't the whole story, because those two trips led to my return to Russia last fall, to work as a translator in Moscow.

Building trails around Baikal or helping to start a recycling program on a Far Eastern beach may not seem like the likeliest precursors to a job translating real estate valuation reports, diplomas, magazine articles and all other manner of documents in Moscow, but I probably wouldn't have gone to Moscow without them.

Not only did I arrive in the capital having already pondered in Vladivostok the possible translations of common but seemingly untranslatable words, long before meeting them in audit reports, but I had also actually spent time in towns of both the *gorodskova* and *negorodskova tipa* (major and minor towns) and the other types of settlements to be met in real estate reports, had picked up some words related to oil extraction and pipelines from environmental campaigns, and had become

skilled enough at dissecting long words to understand *gazepyleiulavlivayushchaya ustanovka* (gas and dust collecting unit) when it came up.

Learning long words wasn't the only reason I decided to go back to Russia. I had seen life in few parts of regional Russia, but not what Moscow had to say about where Russia is headed and what it should be defined by. With its roots still showing in the grandmothers selling apples and shawls, or the soviet architecture of residential districts, Moscow today is 14 million people (including the estimated illegal population) speeding ahead toward a very modern, stylish, increasingly affluent, and still Russian future, full of internet, expendable income, khachapuri delivery to your door, trendy Asian restaurants, mortgage lending, and even a fairly stable government.

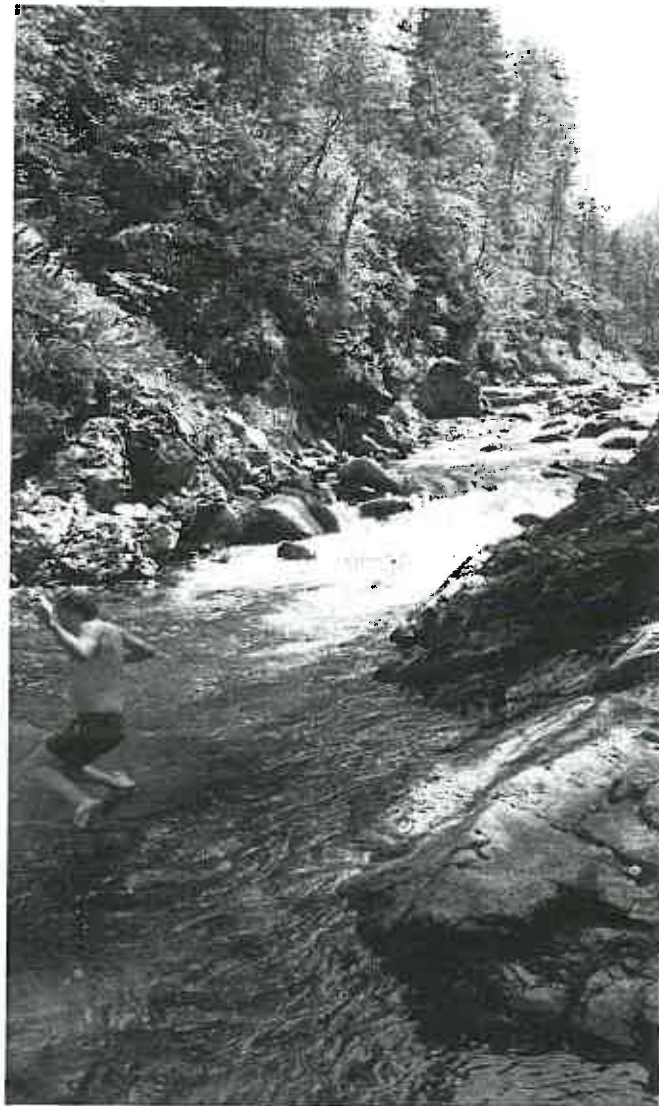
I'll remember Moscow for the buildings, metro stations, and rush, while the forest and lake or sea will always be associated with Irkutsk and Vladivostok. OCREECAS internships and the work they led to provided me more interesting and varied experiences of Russian life, views, and culture than I ever imagined I would have when I came to Oberlin. Each place, from Moscow to tiny towns by Baikal contribute an important part of understanding Russia, and for all these opportunities I have just this to say: Thank You!

~Anna Brown '06

OCREECAS and the Great Baikal Trail Project (GBT): The Story Continues

Since 2003, a steady stream of Oberlin students has participated in a humble but growing non-profit effort to preserve the pristine beauty of Siberia's pride and joy, Lake Baikal. This year that tradition was carried on by three students, Georgia Skoirchet '09, Sally Kintner '07, and Elisa Saltet '07.

Photos by Georgia Skoirchet '09



Building Bridges in Siberia

I recall hearing before I left the States that living abroad, in a country whose language you do not speak fluently, is like going through childhood again, learning little by little to express yourself fully. That has turned out more true than I was then even able to imagine. Not only are your surroundings and customs unfamiliar; not only can you communicate solely in a broken, silly imitation of real language; but because of all this you are often even treated like a child. People say things to you and do things for you that have not been said to you or done for you since you were ten and lived with your parents. I suppose it should not be so surprising that the mountainous task of sounding adult, which in one's own language takes at the very least fifteen years, cannot be achieved in a mere matter of weeks, but

GBT's focus on ecotourism is one of those beautifully simple ideas: build a trail and they will come.

let me assure you, it never ceases to be frustrating. But there are myriad ways to connect and communicate with people, and the way one grows up and forges a new self that exists only in this new language is astounding.

The Great Baikal Trail is one of the most inspiring organizations I have ever seen. It is for good reason that Oberlin students have populated this office repeatedly since Brianna Tindall's spearheading of the internship in summer 2003. Tackling problems so big as conservation of a lake of the size and importance of this one,

or diverting the flow of rubles from resource-exploitative sectors to those more environmentally friendly, seems more than daunting, yet the friendly people of GBT have thrown themselves fully into the task. What's more, they make even such lofty goals seem ultimately attainable.

GBT's focus on ecotourism is one of those beautifully simple ideas: build a trail and they will come.

Many times while I was in Russia, I told new acquaintances that I was working there as a volunteer, and was asked what that means or why in the world I would do it. GBT's work includes breaking ground not simply in the earth itself but in the minds of the local population. GBT's admirable approach to this problem is not just to advocate volunteerism and ecotourism, but to put them into practice, showing that they can and do

work systematically. This has resulted in strong ties with local people and protected



International GBT volunteers take a rest on the bridge we built together. Represented in this photo are Russia, Germany, Canada and the United States.

lands administrations as well as with large foreign organizations.

It is GBT's youth, I have found, that are its lifeblood. For them the office is not an office, it's a hangout, a place they come to for working and learning but also to play computer games and take naps. But that builds in them a loyalty to this project and



Fun and games establish lasting bonds

this type of work that would be utterly impossible to cultivate in a starched shirt-and-tie environment. When GBT needs hands and minds and leaders, it turns to this group of fun-loving, energetic youth.

My specific work included translating our newsletter from Russian into English and our website from English into French; running weekly conversational English practice on topics ranging from fables and folk tales to Johnny Cash; giving and listening to presentations on various topics; and helping with grant proposals in English. My experience included meeting Russians, Americans, Germans, Canadians, Austra-

lians, Belgians, English, Danes, Swiss. It included talking. It included messing up. It included laughing and finding the communicative value of games that seem stupid and childish. It included looking and listening.

Those seven months in Siberia were a whirlwind of emotion and energy. How can

I begin to describe an experience in which every single moment was important? From the simplest conversation to the most glorious mountain outings, there was no minute there that I could waste; every second was impregnated with the need to understand, to remember, to store away as a complete lesson in and of itself. It's hard to live like that. Even when I was overwhelmed, though (this sometimes took the form of longing for very simple but rather

peculiar comforts like *Law and Order* on TV or a peanut butter and jelly sandwich), I knew that those months would shine out in my memory as some of the most lived of my young life.

~Sally Kintner '07

Not the Siberia We Imagine

Every Russian I have met knows about the Great Lakes, but many Americans I talk to have barely heard of Lake Baikal, even though it contains as much water as all five of the Great Lakes combined, making it the largest, as well as the deepest and oldest lake in the world. A good number of my friends in America have heard of Irkutsk, the largest city near the lake, where I lived, thanks to the board game Risk. I myself knew nothing about either until Professor Scholl asked me if I would like to live in a tent in Siberia, and I thought it sounded like a fine idea.

With the generous help of OCREECAS, I was lucky enough to travel to the lake Russians call the 'pearl of Siberia', where I volunteered with the Great Baikal Trail Association, or GBT. GBT is a young non-profit organization which, with both Russian and foreign volunteers, is building the first system of hiking trails around Lake Baikal. My first trip was in 2006, and after a month of camping and hiking by the lake, and witnessing the whirlwind of volunteer activity in the tiny GBT office which miraculously produces well-organized trail crews despite almost no funding, I could only think of getting back there to join the effort. This year I stayed for three months, working and hiking on trail crews in August and September until the snows came in earnest, and then volunteering in the office.

The word "office" probably conjures up the wrong image of the GBT headquarters. When you walk in to the little room, whether you are a first-time volunteer, a foreigner, a Russian student, or the director herself, you will be greeted by a group of folks sitting around a table having tea and cookies, no matter what time of day or night it is. They will invite you to join them, and from the laughing and animated story-telling that bubbles up around

the table, it is easy to think that no work takes place here. But soon you will notice that the group around you keeps changing as people get up to take their turn at one of the two computers, that the conversations are at least part business, and that they are all in fact quite busy. This is how GBT functions: the office is the social hub for the young people – mostly university and graduate students – upon whose enthusiasm and volunteer hours the organization relies. Their table, littered with tea cups and papers, is where they gather to share news and unwind between classes, and it is also where the real work of running a small non-profit – one of the first of its kind in Russia – takes place.

Out on the trail, the same combination of hard work and ample relaxation around a pot of tea is what makes their trail crews so productive, hilarious and satisfying. Life in the Siberian forest taught me the valuable lesson that what takes the hardest work is also the most rewarding. I saw this from the first day of my project, as we hiked for five hours up a mountain range so steep near the top that nothing could grow on the bare stones which rolled down under our footsteps. Every few minutes we stopped to mop the sweat dripping down our faces, as we hiked with packs which held tents, trail-building tools, bottles of fuel for the chain saw, and all our food for two weeks, in addition to our own belongings. (I should mention that the Russian idea of camping food is nothing like our packages of dehydrated soups and protein bars; we had sacks of potatoes and cabbages, bags of grains and sugar, cans of meat, bread, cookies and candies by the bagful, butter, cheese, and sausages, and tubs of jam.) While the Russians led the way, talking gaily and marveling at the beautiful scenery, the new foreign volunteers were eager not to show their worry that this was more rigorous than they had bargained for. They were obviously relieved when we came to

a blueberry patch by the trail, and all of a sudden the Russians stopped, let their packs drop, and began filling their mouths with berries, as sweet-loving Russians do with such relish. They had never complained or shown signs of being tired while we hiked, but they were equally happy to sit eating blueberries for the better part of an hour, until their mouths were purple and we noticed that the angle of the sun had changed.



GBT volunteers hard at work on the trail

This set the pattern for the two-week trip: work up a good sweat hiking or clearing trail, then sit back for a two hour mid-day break, half lunch, half nap, and then one more cup of tea before you start work again! At first we all muttered that this was a bit heavy on the relaxing side, and it would make more sense to push on all day, but after a few days of hiking and waking up with muscles aching which we hadn't known existed, we all realized how practical the system was; those cups of strong black tea and cookies with jam fuelled us to enjoy lopping down trees and hauling brush with zeal.

I have grown up loving the Great Lakes and the ocean, but after a few weeks by Lake Baikal I felt a special connection to this lake which they call the Sacred Sea. I could sense why it is that every Russian, on hearing the word 'Baikal', puts their hands to their heart. Locals call it 'Grandfather Baikal', not just because it is 25 million years old, but also, I imagine, because when you stand on its shores, you feel that you are in the presence of something both familiar and mysteriously wild.

I urge people not to let the old notion of Siberia as a frozen wasteland deter them from visiting this sacred place. Now that I'm back it is fun to show friends my photos of Russians sunbathing and swimming in turquoise waters, streams running through golden birch forests, bountiful harvests of berries being turned to jams in warm Siberian kitchens, and to see the looks of surprise that this, not cheerless labor camps amid snow-drifts, is really Siberia. Go and see for yourself, if ever you get a chance!

During my trip I kept thinking with gratitude what a wonderful thing it is that OCREECAS makes it possible for Oberlin students to volunteer with GBT. It made me especially proud to tell everyone about Oberlin, and for any Oberlin student who visits, there is a whole organization of people who already admire our school and are ready to welcome you with open arms and cups of tea.

~Elisa Saltet '07

OCREECAS brings a taste of Georgia to Oberlin

In the fall of 2007 OCREECAS offered a short course on the food, music and feasting traditions of Georgia. The course opened with a feast hosted by Old Barrows co-op with guest head chef and renowned cookbook author Darra Goldstein, professor of Russian at Williams College. Prof. Goldstein led students in making a variety of traditional Georgian dishes, including *khachapuri* (cheese bread), *khinkali* (dumplings), *lobio* (kidney bean and walnut salad) and many other delectable treats. Most of these recipes can be found in her cookbook *The Georgian Feast*, winner of the 1994 IACP Julia Child Award for Cookbook of the Year. That same evening, Prof. Goldstein gave a lecture on the role of food and feasting in Georgian culture as seen through the artwork of Niko Pirosmani.

Next to visit the Oberlin campus was the Zedashe Ensemble. This amazing group of young folk musicians lit up the stage at the Cat in the Cream with Georgian song and dance. One of the many highlights of the performance was the infamous sword dance, performed with daring precision just feet from the enthralled audience. Members of the ensemble also contributed to the local community by giving a shorter version of their concert at Prospect Elementary School and answering the many questions of the students there about Georgia and Georgian culture. Oberlin students were able to learn more from the ensemble and their organizer Jonathan Wurdeman at two lectures, one on religious life in the former Soviet republic and one on the ethnographic research conducted by the ensemble to collect their material from various outlying regions in Georgia. Their visit ended with a Georgian feast in Russian House with cuisine

prepared by members of the course under the watchful eye of Amanda Blasko, Director of both Russian House and OCREECAS. One of our Georgian guests commented that even his mother didn't make better *satsivi*, so we're hoping they will remember their stay with us fondly.

The last guest of the course was Dodona Kiziria, Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. Professor Kiziria, herself a native of Georgia, spoke on the culture of toasting at a Georgian feast and the role of the tamada or toastmaster. She spoke passionately of the need to preserve Georgian language and culture in these times of globalization, and her recent work in developing Georgian language materials should be an important step in this direction.

Our thanks to everyone who contributed to this wonderful introduction of Georgian culture here at Oberlin.

Journalism in Ukraine

Spending time in Ukraine there are a few things that make themselves apparent. First of all, it is called Ukraine, not the Ukraine, Ukrainians say *в Україні* in Russian, not *на Україні* as most Russians still say (Putin recently adopted Ukrainian usage of *в Україні* spurring a media frenzy). It's a minute distinction, but a vital one, since "the Ukraine" and "*на Україні*" deny Ukraine its independent status, linguistically reducing it to a territory, some lost but not far gone piece of Russia, so much so that after a time, hearing "the Ukraine" or "*на Україні*" begins to grate on the ears. And really this basic and ubiquitous semantic feature is symptomatic of larger concerns for modern Ukraine. Its capitol seems to be flourishing economically, but the rich are getting richer, clogging Kyiv's major arteries with expensive and environmentally hazardous cars that threaten to destroy the beautiful old center of the city, and create political troubles with their thirst for gasoline. These cars on the property of oligarchs, barons of the severe wealth gap, that keeps real estate prices climbing, as average incomes hover low above the ground. Also implicit is Ukraine's polarization: its nationalistic Ukrainian-speaking West, and Russian-speaking East which endorses Putin's every pronouncement. Kyiv lies in the center, and has historically used Russian. Indeed, Russian is still Kyiv's primary tongue, but even in my six months there I noticed an adjustment towards Ukrainian.

The U-Media Project, for which I interned, works closely with about 8 local media organizations to implement change in the spheres of media law and legislation, financial viability for media outlets, and journalism training. I had the opportunity to write articles for Telekritika that compared the Ukrainian and American media landscape on topics like the transition from print to online media, and the growth of online advertising, and harmful representations of women in the media.

In the former regime, pre-Orange Revolution, journalists were heavily censored by the state. Post-revolution, the media is no longer censored,

but because of the top-heavy Ukrainian economy, journalists are often monetarily influenced by powerful corporations of political parties. Journalists are often young, inexperienced and poorly compensated by their publications, and fall prey to pressure from outside sources. When I traveled to visit grant recipients in eastern Ukraine I learned that nearly all journalists accept payment from subjects to cover certain stories. I first arrived in Ukraine when U-Media and its partners were carefully monitoring the press and training journalists to bring about unbiased coverage of the parliamentary elections. There was the added threat of so-called jeans, hidden political advertisement in media outlets owned by high-powered politicians or corporations.

Corruption aside, another question in the Ukrainian media brings this story full circle. Though Russian is widely spoken in many Ukrainian cities, broadcast regulations require the majority of programming to be conducted in Ukrainian. This leads to all kind of peculiar situations: a news reporter speaking at a poll station in Ukrainian, and her interviewee responding in Russian; Russian dubbed American sitcoms, re-dubbed or subtitled in Ukrainian; two hosts of an awards show speaking to each other in different languages. A decade ago, when the American TV execs dubbed the American soap Santa Barbara into Ukrainian rather than Russian, they almost sparked a civil war, as Russian-speaking Crimea threatened to secede. New regulations require all feature film shown in movie-theaters to be dubbed in Ukrainian (not a problem since Russian studios outsource most of their dubbing to Ukraine as it is). And though as a Russian-speaker I should feel practically adverse to transition into Ukrainian, I'm not. Whether or not its correct to impose a national language, Ukraine is a hopeful place these days, and just as language can be a divisive force it can be a unifying one. A Ukrainian media means that the language is no longer just for peasants and intellectuals: it's for everyone.

~Sabrina Jaszi '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, 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.

"Vladivostok 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."

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

