

---

# Activist Culture and Transnational Diffusion: Social Marketing and Human Rights Groups in Russia

Sarah E. Mendelson and Theodore P. Gerber<sup>1</sup>

---

**Abstract:** Research on transnational activism has identified conditions under which advocacy strategies and tactics are likely to diffuse across borders. Two experts on Russian society emphasize a variable that has not received sufficient attention: the predominant culture of local activists. They draw on results from a project undertaken from spring 2002 to summer 2004 designed to introduce social marketing, a strategic communications technique, to human rights activists in Russia. In addition to expanding the theoretical understanding of transnational advocacy, this study suggests that more research is needed on the decision-making processes of activists and, specifically, the organizational cultures shaping choices and decisions.

---

Scholars studying social movements and transnational activist networks have identified conditions that help ideas and repertoires spread across national borders (McAdam and Rucht, 1993; Soule, 1997; Keck and Sikkink,

---

<sup>1</sup>Sarah E. Mendelson is Director, Human Rights and Security Initiative, and Senior Fellow, Russian and Eurasia Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC. Theodore P. Gerber is Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin, Madison. Address correspondence to: Professor Theodore P. Gerber, Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706-1393, e-mail: tgerber@ssc.wisc.edu. We thank George Breslauer, Matt Evangelista, Maria Lipman, Mary McCauley, Kyle Rearick, Jim Richter, Sarah Soule, Valerie Sperling, and Sid Tarrow for helpful comments on earlier drafts. We also acknowledge Michelle Berdy, Marco Blagojevic, Slobodan Djinovic, Patrick Egan, Erica Lally, Sophie Lambroschini, Deiderik Lohman, Tanya Lokhshina, Greg Minjack, Borislav Petranov, Cathy Fitzpatrick, Iryana Vidanova, and Ben Ward for valuable discussions of the issues covered in the article and for insights on social marketing campaigns. We are deeply grateful to Grigory Shvedov, without whom the project described in this article would have been impossible. The Glaser Progress Foundation, the Human Rights and Democracy Fund administered by the US State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, and USAID/Moscow provided generous financial support for the project. Freedom House and the National Endowment for Democracy provided additional financing for workshops. CSIS and Memorial provided logistical support. The views expressed in this article represent those of the authors alone.

1998; Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink, 1999; Olesen, 2003; Acharya, 2004; Tarrow and McAdam, 2005). These studies tend to focus on success stories. They generally neglect factors that can thwart the diffusion process. We argue, based on an unevenly successful effort to encourage human rights groups in Russia to adopt social marketing techniques, that the predominant culture of local activists can impede diffusion efforts.

The culture of the Russian intelligentsia, rooted in historical traditions and the habits of critical intellectuals in the Soviet system, influences the outlook and actions of Russian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) defending human rights. Activists who embrace intelligentsia culture resist adopting strategies and tactics that have proven effective in promoting social change elsewhere. Rather than seek to influence public opinion through concerted campaigns, as human rights groups increasingly do in countries as diverse as South Korea and Brazil, these activists devote their energies to displaying the authenticity of their commitment to human rights norms. Their chief audience is often their own group members, not potentially sympathetic constituents who might be mobilized. Purity and principle take precedence over strategy and action. By orienting activists toward other activists rather than the public, this culture limits the growth of civil society and hinders efforts to promote advocacy norms and tactics. Some activists challenge this culture, but change is slow, uneven, and episodic.

In the 1990s, when the Russian political environment was less hostile to human rights, the reluctance to engage the public hindered the effectiveness of NGOs but was less critical. The steady shrinking of Russian political space in the last six years has increased the urgency of engaging the public for human rights NGOs (HRNGOs). Unless they adopt approaches that address and respond to the needs of the public, activists' ability to moderate the Russian government or mobilize the population will remain marginal.

Our account emerges from a multiyear project we organized jointly with Moscow-based activists from the organization Memorial who wish to promote public support for human rights norms. The project sought to introduce social marketing, a form of strategic communication, to human rights groups in three regions of Russia (Perm, Ryazan, and Rostov), with the larger aim of enhancing their capacity and effectiveness through the implementation and evaluation of campaigns.<sup>2</sup> Our interactions with activists during the project formed the basis for our claims that predominant activist culture can affect transnational diffusion. We would need more data from Russia and other contexts (ideally, surveys of activists) to

---

<sup>2</sup>We selected these regions using several criteria: (1) an area considered to have a well-established activist community in a relatively hospitable political climate (Perm); (2) one with energetic and engaged young activists (Ryazan); (3) the presence of Memorial branches (Perm and Ryazan); and (4) our own interest in the effect of the conflict in Chechnya (Rostov). We also surveyed in "control" regions corresponding to each of the three regions selected for the project.

formally test our larger argument; here we simply make an initial case based on our experiences. To set the stage, we describe social marketing, document its growing use by HRNGOs internationally, review conventional explanations for developments in Russian civil society, and discuss the origins of intelligentsia culture in the imperial Russian and Soviet past. We then recount the key phases in our project, assess the mixed results, and consider the implications for the literature on transnational activism and the future of Russia's human rights movement.

## SOCIAL MARKETING AND HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGNING

Non-profit organizations around the world increasingly use strategic communications techniques to influence policy-making, grow their organizations, and raise awareness about specific problems. Social marketing, one such technique, relies on opinion data to shape campaign messages concerning social or broadly political (not commercial or party-oriented) goals and issues. The most effective campaigns both raise awareness and offer solutions to a problem. They use popular media to deliver messages and foster a sense of collective identification with a cause, ideal, or organization. Campaigns often make a positive norm more robust or create taboos around negative norms.<sup>3</sup>

Human rights activism has traditionally revolved around monitoring abuses and releasing reports (naming and shaming). But recently, HRNGOs worldwide have embraced public outreach and issue-based campaigns.<sup>4</sup> For example, an association of Korean women workers drew on opinion surveys to design a public awareness campaign that pressured the government to increase minimum wages in 2002.<sup>5</sup> In the Netherlands, Amnesty International based an instant messaging campaign on a study of how young people engage technology, raising the number of "constituents" campaigning against torture by 14,000.<sup>6</sup> A Brazilian NGO recently worked with other Latin American groups on campaigns to change attitudes on domestic violence: one campaign, "Heat of the Moment"; focused on "changing social norms about what it means to be a man;" another adopted the Canadian "White Ribbon Campaign," where men mobilized to end

---

<sup>3</sup>For details on an ever-expanding list of social marketing campaigns from around the world, see [http://www.csis.org/images/stories/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/soc\\_market\\_examples.pdf](http://www.csis.org/images/stories/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/soc_market_examples.pdf).

<sup>4</sup>The reasons for this new orientation toward social marketing by human rights NGOs merit additional research. On the limits of naming and shaming, see Rieff (1999).

<sup>5</sup>See <http://www.kwwnet.org/english/kwwau/andalsohttp://database.newtactics.org/NewTactics/CaseList.aspx>.

<sup>6</sup>Approximately 39 percent of their cell phone campaigns have been "successful" in the sense that "prisoners of conscience were released, people who had 'disappeared' were found and death sentences were not carried out" (Dutch Amnesty International email correspondence with first author (July 26, 2006), and Bosman, 2004).

violence against women.<sup>7</sup> Closer to Russia, a Polish organization has campaigned to “kick racism out of the stadiums,” targeting spectators of soccer games and readers of sports magazines.<sup>8</sup> We have identified over 30 such examples of human rights-related social marketing campaigns: HRNGOs can and do use these techniques.

Russian HRNGOs had not used social marketing prior to our project. But other Russian NGOs have used strategic communications in campaigns on health issues such as HIV transmission, condom use, and breastfeeding.<sup>9</sup> These campaigns led us to think that Russian HRNGOs could use social marketing to raise the “demand” for rights in Russia. Together with several Moscow-based human rights activists, we developed a project whose goal was to introduce HRNGOs to social marketing. We helped our Russian partners secure funding to implement the project. The project ultimately produced mixed results. As we explain below, we believe the sway of intelligentsia culture among Russian human rights activists inhibited their use of social marketing. More broadly, intelligentsia culture also helps explain why Russian civil society has evolved slowly.

## EXPLAINING THE CONDITION OF RUSSIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

The Putin years have been especially challenging for Russian civil society (Mendelson, 2002). After a brief life in the 1990s, most political parties have floundered and media independent of the Kremlin have disappeared. Their demise makes the NGO sector the final defense of an imperiled civil society, made more vulnerable by the adoption of a draconian law governing NGO registration in April 2006.<sup>10</sup> The Putin administration has considerably narrowed the room civil society has to operate. The Kremlin has used the tax police and the judiciary to intimidate business leaders, newspaper editors, and even museum directors. The outright repression of human rights activists and organizations and the denial of visas to foreign activists and scholars are becoming common.<sup>11</sup>

Given these threats from the authorities, it is worth considering how deeply connected NGOs are to their own society. Do they advocate on behalf of citizens and address issues that resonate with Russians? Scholars addressing these questions have usually answered in the negative, concluding that Russian civil society is weak, despite the proliferation of NGOs (Powell, 2002; Howard, 2003; Henderson, 2003; Henry, 2006; Sundstrom,

---

<sup>7</sup>Promundo email correspondence with first author (July 26, 2006); see also [www.promundo.org.br/289?locale=en\\_US](http://www.promundo.org.br/289?locale=en_US).

<sup>8</sup>See [www.nigdywiecej.prh.pl/english/index.php](http://www.nigdywiecej.prh.pl/english/index.php).

<sup>9</sup>See, for example, [www.focus-media.ru/en/campaigns/](http://www.focus-media.ru/en/campaigns/).

<sup>10</sup>For analysis of the NGO law, see [www.icnl.org/knowledge/news/2006/02-28.htm](http://www.icnl.org/knowledge/news/2006/02-28.htm).

<sup>11</sup>In 2006, Freedom House ranked Russia 158 out of 194 countries in terms of media freedom ([www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=70&release=356](http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=70&release=356)).

2006). These studies have offered several explanations in addition to pressure from the authorities for the weakness.

Some cite the population's unwillingness to join volunteer organizations, reflecting the legacy of the Soviet period when citizens were forced to participate in numerous "volunteer" activities, frustration at the economic difficulties they have endured since the collapse of communism, and disbelief that any organization could make a difference (Henderson, 2003; Howard, 2003; Javeline, 2003). Persuasive campaigns require funds, and the economic crisis has also deprived NGOs of economic resources needed to work effectively (Henry, 2006).

Another perspective points to the negative influence of foreign donors on Russian NGOs. Scholarship on cross-border activism (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Risse et al., 1999; Price, 2003) has focused on "success stories" such as South Africa, where local and international NGOs worked together to bring down apartheid (Klotz, 1995). In contrast, research on democracy assistance in Russia based on case studies of NGOs often blames international donors for arbitrary or disconnected approaches that fail to take local knowledge into account (Powell, 2002; Richter, 2002; Henderson, 2003; Sundstrom, 2006.) These studies claim that democracy assistance has made activists more responsive to donors and transnational activists than to their own population. Rather than build civil society and strengthen democracy, it has fostered dependence and elitism among activists.

These explanations for the weakness of Russian NGOs are plausible, yet they do not tell the whole story. Putin-era restrictions on civil liberties pose major obstacles, but in other countries NGOs have acted effectively in even more limiting political conditions. Also, the restrictions cannot explain why Russian NGOs did not reach the public during the mid-1990s, when they enjoyed more favorable circumstances. As for the public opinion climate, surveys from 2001 through 2004 suggest considerable potential support for the activities of HRNGOs.<sup>12</sup> The surveys reveal low support for civil liberties, but much stronger advocacy for rights of the person (freedom from arbitrary arrest, slavery, and torture). Large majorities strongly objected to specific violations of these rights that occur frequently, such as violent hazing of army recruits (Human Rights Watch, 2004). More than half recognized some national organizations working on these issues and expressed positive views about them. These results encouraged us that social marketing was worthwhile; if NGOs ran campaigns informed by data, they had a chance to strike sympathetic chords with the Russian public.

---

<sup>12</sup>We refer to four surveys based on nationally representative samples and three surveys conducted in the three project regions plus three other, "control" regions. The surveys were conducted by the Moscow-based polling firm VTsIOM, or by former VTsIOM staff who formed a new firm, the Levada Analytic Center, after VTsIOM was taken over by the government in 2003. Space limitations prevent us from presenting detailed findings here or information regarding sampling, fieldwork, and quality control procedures, but see Gerber and Mendelson (2002, 2007, forthcoming).

To blame an apathetic public for the ineffectiveness of NGOs is to ignore how NGOs elsewhere consciously seek public support. Similarly, to fault international donors is to absolve indigenous NGOs from any responsibility and to accept uncritically their own narratives. Even if donors' efforts suffer from the alleged shortcomings, NGOs themselves may contribute to the weak condition of Russian civil society.

Laura Henry's (2006) recent analysis of diverse organizational forms in the Russian environmental movement represents a novel and fruitful approach to the issue of why Russian NGOs have struggled. She emphasizes how resource constraints and various ideological orientations influence the decisions of movement leaders to adopt varying organizational forms and tactics, the result of which is lack of unity and cohesion within the movement. Our own argument shares her focus on the decisions and actions of the NGOs themselves, rather than external circumstances or foreign donors. However, because of a different research methodology (what some might call "intervention research") and a different issue area (human rights), our conclusions depart from hers in our emphasis on intelligentsia culture as a factor impeding the diffusion of new techniques such as social marketing.

## THE ROLE OF PREDOMINANT ACTIVIST CULTURE

Our project sought to neutralize factors often identified as obstacles to civil society. We helped our Russian partner, a large indigenous NGO, obtain funding from the Moscow office of USAID to support social marketing campaigns to be carried out by activists in the three project regions. The campaigns could address any issue the activists chose that resonated with the local population, according to empirical research. The only requirement was tactical not substantive: activist groups had only to use social marketing. If they agreed to do so, they received funding, training, and consultations in the implementation of their campaigns. Thus, they received resources and flexibility with respect to issues, and a rich supply of national and regional survey data.

More than a decade into the post-Soviet transition, many from the human rights "elite" displayed few relevant skills and no experience communicating with the public. Most regional activists in the project were unaccustomed to thinking about how people outside their group conceive of societal problems. Older participants were especially uncomfortable with this approach. When they did consider public attitudes, they used anecdotes or impressions to describe them. Some would not respond when campaign consultants asked them to identify a goal, map a strategy, or create campaign calendars. Rather than embrace strategic action, many emphasized their commitment to principles. They resisted addressing public concerns, even when empirical data suggested how to.

Public opinion and activist discourse on Chechnya illustrate this divergence. Human rights groups have regularly detailed abuses by Russian federal forces against the civilian population in Chechnya (Human Rights

Watch, 2002, 2005). This information is vital for international organizations that oversee compliance with international human rights law. But the survey data we shared with the activists showed that human rights violations by Russian troops do not shape how Russians assess the war.<sup>13</sup> Fewer than 4 percent of respondents cited shame over human rights abuses by Russian troops as a salient response to reports about the war. Instead, concerns about Chechnya revolved largely around the loss of Russian troops and the economic costs of the war. Two-thirds of respondents cited anxiety over Russian casualties as a salient response; the second most frequent answer was “alarm over the economic costs of the war,” at about 25 percent. These numbers suggested that a campaign on military losses in Chechnya would resonate with the public. Overall, we found deep divisions regarding Chechnya: few favored the *status quo*, and roughly equal numbers supported negotiation or withdrawal (43 percent) and an intensification of military measures (37 percent). The data suggested that anti-war efforts should, at least initially, stress Russian losses. A campaign leading with human rights abuses by Russian troops would fall on deaf ears in Russia.

Several activists objected to a campaign based on the war’s costs, because of their principled focus on abuse and their reliance on their own private deliberations, not public opinion, as the basis for action. The activists’ practices and the survey data parallel the conflict between logics of “appropriateness” and “consequence” (March and Olsen, 1989). Activists could emphasize human rights abuse and have no resonance or they could shift gears and address the war in ways that resonate with the public. Many of the activists opted for the former, while a group in Ryazan chose the latter. To understand the variations, we need to explore the norms that shaped perceptions of these options.

## THE ROOTS OF INTELLIGENTSIA CULTURE

Russia’s distinctive “intelligentsia” tradition first emerged in the 1830s (Berdyayev, [1909] 1990, [1933] 1990; Malia, 1961; Pipes, 1961; Gella, 1976). Drawn mainly from *déclassé* gentry, clergy, and merchants, members of the intelligentsia (*intelligenty*) shared a university education, a profound sense of social alienation, and a sense of elevated status. The oppressive political conditions in tsarist Russia stifled the budding ambitions, stoked by Enlightenment notions of liberalism or Hegelian idealism imported from Europe, of the humanistically educated. The intelligentsia responded by embracing a moral mission to save “the people” from autocracy. But *intelligenty* did not perceive themselves as *of* the people. Their identity

---

<sup>13</sup> All the surveys described in footnote 12 contained questions about Chechnya. We analyze these survey results regarding views on Chechnya at length elsewhere (Gerber and Mendelson, 2002, forthcoming). The distributions of views remained stable, despite dramatic events like the Nord Ost hostage crisis in October 2002 and other terrorist attacks.

included "an exalted sense of difference from and superiority to the barbarous world" (Malia, 1961, p. 11).

How could this cultural heritage influence post-Soviet human rights activists? After all, the Bolshevik regime, fearful of its own pedigree, destroyed what remained of the old intelligentsia by the end of the 1930s (Gella, 1976). Industrialization, mass education, censorship, and the loss of economic independence created conditions inimical to the classic intelligentsia tradition (Pipes, 1961). State socialist regimes actively sought to detach the identities of educated experts from the corporate affinities and moral/political agendas of the intelligentsia tradition and attach them instead to a narrow technical competence deployed exclusively in the service of the state (Kennedy, 1992).

But Russian sociologist Lev Gudkov argues that the Soviet intelligentsia inherited the legends and ideals of their forebearers and thus "perceived [themselves] as an opposition and participant in partial ideological sabotage; that is, as a defender of the people, the salt of the earth, the conscience of society" (1992, p. 217). Lacking a public sphere, opposition-minded intellectuals formed tight-knit, highly insular, and mutually suspicious circles. Group norms predominated over professional norms. These circles shared much with the traditional *intelligentsiya*: "a sense of civic duty, social engagement, capacity for empathy, 'spirituality'.... general feelings of 'one's own' [*svoikh*], 'respectable people,' correspondingly a barrier in relation to others" (Gudkov, 1992, p. 204).

Critical-minded intellectuals in the Soviet Union found themselves in a situation similar to that faced by radical *intelligenty* in tsarist Russia. They could not legally disseminate oppositional views to the broader public, promote their ideas within existing political institutions, or form organizations to advocate for policy goals. They had little hope of influencing public opinion, government policies, or political institutions. Thus, repressive Soviet restrictions made goal-oriented politics—concrete pursuits of precise goals in the realm of policy or public opinion—futile, fostering instead politics driven by a sense of authenticity. *Intelligenty* could not hope to change Soviet policies, but they could provide living examples of principles that contradicted those of the regime. They could find like-minded citizens and create informal communities in which non-official norms prevailed, open only to those who both shared the alternative norms and could be trusted not to betray the group to the authorities.

As Gudkov (1992) indicates, these groups were inwardly directed. Political activism focused on creating, sustaining, and enforcing norms that distinguished one's community from the rest, those who subscribed to official norms. *Intelligenty* frequently deployed the notion of "*ne nash*," not ours, to draw a clear boundary. Although the expression refers to somebody outside the group, it implicitly alludes to those who belong to the group. To label somebody an outsider is to claim the status of an insider and to assert the authority to define or interpret membership criteria. For an activist, qualifying as an *intelligent* and member of the particular group



to which one belonged was far more practical and realizable than the goal of effecting changes in policy or institutions.

The notion of authenticity plays an especially critical role in intelligentsia group dynamics. Members of the in-group identify themselves by strictly adhering to fundamental principles in their statements, actions, and lifestyles. Any departure from these principles—no matter how pragmatic—must be condemned and can lead to questions about the authenticity of one's commitment. Adherence to basic principles becomes a proxy for political action. Rather than a means to some end—such as raising awareness or affecting policy—declarations of adherence become an end in and of themselves, the definitive act whereby one establishes one's membership in the community, one's identity as a supporter and defender of the group's principles. But mere expression of commitment is only a start: one must continually demonstrate the authenticity of those commitments in speech and in action. Members of the community not only internalize the norm of continual expressions of authenticity, they also enforce the norm by condemning those who outwardly stray.

The intelligentsia tradition found powerful expression in the actions and norms of Soviet-era dissidents, individuals or small tight-knit groups who courageously opposed Soviet institutions or policies beginning in the late 1960s (Alexeeva, 1985; Laber, 2002). Some dissidents—notably, Andrei Sakharov (1990)—explicitly referred to the critical intelligentsia tradition as a formative influence on their views and actions. The distinction between intelligentsia culture and a strategic action culture is aptly expressed in this description of dissidence by the biologist and human rights activist Sergey Kovalev: “[I]t was not a conscious, thought-through resistance movement that would have stood on some sort of a political platform. It was not political opposition. It was simply a moral incompatibility with what surrounded one” (quoted in Gessen, 1997, p. 104). Former dissidents are few among current activists, but they hold leadership positions and have enormous influence on the seminal human rights organizations. Thus, it is not surprising that Soviet-era intelligentsia culture, itself a successor to the classic intelligentsia tradition, influences activist circles in the post-Soviet era (Gessen, 1997).

## INTELLIGENTISIA CULTURE TODAY

While intelligentsia culture may have helped critical intellectuals survive in the Soviet period, in post-Soviet Russia it hinders the development of a robust civil society by discouraging prioritization, planning, or engaging public opinion. As summarized in Table 1, its chief characteristics include a politics of authenticity, an orientation toward intra-group and foreign audiences, and a mode of operation emphasizing private decision-making and the preference for principle over action. This culture contrasts with an alternative, “strategic action” culture, defined by goal-oriented politics, orientation toward the Russian public, and a strategic mode of operation that includes planning (setting goals, devising strategies and

**Table 1.** Two Types of Activist Culture in Russia

	Predominant form of practices	Predominant target of practices	Predominant mode of operation
Predominant (intelligentsia) culture	Politics of authenticity	Intra-group (other activists) and foreign (donors)	Private decision making, dominance of principle over action
Alternative (strategic action) culture	Goal-oriented politics	The Russian public	Strategic planning (goals, strategies, tactics), strategic communication (data, social marketing), and strategic accommodation

tactics), communication (using data to craft messages, implementing social marketing campaigns), and accommodation (adjusting goals and strategies when appropriate and feasible). Our project encouraged HRNGOs to shift toward strategic action culture and away from intelligentsia culture.

The predominant activist culture is neither monolithic nor binding on all activists. Like any group, Russian activists are heterogeneous in social background, demographics, values, and beliefs. The project activists had mixed reactions to social marketing; some groups eventually developed successful campaigns. Our data are not suited for a systematic analysis of the sources of variations in activist norms—for that, we would need a larger sample and a quantitative approach. But we did observe generational differences. Many younger activists expressed the view that the old strategies were no longer effective. They were eager to use new media to reach audiences. We heard several younger activists refer to the older generation as “the geriatrics.”<sup>14</sup> Age alone did not determine whether participants in our project embraced the strategic action approach. But we frequently observed signs of intelligentsia culture among activists over 40.

This culture clashed with the project’s stated aims: to combine principle with action and engage the Russian population in order to stimulate change. Whatever issue activists chose, the terms stipulated that they use research to frame the topic in ways that resonate with the public. The campaigns would: (1) communicate with the public, not just with activists; (2) apply strategies and tactics suggested by empirical data; (3) raise the profile of (“brand”) their organizations with respect to issues of public concern; (4) form coalitions to leverage resources. Table 2 shows the key project steps chronologically. We now describe these steps to illustrate how

<sup>14</sup>First author’s conversation, Moscow (February 12, 2005). A December 2004 meeting of human rights activists on tactics and strategies explicitly addressed these generational cleavages.

intelligentsia culture translated into reluctance to engage the public, while some activists embraced social marketing.

## THE PROJECT BEGINS

After several preparatory meetings, Memorial convened the first workshop in July 2002 to introduce social marketing and public awareness campaigns to the activists from Perm, Ryazan, and Rostov, and invite them to implement campaigns on issues of their choice. We presented survey data detailing how Russians in the activists' regions view economic rights, rights of the person, civil liberties, army reform, the war in Chechnya, and HRNGOs. Three Serb activists who had worked in the organization Otpor discussed how they used survey data and focus groups to create messages such as *Gotov je!* (He's finished!) in their campaign to unseat Slobodan Milosevic in 2000.<sup>15</sup>

The culture clash was evident almost immediately in terms of approach (principles instead of action), style (private discourse rather than public campaigning), and method (driven by anecdotal perceptions rather than empirics). Many regional activists reacted with indifference or explicit hostility. They had trouble identifying achievable goals and invoked vague terms (from a campaign perspective) such as "world peace" and "tolerance." Some appeared uninterested in how the Russian population thought about an issue. Not everyone, however, rejected the approach. The Perm activists had met the night before to consider whether to participate and decided to apply social marketing techniques in an ongoing children's rights project. The Perm group had the strongest organizational skills, though a few personalities tended to dominate. They were predisposed to use data, perhaps because their team included a sociologist.

The Ryazan and Rostov groups were unenthusiastic. The leader of the Ryazan group condemned the entire proposal: "We will not engage in 'black PR' [a stock Russian phrase for manipulative propaganda]... We must talk about human rights abuses against Chechens." She likened a campaign on Russian military casualties to a campaign to promote racism. She dismissed the survey evidence that a campaign on human rights abuses would not resonate with the public: adherence to principle was more important than mobilizing opposition to the war. Several young activists sat glumly as she vehemently rejected the advice of the Serb campaign consultant.

The Rostov contingent displayed little interest. Memorial had invited activists from three different cities (Rostov, Taganrog, and Novocherkassk) because they were considered to be among the best in the larger Northern Caucasus region, where civil society seems especially weak. Some partici-

---

<sup>15</sup>Two of the Otpor activists at the July 2002 workshop later helped the Kmara movement in Georgia bring down Shevardnadze. They have also worked in Belarus, Zimbabwe, and Ukraine.

**Table 2.** Chronology of Activities

Date	Activity	Purpose	Partners
Fall 2001	First national survey	Benchmark on how Russians think about human rights	VTsIOM
February 2002	Presentation to donors	Stimulate support for project on social marketing	USAID, State Department
Spring 2002	Search for Russian partners	Broker local buy-in	Memorial, Moscow Helsinki Group
Spring 2002	Second national and first regional survey	Test findings, obtain regional data to present to activists	VTsIOM
June–September 2002	Grant application	Raise funds for training and campaigns	Memorial, USAID
July 2002	First workshop, Moscow	Introduce social marketing to human rights activists	Memorial, Perm, Rostov, Ryazan, and Serb activists
July 2002	Regional focus groups	Test survey findings, interest local activists in focus groups	St. Petersburg, Memorial
November 2002	Second workshop, Belgrade and eastern Serbia	Study a success story, consultations	CeSID, Freedom House
December 2002	Third workshop, Moscow	Create plans and write questions for local surveys	Memorial, regional activists, American trainer
January 2003	Campaign plans and calendar	Have a guideline and create criteria for evaluation	Regional activists
January–February 2003	Third national and second regional survey	Create more longitudinal data, benchmark data for activists	VTsIOM-A

March 2003	Fourth workshop, Moscow	Discuss data results and message development	Memorial and regional activists
July 2003	Fifth workshop, Moscow	Consultations on campaigns	Memorial and regional activists, American trainer
Early fall 2003	Perm campaign begins	Raise awareness of children's rights, increase number of foster parents	Local government, broad coalition
November 2003	Ryazan campaign begins	Shame government over the costs of the war in Chechnya	Broad coalition
February 2004	Sixth workshop, Moscow	Consultations on campaigns	Memorial, regional activists, American trainers
April 2004	Rostov campaign begins	Raise awareness of rights of students	Three-region coalition
June 2004	Campaigns end	N/A	N/A
June 2004	Regional focus groups	Qualitative assessment	Local moderators
June–July 2004	Fourth national and third regional survey	Longitudinal assessment, measure local impact	Levada Analytic
October 2004	Seventh workshop, Moscow	Lessons learned on project	Memorial

pants had been engaged in local activism concerning Chechnya, yet they wanted to work on “tolerance,” which sounded like a buzzword used more by their donors than their neighbors. “We want to work on spreading ethnic tolerance. What does your data show us about that?” Our data did not explicitly address this issue, and we would need to add questions to the 2003 survey.

We next traveled to the capital cities of the three project regions to conduct focus groups. We invited the activists to provide questions for the focus group scripts in order to explore potential campaign themes or even test messages. Only one group was ready to do so: Perm activists wanted to work on children’s rights and support for foster parents in the region. They used the focus groups to learn how local residents thought about these issues and to test alternative campaign messages and colors. The Rostov activists did not contribute any questions to the focus groups. They fought among themselves, each faction seeking to fit the project into its current activities. Taganrog wanted to produce a game show highlighting human rights. Novocherkassk wanted to put on a “peace” festival. Rostov city tried to moderate, while advocating a students’ rights theme. In Ryazan our discussions with younger activists in the group revealed how generational cleavages and clashing cultures were impeding the diffusion of social marketing. Several quietly told us they wanted to use the data on how Russians thought about Chechnya. The leader of the group, however, put more effort into organizing trips to the local swimming hole than into discussing the project, the focus groups, or the data.

Back in Moscow, Memorial looked for experts on social marketing to provide training and consultations. The search was largely futile. So about 30 Russian activists from the project regions went to Belgrade, Serbia, in November 2002 to receive training from Serb activists experienced in social marketing. CeSID (Centar za Slobodne Izbore i Demokratiju/Centre for Free Election and Democracy), a Serb election monitoring organization, arranged meetings with former Otpor activists and a field trip to eastern Serbia to meet regional NGOs. The Russian activists also met representatives from independent media associations, election observation groups, and women’s NGOs. The eastern Serb activists were far poorer than the Russians and had faced tighter media conditions, yet they had used strategic communication to mobilize the public.

The interactions between the Russian and Serb activists were strained. While the Serbs proved popular among activists in Georgia and elsewhere, the Russians were alienated by the talk of “how we brought down Milosevic.” Their skills and messages seemed geared for one sort of campaign: “bringing down a dictator.” CeSID’s focus on election observation, also of enormous consequence in Serbia (and later in Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004) seemed irrelevant to the Russian human rights activists.

## DIFFUSION ENCOUNTERS LOCAL CULTURES

A month after the Belgrade meeting, Memorial convened another workshop in Moscow with the same regional activists and an American campaign consultant who had worked with political party activists in Russia in the early 1990s. The workshop aimed to clarify the themes of the regional activists' campaigns, discuss strategies, and develop campaign calendars. The activists also needed to produce questions for regional tracking surveys. Having learned about social marketing campaigns by other activists in previous meetings, now the Russian activists were supposed to start actively developing their own campaigns. Yet two of the groups had not identified tangible campaign goals. Several participants still focused on proclaiming that they were "for human rights." The process of identifying the research needed to generate effective messages and measure impact revealed the stark differences between strategic action culture and the predominant activist culture. The consultants struggled to convey the utility of research on how the public viewed the issues the activists wished to address. One marveled that the activists were being provided their own data free of charge, as well as their own funds to implement a campaign. But many of the activists seemed disinclined to take advantage of the opportunity, even though by now they had been exposed several times to discussions about goals, strategies, and tactics.

The activists varied, however, in their responses. The Perm group was researching the target audience's attitudes. The Ryazan activists submitted questions that reflected their split along generational lines: the young people sat sullenly as the director of the project tried to explain the logic behind seemingly impromptu questions on ethnic tolerance. The younger activists hinted that they remained interested in our survey data on Chechnya. We had planned to rerun a battery of questions on the war so we knew these data would be available. They eventually turned out to be more useful than we could have hoped. Rostov posed a complex set of challenges. The activists had a flat organizational structure: no one was willing to defer to leadership. They had few advocacy or organizational skills. Foreign donors had supported some for years, despite the lack of strategic planning. Between them, they had organized hundreds of events, concerts, and festivals, but none linked to a concerted campaign. The Rostov city activists were the least interested in goals and strategies. Donors had rewarded them just for keeping active. Why change the organizational culture?

By late 2002, we realized that our efforts to introduce strategic action culture were not going smoothly. We again looked to recruit local experts to help with training. Foreign organizations working on health and HIV/AIDS had some familiarity with social marketing, but local organizations, even those that called themselves "social marketers," had not actually implemented campaigns. Friendly and interested, they could not, however, meet the needs of the regional campaigns. Our long search identified only one person with the requisite experience—an expatriate American! In

January 2003, together with campaign experts and staff from Memorial, we developed criteria to evaluate each campaign plan: (1) clearly stated goals; (2) consistency in goals and strategies; (3) use of data to develop messages and target audiences; (4) plans for use of media and other techniques for reaching the public; (5) attempts to reach audiences that needed to be persuaded (not just friends of the organization); and (6) avoidance of themes and strategies would not, according to the data, resonate with the public.

The Perm activists wanted to shape how adults in their region think about children's rights (especially on issues related to physical abuse). But beyond that, their goal was rather vague. Part of the campaign targeted rights of orphans and aimed to bolster support for foster care. Later, the goal shifted to increasing the amount of state funding for each orphan. By spring 2003, this group was testing messages and working with a creative team on collateral materials (t-shirts, pens, pocket calendars, billboards). The key activists appeared to agree that the old methods had not been effective. They were attempting, as one put it, "to break out of the cocoon of silence."

The Ryazan activists' campaign plan yet again revealed a split, with the group leader favoring a campaign on tolerance and the younger activists wanting to protest the war in Chechnya. Their campaign calendar was filled with activities, such as creating "an information center" or a "summer camp for children," that did not advance any one campaign in a concerted way. Most of the planned outreach targeted already existing supporters rather than the larger public or those not already sympathetic. Many activities were aimed at adolescents, though some in the group wanted to reach an older target audience.

The Rostov group displayed the same tensions. Half wanted to work on abuse in schools; the others wanted to take a stand against xenophobia or the war in Chechnya. Rather than articulate the goals of any one campaign, they proposed a series of events that the campaign specialists concluded would probably have little impact beyond a narrow group of people. The proposed activities did not cohere. For example, regional meetings, a competition for young people, and a peace festival did not seem guided by or connected to any larger goal. The project leaders urged the activists to use the survey to learn how the people they hoped to reach view the campaign issues. But their proposed survey questions had no relation to the plans they were developing.

In March 2003, we met with the regional activists to discuss how they might use the survey results for their campaigns. The meeting with the Perm group was straightforward. The Perm population supported children's rights, and the activists developed a specific goal of increasing the number of respondents who would support foster care. Remarkably, 76 percent of respondents said that children came first in the eyes of society and the state during the Soviet era, but not in contemporary Russia.

The clash of activist cultures within the Ryazan group had deeply strained relations. Prior to the meeting, they had requested outside medi-



ation. We discussed the survey results from the questions the leader had placed on the survey, but since the younger activists wanted to use our data on Chechnya, we explored these too. As before, the data clearly called for shifting the campaign focus from Russian military abuse of Chechens to Russian casualties and economic costs. The young people animatedly planned a campaign around the phrase "*Skol'ko?*" (how much?), which could be used to ask how many casualties, how many rubles, and how long it would go on. They rejected the leader's idea of a library exhibit (reminiscent of the Soviet-era "Red Corners") as ineffectual and soon after pushed the leader out of the project.<sup>16</sup>

In the Rostov group, the head of a well-regarded NGO in Novocherkassk, who had missed the previous workshops and was thus unfamiliar with and dismissive of social marketing, now asserted a dominant role. She did not want to hear about the survey so we did not discuss the results. She asserted that her group was targeting abuse in schools by teachers, students, and authorities. There was no discussion of how people in the regions thought about these issues. The Taganrog and Rostov city teams seemed disengaged.

By July 2003, one year into the project, we saw a growing gap. Perm had come to the project receptive toward the new approach, and they made progress throughout the year. The Ryazan group went through a major shift. The younger activists had forced out a resistant older member, a central figure in their region. They had found a local graphic artist to help them design campaign materials. The edgy "*Skol'ko?*" campaign they presented highlighted human and economic costs of the war. While no one thought this campaign would end the war, they discussed concrete results they might expect from this targeted message of protest on a highly sensitive issue.

One project from the three contentious groups within Rostov was related to the data: a campaign on schoolchildren's rights. Some talked about Chechnya, but without any reference to public views. The Taganrog activists now introduced the idea of an arbitration court, which supposedly would "create the preconditions of skills for conflict prevention in the region." Their collateral materials amounted to text on the theme, "I have a right." The campaign consultant asked the Rostov group to specify their target audience and received three different answers. In his view the Rostov activists had "flunked" a critical test; he suggested taking them off the project to free up funds for the groups with campaigns under way, a step the Moscow partners were unwilling to take.

---

<sup>16</sup>We learned in our June 2004 assessment that a more senior member of the Ryazan human rights community had encouraged the younger activists behind the scenes to pursue their desire to shift approaches. This intervention shows that the generational cleavages, while evident, are not ironclad.

## CAMPAIGN RESULTS

By early 2004, Perm had executed two different campaigns on children's rights. The authorities embraced their issue, so they had favorable political space in which to work. The activists took advantage of ideas and opportunities that came their way. They eventually settled on the message "I'm a person. I have rights" (*Ya chelovek. U menya yest' prava*), which they ran alongside pictures of smiling children on billboards, pocket calendars (popular throughout Russia), and local television to fuse the idea of children's rights with human rights. They raised more money for their efforts: the local Perm government matched the funds from USAID. When we visited Perm in June 2004, the deputy governor requested a meeting to tell us she planned to support additional projects.

Our June 2004 survey showed that 28 percent of the population of Perm city saw the "*Ya chelovek*" billboards, 6 percent saw the calendars, and 15 percent saw the TV programs at least once.<sup>17</sup> One-third of the city residents (34 percent) had some exposure to the campaign. The campaign also reached 19 percent of the population outside the capital city, primarily through television (14 percent). Even allowing for some "false positives," the "*Ya chelovek*" campaign reached a considerable proportion of the population. In Perm city 84 percent of those who encountered campaign materials identified them with rights of children. The survey in Perm city suggests the campaign got its message across effectively: 68 percent strongly agreed and 21 percent agreed with the statement that when they see the "*Ya chelovek*" materials, they want more to be done to protect children's rights. Two focus groups we observed in June 2004 suggested some confusion about the specific rights the campaign was advancing. Altogether, though, the "*Ya chelovek*" campaign must be judged a success in the number of people reached and the clarity of its theme and message.

The campaign's impact on the public's behavior and associated attitudes was less successful. From February 2003 to July 2004, there was no change in the proportion of Perm city residents who said that adolescents should have the same rights as adults. We found no change in assessments of whether the rights of adolescents are respected in Russia today, perhaps because the campaign materials mainly used young children. The campaign sought to increase the proportion advocating more government assistance for children, but the number actually fell from 27 percent to 19 percent in Perm city.

The Perm activists implemented public awareness campaigns for the first time. One activist exclaimed in June 2004 that such campaigns are an "incredible thing," if "complicated." The primary public campaign reached a satisfactory number of people, and got the message across to most people who saw them. In these respects, the campaigns were successful. But the

---

<sup>17</sup>The Perm activists chose this message after we had surveyed in January 2003 so we have no benchmark data to report. A comprehensive quantitative analysis of this and the other two regional campaigns can be obtained from the second author upon request.

impact was disappointing, especially given the resources and the cooperation with the authorities. Most likely, the messages of the campaign were not evocative enough to produce the attitudinal and behavioral shifts the activists had hoped to see.

The Perm team also developed a campaign around foster care, including a pilot program (rights of orphans) to draw attention to abuses in orphanages. The original survey data from 2003 revealed two modal responses to the plight of orphans: passivity and sympathy. The activists' goal was to turn that passive attitude into a proactive one. They originally aimed to increase the number of people who viewed the orphans' plight sympathetically and would be willing to provide assistance. Data helped identify the group most proactive on this issue (those in their thirties). Well into the campaign, however, a leading member of the coalition responsible for the foster care issue shifted gears and turned this into a campaign to increase state funding for orphans. He succeeded in getting the authorities to increase the monthly stipend for orphans from 1000 to 1700 rubles a month (about \$35 to \$60). While our surveys of the general public did not measure attitudinal impact among elites, clearly this campaign shows the potential of embracing and advancing a strategic action culture, if not social marketing.<sup>18</sup>

In Ryazan, the young activists who had taken charge in spring 2003 worked with partners in Moscow to shift how human rights groups spoke about Chechnya. Drawing on the survey data, they attempted to engage the public with posters that asked how many soldiers had been killed and how much the war cost. They distributed several messages they had tested in focus groups. They dealt with numerous organizational challenges. How large a team was necessary to get X number of posters distributed? What sort of authorization was needed? They were often uncertain of the ultimate goal, realizing that such a campaign in Ryazan alone would not end the war.

The Ryazan team used posters and broadsheets to stimulate a letter writing campaign to shame the authorities into revealing the cost of the war, the number of soldiers killed, and how long they expected the war to last. They organized a public event displaying how many letters had been sent and the government's response. Their campaign materials used satire and irony. They had embraced the idea that activists need to appeal to the public. Despite working in a tight media market in a communist-run region, they found that the media were not hostile. They correctly anticipated that the visual strength of the "collateral materials" (posters and broadsheets) would draw attention, and they introduced the message in cleverly planned phases. The campaign targeted young adults, so they designed it with them in mind and researched where young people gathered, to get their posters the widest possible exposure.

---

<sup>18</sup>Memorial commissioned a study of elite opinion that also indicates the campaign raised awareness among government officials. Report in Russian is available upon request.

The results of their campaign contradict the conventional wisdom that the population does not care about the war in Chechnya. That conception derived from the fact that demonstrations, with posters reading "Stop Human Rights Abuses in Chechnya," typically drew 100 or fewer activists in central Moscow. The scant support for that message is not surprising, given our data showing that human rights abuses in Chechnya do not trouble most Russians. But how would people respond if the messages about the war addressed their concerns? The Ryazan campaign offers a tantalizing answer.

The results of the June 2004 survey suggest that people responded to the framing of the issue. About 30 percent of respondents reported seeing the campaign posters; of these, 57 percent accurately linked them to Chechnya. In our 2002, 2003, and 2004 surveys, the most common feeling evoked by the war in all regions was "alarm over losses of Russian troops." However, in Ryazan city, the percentage of respondents who identified this feeling jumped from 53 percent to 81 percent between February 2003 and July 2004. It jumped from 53 percent to 73 percent outside the capital city. In the "control" region, Kaluga, it remained stable during this period, inching from 60 percent to 64 percent. The sharp jump in Ryazan city (where the campaign took place) compared to Kaluga (where none did) suggests the campaign achieved a central aim: to increase public concerns about Russian casualties. Similarly, we find evidence implying that the campaign achieved its second goal: raising public concerns about the economic costs of the war. In Ryazan city, the relevant percentage increased from 19 percent to 32 percent following the campaign; in non-capital Ryazan, from 17 percent to 30 percent. In Kaluga *Oblast'*, the figure actually fell from 23 percent to 18 percent.

In addition, the Ryazan campaign tangibly engaged the public in several ways. It opened with a "teaser" in November 2003, where activists put up the first batch of posters that showed only the word "*Skol'ko?*" and then "went dark" (silent). Activists overheard people at bus stops ask: Who did this? What is this about? Over several months, they gradually rolled out more posters, each wave revealing more details. The campaign culminated with an event in the center of the city: an exhibition with photographs from Chechnya where the activists gathered signatures and people asked to join their effort. The media covered their event. Television journalists were hesitant to televise a press conference because of the topic, but they covered the exhibit. Local newspapers reprinted the public letters that 2100 people signed asking the president and minister of defense how much the war cost. Instead of 100 activists in Moscow, this group mobilized over 2000 citizens. When we arrived in Ryazan unexpectedly by car in June 2004, weeks after the campaign was over, we could still see many campaign posters on buildings and lampposts around the city.<sup>19</sup>

Rostov never caught up. Our Moscow collaborators devoted enormous time to additional meetings and training. By March 2004, they were still working on campaign calendars even though the campaign was scheduled to end within 75 days. Divisions and the lack of leadership incapacitated

tated the group. In the March 2004 meeting, the American campaign consultant had written the number of days left in the campaign on a board and asked activists to detail their plans. They had no answer. Taganrog dropped out of the campaign altogether and refused to meet when we traveled to the region in June 2004.

Shortly after the March meeting, however, the leader of the Novochoerkassk group, who had earlier objected to using survey data, suddenly embraced the strategic action approach. She led a campaign in their town, ignoring the inaction of Rostov city and Taganrog. Her team used public awareness techniques to increase recognition of the legal assistance clinic they had set up for students whose rights had been violated. The leader negotiated with the mayor for access to the transportation system; she eventually got permission to place posters with messages about students' rights and a festival on this topic in all trolleys in the city.<sup>20</sup> Their May 2004 event highlighting the campaign drew a large crowd, and the clinic's daily "foot traffic" went from an average of three or four in February, March, and April to nearly 12 a day in May.

Our discussion with the Novochoerkassk team in June 2004 revealed how difficult the shift from intelligentsia to strategic action culture had been. The leader described the process: "The early part [of the project] was terribly hard; we had no idea what was needed, what PR was or how to do it here.... If we had done more actions earlier, we would have had more of an effect." A moderated discussion with Novochoerkassk students who had participated in the project suggested that the May 2004 event was a big success. Campaigns that had specific outcomes (such as promoting a legal clinic) seemed especially welcome in a small regional town where few, if any, resources and no after-school programs exist for young people.

The Rostov activists used two different slogans in the campaigns implemented in Novochoerkassk and Rostov city. Symptomatic of the coordination problems within this group, the activists gave us only one slogan, "Make rights a part of your life" (*Sovmesti svoi prava s zhizn'yu*), to test on our survey. We therefore cannot measure exposure and reaction to the more widely used (especially in Novochoerkassk) slogan "We are familiar with our rights, are you?" (*My s pravami na ty, a ty?*).<sup>21</sup> Our survey suggests wide exposure to the "*Sovmesti*" materials in Novochoerkassk: one-third of the respondents saw them at least once. By contrast, in Rostov city only 7

---

<sup>19</sup>A journalist described the Ryazan campaign as follows: "Compared with the wordy open letters and principled stands of the Soviet-era dissidents who still dominate Russian civil society, it is all very 21st-century.... Modern activism could help to make Russian democracy grow" (Survey—Russia: Who Needs Democracy, 2004).

<sup>20</sup>We met the mayor on our June 2004 assessment trip. Unlike the authorities in Perm, he did not seem interested in continued cooperation. He later led an effort to use local courts to shut down a local independent newspaper that he believed was slandering him (Krasnov, 2005).

<sup>21</sup>Memorial hired a Russian research firm, Validata, to survey 197 young people in Novochoerkassk about the campaign, but the results are ambiguous because they relied on activists, many of whom had participated in the campaign, to generate the sample.

percent saw them. On the one hand, this is not surprising, since Rostov is a much larger city than Novocherkassk. Yet when we compare exposure in Perm city to the “*Ya chelovek*” campaign materials, the Rostov city campaign must be judged a disappointment. Also, 7 percent of respondents in the rest of Rostov *Oblast’*—where there was no campaign to speak of (although perhaps some materials were distributed in Taganrog)—say they saw materials. In sum, the data suggest that the campaign reached a broad audience in Novocherkassk, but not in Rostov city.

However, even in Novocherkassk the message we were able to test was unclear to respondents: only 13 percent who saw the materials agreed that it made them think about violence in schools. Forty-three percent—more, but still less than a majority—agreed it made them think about the right to education. In light of the fuzziness of the message, it is not surprising that only 7 percent of Novocherkassk respondents who saw the materials said they visited one of the reception centers described in the posters. Despite few expectations as late as March 2004 that there would be any campaign, the Novocherkassk activists demonstrated a shift of sorts toward this action-oriented culture. In sharp contrast to the other southern colleagues, they did put together a campaign. Had the shift occurred earlier, perhaps they might have accomplished even more.

## CONCLUSIONS

Our social marketing project with Russian human rights activists produced mixed results. Perm and Ryazan, after much internal struggle, engaged the public in a relatively strategic manner, making choices that were informed by public opinion rather than internal group dynamics. They combined principle, standing for human rights, with some specific action. The majority of Rostov activists never managed to strike this balance, though a few in the town of Novocherkassk took decisive steps in this direction toward the end of the project.

Some experts have suggested that research on civil society might fruitfully shift attention from structures and organizations toward norms, attitudes, and daily practices (Hann, 1996, p. 3). In that spirit, we have considered what forces and habits shaped the activists’ decisions and daily practices, as does Henry (2006). Scholars have written about the impact of Soviet-era legacies on post-Soviet state institutions and on the population (e.g., Howard, 2003). But few have explicitly considered how legacies shaped the predominant culture within parts of civil society. We believe this variable to be a defining yet overlooked aspect of the post-Soviet transition. The predominant activist culture affects the development of this civil society and plays an important operational role in qualifying the effectiveness of cross-border activism and thus the diffusion of ideas and norms. By focusing on the actual practices and choices of activists, we arrive at some larger observations about obstacles to diffusion as well as the condition of Russian civil society.

Our project in diffusion and social marketing suggests that a paradigm shift would be needed for the strategic action culture to take hold more broadly in the human rights community in Russia. The strategic planning and communication skills that underpin social marketing campaigns are more or less orthogonal to a predominant activist culture that discourages and inhibits activists from looking beyond their own circle to the public, relying on empirical data, or planning goal-oriented action. Drawing on this private–public tension, we identify an important potential obstacle to successful transnational diffusion that has been overlooked in the literature: local, in this case Soviet-era, legacies and cultures shape how activists work and can inhibit the diffusion of ideas and practices from other settings. In other settings, local legacies and circumstances might foster an activist culture that favors the adaptation of new ideas and practices. Thus, activist culture should be added to the set of key variables that shape whether diffusion of particular movement techniques takes place in specific national and historical contexts.

We recognize that factors other than intelligentsia culture may also hinder the diffusion of social marketing among human rights groups in Russia. Social marketing campaigns are expensive and local expertise is hard to find. Undoubtedly, many activists prefer strategies with which they feel comfortable, even if they are not especially effective. Preferences for the *status quo* are likely the result of complex forces: donors may have rewarded activists in the past, giving them no incentive to change. Likewise, activists may dislike prioritizing; choosing attainable goals is difficult and often requires trade-offs or distasteful alliances. But our project sought to overcome these other potential obstacles by explicitly giving activists the incentives and resources necessary to implement strategic marketing campaigns, as well as the freedom to choose what issue to work on. Our experiences led us to attribute the resistance we encountered among some activists, particularly older ones, to the lingering hold of intelligentsia culture in Russian civil society.

How representative are these findings? Will scholars be able to replicate them? Here we have attempted to demonstrate the plausibility of our argument, but to be validated researchers might test it against other sectors within Russian civil society, and civil societies in other parts of the world. Ideally, we would do this in Russia using a random sample survey of self-described human rights and other activists. To test the importance of generational cleavages, we would look more systematically at demographic variations. We need a much larger set of observations to systematically consider other factors that may shape variations in activist cultures within Russia, such as gender, education, and region.

Caveats aside, we believe that the predominant activist culture in Russia continues to impede the development of its civil society and will hinder the efforts of transnational activists so long as they fail to grapple with it directly. We do see challenges to this culture coming from inside Russia, and especially from younger activists: one of the organizers from Ryazan in 2006 won an international competition sponsored by the Ford

Foundation to study social marketing abroad, and our main partner in Moscow continues to oversee social marketing campaigns in regions of Russia today. A Russian-language brochure describing the project proved quite popular, and Memorial printed a second version, doubling the number from 500 to 1000 copies. But the overall trend within the human rights community does not bode well. The Russian human rights movement is dominated by activists in their sixties and seventies. Elsewhere in the world, the human rights movement attracts the young. University students in many countries have embraced the global justice and anti-apartheid movements. We see no evidence of this in Russia. Instead, in the next 10 years, the human rights movement in Russia faces a demographic and methodological crisis: either younger voices, new strategies, and innovative techniques will multiply or the movement will literally perish.

## REFERENCES

- Acharya, Amitav**, "How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism," *International Organization*, **58**, 2:239–275, Spring 2004.
- Alexeeva, Ludmila**, *Soviet Dissent*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985.
- Berdyayev, N. A.**, "Filosofskaya istina i intelligentskaya pravda (Philosophical verity and the intelligentsia's truth)," in N. A. Berdyayev et al., *Vekhi* (Landmarks), reprint of second edition. Moscow: Novoye Vremya and Gorizont, [1909] 1990.
- Berdyayev, N. A.**, *Istoki i smysl' russkogo kommunizma* (The sources and meaning of Russian communism). Moscow: Nauka, [1933] 1990.
- Bosman, Anneke**, "Sending out an SMS: A rapid-response mobile phone network engages a youth constituency to stop torture fast," New Tactics in Human Rights Project, The Center for Victims of Torture, Minneapolis, MN, 2004, available online at [www.newtactics.org/files/1034/Bosman\\_SMS.pdf](http://www.newtactics.org/files/1034/Bosman_SMS.pdf).
- Gella, Aleksander**, "An Introduction to the Sociology of the Intelligentsia," in Aleksander Gella, ed., *The Intelligentsia and the Intellectuals*. London, UK: Sage, 1976.
- Gerber, Theodore P. and Sarah E. Mendelson**, "Casualty Sensitivity in a Post-Soviet Context: Russian Public Opinion on the Second Chechen War, 2001–2004," *Political Science Quarterly*, forthcoming.
- Gerber, Theodore P. and Sarah E. Mendelson**, "Police Violence and Corruption in Russia: A Case of Predatory Policing?," unpublished manuscript, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI, 2007.
- Gerber, Theodore P. and Sarah E. Mendelson**, "Russian Public Opinion on Human Rights and the War in Chechnya," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, **18**, 4:271–305, October–December 2002.
- Gessen, Masha**, *Dead Again: The Russian Intelligentsia After Communism*. London, UK: Verso, 1997.
- Gudkov, Lev**, "Intelligenty i intellektualy (The intelligentsia and the intellectuals)," *Znaniya*, 3-4:203–220, March–April 1992.
- Hann, Chris**, "Introduction: Political Society and Civil Anthropology," in Chris Hann and Elizabeth Dunn, eds., *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models*. New York: Routledge, 1996.



- Henderson, Sarah L.**, *Building Democracy in Contemporary Russia: Western Support for Grassroots Organizations*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003.
- Henry, Laura A.**, "Shaping Social Activism in Post-Soviet Russia: Leadership, Organizational Diversity, and Innovation," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, **22**, 2:99–124, April–June 2006.
- Howard, Marc Morje**, *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Human Rights Watch**, *Worse than a War: 'Disappearances' in Chechnya—A Crime Against Humanity*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2005.
- Human Rights Watch**, *The Wrongs of Passage: Inhuman and Degrading Treatment of New Recruits in the Russian Armed Forces*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2004.
- Human Rights Watch**, *Swept Under: Torture, Forced Disappearances, and Extrajudicial Killings During Sweep Operations in Chechnya*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002.
- Javeline, Debra**, *Protest and the Politics of Blame: The Russian Response to Unpaid Wages*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003.
- Keck, Margaret E. and Kathryn Sikkink**, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Kennedy, Michael D.**, "The Intelligentsia in the Constitution of Civil Societies and Post-Communist Regimes in Hungary and Poland," *Theory and Society*, **21**, 1:29–76, February 1992.
- Klotz, Audie**, *Norms in International Relations: The Struggle Against Apartheid*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995.
- Krasnov, Aleksandr**, "Novocherkassk Closes Independent Newspaper," *Russian Regional Report*, **10**, 5, March 15, 2005, available online at [www.isn.ethz.ch/news/rrr/details.cfm?lng=en&id=13839](http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/rrr/details.cfm?lng=en&id=13839).
- Laber, Jeri**, *The Courage of Strangers: Coming of Age with the Human Rights Movement*. New York: Public Affairs, 2002.
- Malia, Martin**, "What is the Intelligentsia?," in Richard Pipes, ed., *The Russian Intelligentsia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961.
- March, James G. and Johan P. Olsen**, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics*. New York: Free Press, 1989.
- McAdam, Doug and Dieter Rucht**, "The Cross-National Diffusion of Movement Ideas," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, **528**:56–74, July 1993.
- Mendelson, Sarah E.**, "Russians' Rights Imperiled: Has Anybody Noticed?," *International Security*, **26**, 4:39–69, Spring 2002.
- Olesen, Thomas**, *International Zapatismo: The Construction of Solidarity in the Age of Globalization*. London, UK: ZED Books, 2003.
- Pipes, Richard**, "The Historical Evolution of the Russian Intelligentsia," in Richard Pipes, ed., *The Russian Intelligentsia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961.
- Powell, Leslie**, "Western and Russian Environmental NGOs: A Greener Russia?," in Sarah E. Mendelson and John K. Glenn, eds., *The Power and Limits of NGOs: A Critical Look at Building Democracy in Eastern Europe and Eurasia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Price, Richard M.**, "Transnational Civil Society and Advocacy in World Politics," *World Politics*, **55**, 4:579–606, July 2003.
- Richter, James**, "Evaluating Western Assistance to Russian Women's Organizations," in Sarah E. Mendelson and John K. Glenn, eds., *The Power and Limits of NGOs: A Critical Look at Building Democracy in Eastern Europe and Eurasia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

- Rieff, David**, "The Precarious Triumph of Human Rights," *The New York Times Magazine*, August 8, 1999.
- Risse, Thomas, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink, eds.**, *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Sakharov, Andrei**, *Memoirs*. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- Soule, Sarah A.**, "The Student Divestment Movement in the United States and Tactical Diffusion," *Social Forces*, 75, 3:855–882, March 1997.
- Sundstrom, Lisa McIntosh**, *Funding Civil Society: Foreign Assistance and NGO Development in Russia*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006.
- "Survey—Russia: Who Needs Democracy?," *The Economist*, May 22–28, 2004.
- Tarrow, Sidney and Douglas McAdam**, "Scale Shift in Transnational Contention," in Donatella della Porta and Sidney Tarrow, eds., *Transnational Protest and Global Activism*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005.