Environmental Activists as Agents of Social Democratization: A Historical Comparison of Russia and Mexico

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Environment in the Graduate School of Duke University

2009
ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This study is a comparative historical analysis of the link between environmental activism and state-society relations in 20th century Russia and Mexico. It explores the three main currents of environmentalism that originated in these two countries under non-democratic political systems that originated in the social revolutions of 1910 (Mexico) and 1917 (Russia) and the roles that each current has played in the process of democratization that began in the 1980s. It is based on critical evaluation and synthesis of the following theoretical fields: collective action, social movements, political regime change and democratic transition. Scholarly literature and press sources are used to corroborate and evaluate findings from in-depth qualitative interviews with environmental activists, researchers, lawyers, and journalists as well as data from participant observation conducted by the author in Russia and in Mexico. The main findings of the study are two-fold. 1) Environmental activism affects social rather than political democratization. 2) The type of environmental activism that has the most significant impact on social democratization is social environmentalism - the current that emphasizes the synergy between the struggles for social justice and civil rights on the one hand and against environmental degradation on the other.
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Mexico

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Biography
Abbreviations

The names of Russian organizations are given in the text as original acronyms transliterated into Latin alphabet or as full English translations; full Russian names and acronyms in Cyrillic alphabet are given below.

The names of Mexican organizations are given in the text as original acronyms or as full English translations; the full Spanish names appear below.

A.C. – Asociación Civil / Civil Association (indicates a non-profit organization in Mexico)

AD – Autonomous Action / Автономное Действие (АД)

AEN – Alianza Ecologista Nacional / National Ecologist Alliance

AES – Anarcho-Ecological Resistance (Perm) / Анархо-экологическое сопротивление (АЭС)

AMDA – Academia Mexicana de Derecho Ambiental / Mexican Academy of Environmental Law

ATA – Asociación de Tecnología Apropiada / Appropriate Technology Association

CBK – Central Bureau for Local Studies / Центральное бюро краеведения (ЦБК)

CIMEX – Conservation International (Mexico)

CEAMA – Comisión Estatal de Agua y Medio Ambiente / (Morelos) State Commission for Water and Environment

Cecodes – Centro de Ecodesarrollo / Center for Eco-Development

CECOP – Council of Ejidos and Communities Opposed to La Parota Dam / Consejo de Ejidos y Comunidades Opositores a la Presa La Parota

CEMDA – Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental / Mexican Environmental Law Center

CFE – Comisión Federal de Electricidad / Federal Electricity Commission

CIECO – Centro de Investigaciones en Ecosistemas / Center of Ecosystem Research
Conacyt – Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología / National Council for Science and Technology

CTR – Cooperative Threat Reduction program, US Department of Defense

DF – Distrito Federal / Federal District (the core of the Mexico City urban agglomeration, which also extends considerably into the surrounding state of Mexico)

EIA – environmental impact assessment

EPR – Ejercito Popular Revolucionario / People’s Revolutionary Army

EZLN – Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional / Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Chiapas)

FEHM – Foro Ecologista de la Cuenca de Mexico / Ecologista Forum of the Mexico Basin (currently known as Ecomunidades)

FECOMEX – Federación Conservacionista Mexicana / Mexican Conservationist Federation

FSB – Federal Security Service / Федеральная служба безопасности (ФСБ)

ICBMs – intercontinental ballistic missiles

IKD – Collective Action Institute / Институт «Коллективное действие» (ИКД)

INMERNAT – Instituto Mexicano de Recursos Naturales / Mexican Institute of Natural Resources

GMOs – genetically modified organisms

KAS – Anarcho-Syndicalist Confederation / Конфедерация Ануархо-Синдикалистов (КАС)

KGB – Committee on State Security / Комитет государственной безопасности (КГБ)

KPRF – Communist Party of Russian Federation / Коммунистическая Партия Российской Федерации (КПРФ)

KPSS – Communist Party of the Soviet Union / Коммунистическая Партия Советского Союза (КПСС)

MAPDER – Movimiento de los Afectedos por las Presas y en Defensa de los Rios / Movement of People Affected by Dams and River Defenders
MIA – Manifestación del Impacto Ambiental / Environmental Impact Assessment

MPR – Ministry of Natural Resources / Министерство природных ресурсов РФ (МПР)

MUP – Movimiento Urbano Popular / Urban Popular Movement

NAFTA – North American Free Trade Agreement / Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte (TLCAN)

NGO – non-governmental organization

NPP – nuclear power plant

NIMBY – “not in my back yard”; denotes protests against locally undesirable land uses

NKVD – People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs / Народный комиссариат внутренних дел (НКВД)

OCESP – Organization of Peasant Ecologists of the Sierra de Petatlán / Organización de Campesinos Ecologistas de la Sierra de Petatlán

OCSS – Peasant Organization of the Sierra Sur / Organización Campesina de la Sierra del Sur (Guerrero)

OGF – United Civic Front / Объединенный Гражданский Фронт (ОГФ)

RMALC – Red Mexicana de Acción frente al Libre Comercio / Mexican Free Trade Action Network

PGE – Pacto de Grupos Ecologistas / Pact of Ecologist Groups

PAN – Partido de Acción Nacional / Party of National Action

PBO-NN – Household Waste Processing – Nizhniy Novgorod / Переработка бытовых отходов – Нижний Новгород (ПБО-НН)

PGP – Perm Civic Chamber / Пермская гражданская палата (ПГП)

PEEA – Public Environmental Expert Assessment / Общественная экологическая экспертиза (ОЭЭ)

PGE – Pacto de Grupos Ecologistas

PGR – Procuraduría General de la República / General Prosecutor’s Office

PGU – Perm State University / Пермский государственный университет (ПГУ)
PNR – Partido Nacional Revolucionario / National Revolutionary Party

POPs – persistent organic pollutants

PRD – Partido Revolucionario Democrático / Revolutionary Democratic Party

PRI – Partido Revolucionario Institucional / Revolutionary Institutionalist Party

PRM – Partido de la Revolución Mexicana / Party of the Mexican Revolution

PROFEPA – Procuraduría Federal de Protección Ambiental / Federal Environmental Prosecutor’s Office

PRPC – Perm Regional Human Rights Center / Пермский региональный правозащитный центр (ПРПЦ)

PVEM – Partido Verde Ecologista de México

SEDUE – Secretaría de Desarrollo Urbano y Ecología / Ministry of Urban Development and Ecology

SEEA – State Environmental Expert Assessment / Государственная экологическая экспертиза (ГЭЭ)

SEMARNAP - Secretaría del Medio Ambiente, Recursos Naturales y Pesca / Ministry of the Environment, Natural Resources, and Fisheries

SEMARNAT – Secretaría del Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales / Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources

SEU – Socio-Ecological Union / Социально-экологический союз (СоЭС)

SPES – Social-Legal Ecological Partnership, Dzerzhinsk / Социально-правовое экологическое сотоварнишество (СПЭС)

TLA – Tribunal Latinoamericano de Agua / Latin American Water Tribunal

TNC – transnational corporation

UAM – Universidad Autónoma de México / Autonomous University of Mexico

UASLP – Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí / Autonomous University of San Luis Potosí

UCS – Union for Chemical Safety / Союз «За химическую безопасность»

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UNAM – Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México / National Autonomous University of Mexico

VLKSM (Komsomol) – All-Union Lenin Communist Youth Union / Всесоюзный Ленинский Коммунистический союз молодежи (ВЛКСМ)

VOOP – All-Russian (All-Union) Society for Nature Protection / Всероссийское (Всесоюзное) общество охраны природы (ВООП)


WWF – World Wildlife Fund
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 What Does Environmental Activism Have to Do With Democratization?

Researchers often note the link between democratization and environmental activism,\(^1\) but when it comes to specifying the causal mechanisms behind this association few studies go beyond the most general level. Yet, if one looks closely at the history of particular countries, general statements, such as “higher levels of environmental activism produce stronger democratic institutions” or “environmental activism is more effective when democratic institutions work well,” sound largely meaningless, if not outright erroneous. This predicament arises because both “democratization” and “environmental activism” are umbrella terms that group together a significant variety of distinct phenomena and processes. As Fox (1994) notes, democratization is “a set of transitions” and cannot be limited to the process of political democratization – “national regime change and construction of competitive electoral institutions.” Similarly, the term “environmental activism” is used to describe a great variety of collective action forms that are inspired by different notions of what environment means, what threatens it, why it is worth protecting, and how it is to be defended.

Given such internal heterogeneity of each concept, what precisely does it mean to say that an association can often be observed between pro-democratic mobilization and environmental activism? The general answer to this question that emerges from research

\(^1\) See Rootes (2004) for a recent literature review.
on countries that have undergone episodes of democratization since the 1970s, is that environmental protests are a prominent (and sometimes the initial) feature of the process that culminates in the breakdown of non-democratic (authoritarian or totalitarian) regimes.\(^2\) Moreover, environmental degradation tends to generate significant amounts of collective action both during and after the democratic transition, regardless of whether the latter is successful or not. The fact that these general statements apply to a very large number of very different societies both indicates that it is more than a simple coincidence and makes the search for possible causal mechanisms behind it a very difficult undertaking.

I chose to investigate this association through a historical comparison of Russia and Mexico – two countries where authoritarian power relations have remained an enduring feature of political and social life in the aftermath of recent democratization efforts. The 20\(^{th}\)-century history of these societies has been shaped by different, but comparable political systems, which can be both described as non-democratic and mobilizational. Both systems emerged from social revolutions and, during their formative period, had taken political inclusion of the disenfranchised masses to unprecedented levels. However, this incorporation of the lower classes was accompanied by severe restrictions of political pluralism and by the institutionalization of highly unequal and hierarchical power relations in all spheres of social life. By taking upon itself many of the tasks that in democratic societies are carried out by “a myriad of voluntary associations

that take an interest in collective goods, the state in Russia and Mexico had greatly reduced societal capacity for autonomous formulation of interests and collective action. The task of “constructing respect for associational autonomy” in all spheres and of forcing the state to recognize its subjects as citizens has loomed large in both societies ever since the 1960s, when their political systems began to lose their legitimacy and capacity to perform essential political, economic and social functions. This task includes, but is not limited to political democratization – the change of political regime and the creation of formal democratic institutions. It also involves the much-slower and much less visible work of social democratization – the processes that gradually demote authoritarian power relations from their dominant position in all spheres of social life and promote a more equitable distribution of political and social power.

Until the mid-1990s, the mechanisms of social democratization did not figure prominently in research about democratization, which was dominated by the debates about the pathways of democratic regime transition and the recipes for the successful installation of formal democratic institutions. Researchers started paying more attention to the social underpinnings and prerequisites of political democracy because they discovered that the democratic transition framework was unable to account for the

5 I adopt the definition of political democratization that is used by O’Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead (1986), Schmitter and Karl (1991), and Schedler (1998 and 2002). These authors use the term “political democratization” to refer to the construction of the “minimalist” or “electoral” version of democracy – the one that was originally described by Dahl (1971) as “polyarchy.”
6 These processes have been initially referred to as “democratic consolidation” (O’Donnell, 1996; Schedler, 1998) and as improvements in “the quality of democracy” (O’Donnell, 2004). Fox (1994) and Vorozheikina (2001) draw the direct link between social democratization and the erosion of authoritarian power relations.
numerous cases of incomplete and reversed political democratizations left in the wake of
the successive “waves of democratization” that had swept the world since the 1970s.\textsuperscript{7}
Together, the conclusions made by scholars that undertook in-depth studies of
democratization in particular countries indicated that, while the formal institutions of
representative democracy did not vary significantly from country to country, the
substantive content and the meanings that made these institutions viable had to be unique
to each society that produced them.\textsuperscript{8} In one country after another, formal democratic
institutions were corrupted and rendered hollow soon after the democratic transition by
various kinds of authoritarian and clientelist power relations that had deep roots in
society and were not destroyed in the wreckage of the old, non-democratic political
regimes.\textsuperscript{9}

Researchers such as O’Donnell, Gómez Tagle, Schedler, Diamond, and Carothers
argue that while the process of social democratization is unique to each society that
undergoes it, its success depends on whether or not it can occur in all spheres of social
life, including that of voluntary associations and social activism. The fate of democracy
in countries with deeply entrenched social and political authoritarianism hinges partially
on the question of whether or not social movements and activists that emerge in non-
democratic settings can break free from the vicious circle of social and political
authoritarianism and avoid reproducing authoritarian patterns of interaction in their own

\textsuperscript{8} See in particular the cross-national studies by Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992); Linz and
Stephan (1996); Przeworski et al. (2000).
\textsuperscript{9} See Roniger and Gunes-Ayata (1994), Linz and Stepan (1996) for cross-country comparisons; Afanasiev
(1997), Rose (1999), Levada (2000), and Vorozheikina (2001) on Russia; Cavarozzi (1992) and O’Donnell
practices. In other words: can social activists with authoritarian birth-stains overcome this heritage and become agents of social democratization? I address this question for the particular case of environmental activism in Russia and Mexico. I give a comparative historical account of how modern environmental activism has evolved in these two countries during the 20th century and investigate the mechanisms through which environmental activists have contributed to citizen participation, associational autonomy, and to the defense of political, civil, and socio-economic rights. On the basis of this comparison, I argue that environmental activism impacts political democratization indirectly, through social democratization. In Russia and Mexico, the most significant positive contribution to social democratization is made by one particular stream of environmental activism, which I call social environmentalism. This approach is characterized by the link that its partisans make between social injustice and environmental degradation and by the synergy between grassroots associations and professional activists that come from the Leftist intellectual tradition. By making a positive contribution to social democratization, social environmentalism helps to create more favorable conditions for political democratization. I use case-studies of social-environmental campaigns based on my own fieldwork and existing secondary sources to

See Sections 1.4 and 3.1 for the definition and conceptualization of this term. I formulated it by synthesizing the following concepts: “social ecology” – the term introduced by Murray Bookchin (1964/2004); “political ecologism” – the term used by Brulle (2000) and Rootes (2004) in reference to the post-1960s wave of radical environmental activism in the US and in Western Europe; “eco-anarchism” – a Russian term that appeared in the late 1980s (Fomichev, 1997), the Mexican term “socio-ecological struggles,” coined by Alfonso González Martinez (1992), and “socio-environmentalism” – the term used by Hochstetler and Keck (2007) in their discussion of environmental activism Brazil since the transition to democracy began in the mid-1980s.
identify the causal mechanisms that allow social environmentalism to make a positive contribution to social democratization.

Social environmentalism is the concept that I have defined on the basis of what I know about Russia and Mexico, but it is also based on the classifications of environmental activism types that have been made for the US and Brazil.\(^{11}\) Whereas the literature that I drew on describes this type of environmentalism with references to just one particular country at a time, I tried to describe it in more general and comparative terms, as a distinct approach to environmental activism that brings together the grassroots and the professional activists and creates a bridge between environmental and social justice concerns.

My ideas about the link between social environmentalism and social democratization have two major origins: the social-ecological ideology formulated by Bookchin and reinterpreted by Mexican ecologistas and Russian eco-anarchists; and O’Donnell’s (2004 and 2007) recent work on joining the concepts of citizen and human rights to those of socio-economic development. Social environmentalist ideologues argue that people whose political and economic freedoms are trampled cannot live in harmony with nature. O’Donnell argues that the goal of democratization is to produce not just political citizens, but free agents – people who can fully realize their potential through autonomous associations as well as formal political and economic institutions. These two arguments come together when one simultaneously thinks about environmental threats

\(^{11}\) For the US, I rely on the descriptions of the environmental justice movement provided by Cable and Benson (1993) and Cole and Foster (2001); for Brazil, I use the description of socio-environmentalism found in Hochstetler and Keck (2007).
created by the powerful as instances of environmental degradation, political disenfranchisement, and socio-economic marginalization.

1.2 Authoritarianism, Democratization, and the Evolution of Power Relations

The term “authoritarianism” is most commonly used by scholars to refer to a particular type of political regime that is distinct from both liberal democracy and totalitarianism.\(^\text{12}\) Yet it also has a more general meaning – “the principle of blind submission to authority, as opposed to individual freedom of thought and action”\(^\text{13}\) – that has relevance not just for the political sphere, but for all social interactions where power is exercised and contested by different actors. O’Donnell (1986) refers to this broader, social meaning of authoritarianism when he discusses the suppression of “vertical and horizontal voice” by the authoritarian rulers and the resulting inability of the subjects to hold the rulers accountable as well as to form collective identities and engage in collective action by interacting with other subjects. Successful inhibition of vertical and horizontal voices produces authoritarian power relations that are manifested in hierarchical and asymmetric structures of domination and subordination found in all spheres of social activity (Levada, 1993). In non-democratic political systems, authoritarian power relations are the rule of the day within the political sphere, from where they can easily spread to virtually all other spheres of social life, thus adding a social dimension to the political authoritarianism. The extent to which authoritarianism

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\(^{12}\) Linz (2000); Eckstein and Apter (1963), Gudkov (2001).

can penetrate the social fabric varies greatly depending on the characteristics of a particular political system and of the society that engendered it.

Although the terms “political regime” and “political system” might appear interchangeable at first glance, they have evolved from distinct roots and are not equally suited for all types of political science research. The term “system” came to the political science from the systems theory developed by Talcott Parsons and formed the basis for the structural-functionalist approach to politics. “Political system,” as it was originally defined by David Easton (1953), refers not just to the political institutions mentioned above, but also to the social institutions that have direct and significant influence on politics: trade unions, civic associations and social movements, the Church, the army, the educational system, etc. As this approach came under critique in the 1970s, the term “political regime” has begun to replace the term “political system” whenever researchers referred to “the relationship of people to their government”. and the patterns of access to political power. Nevertheless, many scholars of totalitarianism continued to refer to their case studies as “systems,” since this term was better suited for settings where no clear boundaries could be drawn between state and society on the one hand and politics, economics, and other spheres of social life on the other.

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15 Parsons (1951).
16 Chilcote (1994a), Gudkov (2001); quote from Linz (2000: 49). O’Donnell (2004: 15) includes the following elements into his definition of a political regime: “the patterns, formal and informal, that determine the channels of access to principal government positions; the characteristics of actors who are allowed or denied such access; and the resources and strategies that they are allowed to use for gaining it.”
My main reason for retaining the distinction between political regimes and political systems is the need to distinguish between the processes of political and social democratization. The literature of democratic transition focuses on the process of political democratization or the construction of a democratic political regime, which includes the creation of competitive and pluralist electoral and party systems and the separation of powers.\textsuperscript{18} Its critics draw attention to the importance of social democratization, arguing that while the political and social systems remain permeated with authoritarian power relations, the political democratization cannot proceed very far. This concept is well suited for drawing attention to the importance of social democratization: Thus, my distinction between the political regime and the political system is based on the sense that political regime is something more transient and easier to change, because it refers to a more limited set of formal and informal institutions than those included under the heading of a “political system”. The latter, apart from being a broader set of institutions, also includes the underlying principles, processes, and characteristics (in particular, the dominant models of power relations) that are fundamental for the unique make-up of a given society and change less easily and rapidly over time. This distinction is particularly relevant for the comparative analysis of Russia and Mexico in 1985-2008, because during this period Mexico and Russia have made the transitions to very different kinds of political regimes, but can still be compared with respect to several fundamental characteristics of their political systems.

1.2.1 Characteristics of Modern Non-Democratic Political Systems

As their name indicates, these political systems are defined and described *a contrario*, on the basis of the democratic characteristics that they lack. This approach departs from the premise that it is possible to define political democracy as a particular set of “procedures and principles.” Researchers who work within this framework classify all the political systems that lack the essential elements of this set as *non-democratic* (Linz, 2000) or *autocratic* (Magaloni, 2006), but the process of classification does not have to stop there.

As Knight (1994) notes, at the simplest level a non-democratic political system is defined by “the absence of popular representation”: the decisions are made “from the top,” through hierarchical state and private structures. *Modern* non-democratic systems – authoritarian and totalitarian – are not based on traditional legitimacy: their rulers do not claim to act in the name of collective goals. While democratic systems are based on the principle of citizenship and political agency, modern non-democratic systems are based on political subordination of groups and individuals within society to the state. This subordination can take a variety of forms – from prohibitions on selected types of collective action and to controlled mass mobilization and outright repression of all collective action that does not originate from the state – and can vary in intensity, depending on the specifics of a particular system.³⁰

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²⁰ Linz (2000).
Linz (2000) distinguishes between two aspects of non-democratic political systems: limitations of political pluralism – the number and types of players allowed into the political arena – and limitations on mobilization – the extent to which the general public can participate in politics and the channels through which it can do so. He provides a classification of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes based on these two parameters. In mobilizational authoritarian and totalitarian systems, social authoritarianism becomes especially deeply rooted and nearly ubiquitous and is often hard to differentiate from political authoritarianism, because in such systems the central state makes almost any kind of social activity political by demanding that its subjects actively participate in “collective social tasks” through the single party and its affiliated institutions.21

1.2.2 Types of Power Relations

When classifying modern political regimes, researchers often define democracy and authoritarianism as the diametrically opposite ways of legitimizing, organizing, and exercising power, linking the state to society, and defining the citizens’ role in the political process.22 Apart from describing “the relationship of people to their government,”23 these terms can also be used to refer to distinct kinds of power relations that link actors within and across all spheres of social life. The types of power relations that prevail in a particular society can be classified with reference to two extremes: democratic (pluralist) and authoritarian. Pluralist power relations are based on state respect for associational autonomy, which makes the balance of power shift in favor of

the traditionally disadvantaged and disenfranchised social actors. In societies that have reached advanced stages of social democratization, state actors “accept the rights of citizens to pursue their goals autonomously” and see “autonomous, representative societal organizations as legitimate interlocutors”.24 Authoritarian power relations are highly unequal and are usually reproduced through the operation of well-established and durable domination-subordination mechanisms.25 Clientelist power relations lie in the middle of this spectrum: even though they are inherently unequal, they are nevertheless “a form of bargaining” and therefore presuppose “some degree of autonomy between the parties.”26

Non-democratic regimes leave a lasting political and social legacy, because the authoritarian and clientelistic power relations that they generate shape not just the political sphere, but the functioning of all types of social institutions.27 This “authoritarian political culture” manifests itself through frequent use of the state repressive apparatus, the proliferation of corporatist and clientelist arrangements, and the ubiquity of corruption, disinformation, and manipulation practices.28 In totalitarian and highly authoritarian settings, those in power are not interested in “the people” either as voters or as clients. This attitude has a lasting impact on “the subjects,” who see neither the possibility nor the need for autonomous collective action both because it is very likely to be repressed by the state and because there is little to be gained from it by way of

resources and benefits. This has been the case in Russia during the Soviet period and since 2000. By contrast, the PRI regime in Mexico was based on power relations that lie between the authoritarian and the clientelist parts of the spectrum. Fox (1994) described them as “authoritarian clientelism” that combined “clientelistic incentives with the threat of state-sanctioned coercion.”

While this combination also inhibited autonomous collective action, it did so less effectively than the Soviet domination-subordination scheme.

The ability of society as a whole to shift towards more equitable power relations with the state depends on the social and especially grassroots capacity for self-organization and on the nature of the demands that grassroots associations make on the state. Thus, the emergence of new, more autonomous grassroots associations in Mexico, after the PRI regime suffered its first major legitimacy crisis in 1968, was accompanied by the politicization of popular demands towards the state. Before 1968, the regime was largely successful in confining autonomous collective action to the sphere of socio-economic demands – reivindicaciones – that held the state up to its promise to redistribute resources in favor of the have-nots. The state was pressured to deliver what the people considered “rightfully theirs” – land, basic urban services, education, health care, etc. – according to their understanding of the fundamental social contract that ensured the legitimacy of the regime. After 1968, new associations formed and began to pressure the state to recognize their rights to play a more active role in the processes through which these basic goods were produced and allocated. This shift in demands had

set in motion the struggle for political and electoral rights that the regime was no longer able to suppress.

The process of transition from authoritarian to pluralistic power relations that constitutes one of the most important aspects of social democratization is not linear in time and not uniform across national territory, levels of government, and social spheres or “bargaining arenas.” It can easily result “in the coexistence different de facto political systems” under the same formal national political regime.31 In other words, the uprooting of authoritarian practices cannot be expected to proceed with equal speed or success across different regions of the same country or different spheres of social life. While Russia and Mexico currently have very different national political regimes, they still face many similar challenges from “subnational” and local “authoritarian enclaves” that impede the process of social democratization.32

1.2.3 Aspects of Social Democratization and Their Relationship to Social Activism

The term “democratization” is often associated primarily with the process of political reforms that leads to the installation of the standard set of formal institutions, deemed to be the essential components of a democratic regime. However, many scholars of democracy have emphasized that a viable democratic regime cannot be reduced to “a unique set of institutions.”33 The actors that populate these institutions must be willing to follow democratic procedures and to act on the basis of democratic principles. The

essential democratic procedure is the free formulation of political preferences through the mechanism of competitive elections and also through other political and non-political associations that can result from the citizens’ use of basic civil freedoms of association, information, and communication.\textsuperscript{34} The principles of democratic decision-making – competition, pluralism, inclusiveness, uncertainty of electoral outcomes, rule of law – have to operate not only in the political sphere, but also in other spheres of social life.

Thus, it seems more accurate to reserve the general term “democratization” for the aggregate of processes through which democratic procedures and principles become better rooted and more widespread not just in the electoral field, but also in the functioning of all institutions that form part of the political system. O’Donnell (2004) argues that, for the political democracy (democratic regime) to be functional, respect for diversity and pluralism, rule of law, and civil rights must extend beyond the strictly political and electoral institutions to other important “social locations,” such as the state bureaucracies, the media, the business corporations, universities and research centers, NGOs, etc. The process by which this is achieved constitutes social democratization – the necessary undercurrent of political democratization, which is the building of formal democratic institutions or, as O’Donnell and Schmitter put it, “the establishment of regular, formalized political competition.”\textsuperscript{35} These authors identify two key directions of social democratization: the transformation of subjects into citizens or the change of the dominant model of state-society relations and the achievement of more equitable participation in the making of collective choices across socio-economic strata of

\textsuperscript{34} Linz (2000: 58); Schmitter and Karl (1991: 77).
\textsuperscript{35} O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986: 3).
society.\footnote{Ibid., pp.7-9.} Thus, social democratization is necessary for overcoming both political authoritarianism – absence or malfunctioning of institutions that ensure citizen participation in government and ruler accountability – and its social counterparts – prevalence of vertical and unequal power relationships, lack of respect for civil and political rights, and the public sphere that is too narrow, exclusive, discriminative, and intolerant.

Social democratization (or the shift away from authoritarian power relations) has multiple aspects that tend to be mutually interrelated and reinforcing. First and foremost among them is the strengthening of the \textit{public dimension of the state} and the overall transformation of the political sphere into “\textit{res publica}, something that is not subject to private appropriation.”\footnote{Cardoso (2001: 12).} This task looms large in societies where most state institutions have been historically “taken over and used by individuals and groups to promote their private ends.”\footnote{Ibid., p.13.} The state has a predominantly private character in societies where economic and political power do not have distinct foundations. In other words, if the institution of private property that forms the basis of modern economic power is not seen by the state as a source of power that is largely autonomous from it, and the political power is not legitimized through democratic elections, property ownership becomes strongly contingent on access to political power.\footnote{See O’Donnell (1999 and 2004), Vorozheikina (2002).} Limiting the extent of this unity between power and property is the key goal of the democratic reform of the political sphere as a whole and of the state in particular.
One of the main obstacles to such reforms is the weakness of the rule of law – the ability of the powerful actors not only to place themselves beyond its reach, but also to use the law arbitrarily and selectively to reward supporters and punish opponents.\(^{40}\)

Strengthening and extending the rule of law involves making the judicial institutions resistant to pressures from powerful actors. In particular, this means fighting for the independence of the courts, so that the citizens and their associations can both exercise their right to bring lawsuits against the state and other powerful violators, but also use such lawsuits as a means of forcing the state to observe its own laws.\(^{41}\) Such pressure from citizens is also essential to make it possible for judges and lawyers to act professionally and autonomously – they can better stand up to arbitrary power if they feel that there is a social need for them to do so. Since the judicial system and the courts are one of the main institutional levers that can be used to overcome the highly unequal, authoritarian power relations within society and between state and society, strengthening their autonomy is essential to social democratization.

Violation of human rights is the domain where weak rule of the law is manifested most clearly. The state is almost always complicit in these, because, regardless of whether the violator is a public or a private entity, such actions become possible and remain unpunished due to the failure of the state to guarantee the citizens’ basic rights.\(^{42}\) The police and the army usually top the list of the offending state institutions – in fact, the ability of citizens to hold them accountable is one of the key indicators of social

\(^{40}\) O’Donnell (1999).

\(^{41}\) Levitsky and Way (2002); Schedler, Diamond, and Plattner (1999).

\(^{42}\) O’Donnell (2007).
democratization precisely because their impunity is usually very hard to overcome.\(^{43}\) One aspect of this problem that is particularly relevant to my study is the deliberate targeting of social activists by the repressive state agencies and the criminalization of social protest.\(^{44}\) Legal and physical harassment, unlawful detention and imprisonment, fabrication of criminal charges, torture, and assassinations are all used by state institutions and their allies to intimidate and silence those whose actions they consider threatening. Denouncing such violations in the courts and in the media and fighting for restitution often becomes a major part of any activist campaign and is seen as fundamentally necessary by the activists, even though it absorbs significant amounts of time and effort and often seems fruitless. Fighting such abuses is one of the main contributions that social activists can make to social democratization.

Ensuring the plurality and the liberty of the press is another crucial aspect of making the state and the politics public. Censorship, persecution of journalists, elimination of oppositional media outlets, and other uses of political and economic power to prevent the media from adequately representing the spectrum of opinions and concerns that exists in society interfere with the citizens’ fundamental rights of information and expression and contribute to the perpetuation of authoritarian power relations, because exclusive access to information constitutes a very important form of power.\(^{45}\) Just as in the case of human rights violations, these problems are exacerbated by the unity of power

\(^{43}\) The cases when the police and the army form links with the criminal elements and are used by state officials and their allies for personal purposes are perhaps the most extreme manifestation of the way in which the public power of the state can acquire completely private forms. Vorozheikina (2007).

\(^{44}\) For a very detailed analysis of the Mexican variant of this problem see Tlachinollan (2009).

and property: if powerful economic actors do not feel themselves to be sufficiently autonomous from the state, they are unlikely to finance publications that the state considers threatening or subversive. Organized citizens and social activists can help the journalists to preserve professional ethic and autonomy by making public the information that the journalists might not be allowed to disclose and by defending them against state and business attacks.

In societies with high levels of socio-economic inequality, citizenship status and the associated rights are enjoyed only by the privileged minorities, in spite of constitutional provisions that guarantee universal citizenship. This de facto denial of full citizenship rights (social, civil, and political) to significant portions of the population stems from the prevalence of social authoritarianism in both state-society and within-society relations. O’Donnell argues that whether the state treats individuals as free agents or as subjects is a crucial test of democratic quality, because free agency is the fundamental principle on which democratic citizenship is based. An agent is a being that feels himself and is seen by others as capable of making choices “that are reasonable relative to his situation and goals” and of taking the responsibility for these choices. Free agency is not compatible with the status of a subject that individuals have in non-

47 O’Donnel (2004: 47) argues that the poor strata of the population also suffer from disenfranchisement, because they “also denied basic civil rights. They [are subject to] police violence and various forms of private violence; denied fair access to state agencies and courts; their dwellings are raided arbitrarily; they are forced to live a life not only of poverty but also of recurrent humiliation and fear of violence. These people, whom I will call the popular sector, are not only materially poor; they are also legally poor.”
democratic political systems, where they depend on “the goodwill of the state,” see themselves and are seen by state officials primarily as “supplicants.”

While genuine democratization must force the state to extend the status of citizens and agents to all adult members of the population, political democratization carried out without its social counterparts allows the state officials to treat as citizens only the members of privileged minorities – groups with good access to enabling socio-economic institutions – education, formal employment, housing, health and social welfare services. The majority of individuals that do not have adequate access to these institutions are still treated by the state bureaucracies as subjects. The state officials often refuse to see such individuals as agents and treat them as inferior, “second-class citizens,” whose demands and interests are not socially legitimate or significant. This attitude of superiority towards the poor and the disenfranchised is often adopted by the members of privileged social groups as well, so that the social authoritarianism of the state becomes replicated and reinforced in other social contexts. Thus, in the eyes of the state and of the privileged minorities, the majority of the population appears as an undifferentiated mass that is incapable of formulating its own interests and pursuing them through legitimate, systemic forms of collective action. One of the key purposes of social democratization is to enable

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50 O’Donnell (1993)
51 Clément (2006a) quotes a classic example of such attitude on the part of a Russian government official: “Those at the bottom do not know what is good for them. Therefore, I must determine it for them, just the same way a professor defines what his student needs to know in order to become a specialist.”
“the subjects” to gain the right to be treated as citizens and agents by both state and society.\(^52\)

Environmental protection is a task that requires collective action and provision of public goods, and it would be impossible to understand this process without asking questions about the relationship between the state and the society and the societal capacity for self-organization. I use the key aspects of social democratization as yardsticks to measure and evaluate the contribution of Mexican and Russian environmental activists to democratization. I find that this contribution strongly depends on the relative importance that they assign to different centers of power and to their attitudes towards social exclusion and inequality. I also identify the pathways through which professional environmental activists come to feel the need to establish their ideological, organizational, resource, and strategic autonomy from the omnipresent authoritarian state and choose to ally themselves with the grassroots popular groups acting in the name of social justice and citizen rights. In Mexico and Russia, this process has been closely linked with the emergence and evolution of social environmentalism – a current within the environmental movement that links the problems of environmental degradation and political and socio-economic exclusion.\(^53\) Rather than seeing the state and the private sector as their main interlocutors, social environmentalists tend to look towards society and to facilitate the formation of new collective identities and

\(^52\) Fox (1994: 153) argues that the extension of associational autonomy “to the poorest members of society” is crucial to this process, because the poor are “usually the most vulnerable [both] to the state-sanctioned coercion [and] to clientelistic incentives.”

organizational forms at the grassroots level – among those whose access to citizenship rights and to the formal political and economic institutions is limited.

1.3 Russia and Mexico: the Centrality of the State as the Basis for Historical Comparison

Mexico and Russia are particularly well suited to the study of societal effects of authoritarianism, because for most of their modern history, the state had been not only the main political and economic actor in these countries, but also the main agent in the structuring of social relations. In the 20th century, these societies have produced two of the most durable and stable single-party regimes, which explicitly aimed at restructuring society from above. Both the Soviet and the PRI states had emerged from social revolutions and, at least during their formative period, were characterized by an unprecedented degree of political inclusion of the previously disenfranchised masses through the corporatist and state-party channels. However, both regimes carried out the incorporation of the “lower classes” and dealt with the political opponents and “old” economic elites in a manner that has greatly reduced the societal capacity for autonomous organizing and collective action. Therefore, the task of rebuilding this capacity has

54 The Latin American variant of this phenomenon has been described by Cavarozzi (1992) as the “state-centered development matrix.” This framework has been adapted by Vorozheikina (2001 and 2002) for the comparison of Russia and Latin America; she considers Russia to be “an extreme case of the state centered matrix.”

55 See Collier and Collier (1991), Olvera, ed. (2003), and Knight (1992) on Mexico, Cheshkov (1994) and Vorozheikina (2001) on Soviet Russia. The other two obvious cases are China and Cuba; however, these two countries are not good candidates for the comparison with respect to the social effects of authoritarianism, mainly because both of these regimes are still in power. In addition, the social revolutions in these two countries had occurred in historical contexts (both domestic and international) that were very different from those of the Mexican and the Russian revolutions. Both the Chinese and the Cuban revolutionaries were greatly influenced by the Russian example and received aid from the Soviet Union – in many ways China, Cuba, and Russia are not independent cases to the same extent that Russia and Mexico are.
loomed large in both societies ever since the long-lived authoritarian regimes began to lose their legitimacy and capacity for political, economic, and social control.

In order to determine the extent to which these two political systems are comparable, they must first be placed into a broader historical context of modernization – a process that profoundly affects the balance of forces and the nature of the relationship between state and society. My discussion of Russia’s and Mexico’s places in this worldwide process is based on the theoretical framework originally proposed by a Soviet scholar, Kiva Maidanik in 1960s-1970s\textsuperscript{56} and subsequently used by Russian researchers for historical analyses of Russian state and society\textsuperscript{57} and for comparisons between Russia and Latin America.\textsuperscript{58} This framework classifies the countries of the world into groups or tiers according to the timing and the character of their modernization process. It was formulated as a critical response to the modernization theory, according to which the transition from a traditional to a modern society in different countries takes place according to the same generic scenario that involves the emergences of an autonomous public sphere, modern bureaucratic nation-state, capitalist market economy, and representative democracy with universal citizenship and equality before the law.\textsuperscript{59} While it recognizes that modernization involves a set of macrosocial processes common to all societies – industrialization, urbanization, development of mass media, secularization of

\textsuperscript{56} This framework is outlined in the Maidanik’s chapters of two edited volumes – Gefter (1969) and Maidanik (1974). These works were published in Russian and, to the best of my knowledge, have not been translated into English.
\textsuperscript{57} See, for example, Pantin, Plimak, and Khoros (1986); Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008).
\textsuperscript{58} See Vorozheikina (2001 and 2002).
education, and increases in economic and political participation – it challenges the assumption that these processes developed under the same conditions in countries within and outside of the Western world. In particular, it emphasizes the differences in the balance of forces between state and society in countries of different modernization tiers and systematically explores the consequences of these differences for the resulting political, economic, and social systems.60

In France, Britain, the Netherlands, and their settler colonies (United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia) – the countries that constitute the first tier of modernization – the modern state grew organically from society through a bottom-up process of interest conflict and aggregation. Locke (1689) has described the generalized (and idealized) version of this process by using the “social contract” metaphor. It refers to the constitution of a political community, where both citizens and rulers are bound by law, the people is the ultimate source of sovereignty and can hold the rulers accountable for the performance of duties entrusted to them by the general public. The citizens’ power to control the state comes from civic and political associations autonomously formed from below, without state intervention.61

In an ideal-case scenario, modernization results from the natural evolution of society and the incorporation of the lower classes into the political sphere takes place in response to the growing pressure from below. While researchers disagree on how

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60 Maidanik’s classification also grew from his reflections about dependency theory, especially as it applied to Latin America, and was formulated in discussion and in polemic with such authors as Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Celso Furtado, and Semir Amin.

61 This is an ideal-type description: comparative historical investigations of Tilly (1978 and 2004) and Tarrow (1998) give detailed accounts of the violence and social conflict through which citizens of European countries wrestled civil and political freedoms from their states.
autonomous the Western societies were vis-à-vis their states and whether modernization can be described as an evolutionary process even for the first-tier countries, a comparison between these countries and the rest of the world reveals a qualitative difference in the balance of forces between state and society. In the second- and third-tier countries, economic and social modernization have been to a much greater extent forced upon society by its rulers and accelerated through state action, while the expansion of the political sphere was controlled and facilitated from above. In other words, the second- and third-tier variants of modernization are even farther away from the idealized first-tier variant – the gradual process of modernizing change that simultaneously affects all spheres of social activity and grows out of society’s internal needs.

During the course of the 19th century, the rulers of the second-tier countries – Germany, Austro-Hungary, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Russia, and Japan – all confronted the dilemma of either “catching up with the West” – the first tier – or having their countries lose the great-power status.62 In these countries, the central state became the main agent and engine of modernization, seen first and foremost as industrialization and development of capitalist markets and economic relations. The economic modernization was not pursued as an end in itself, but as a means of maintaining an adequate military potential. In the process, the state substituted its enterprises and bureaucracies for the modern economic actors and relations that were just beginning to emerge within society.63 The state effort to make up for the weakness of economic agents and markets that did not have time to develop “organically” had two important

62 Russian emperors found themselves in this situation after the defeat in the Crimean War (1854-64).
63 See also Gerschenkron (1962).
unforeseen consequences. First, it resulted in the unity of power and property: virtually all significant economic actors became beholden to the central state, while state officials figured prominently among the richest men of the country. In other words, access to political power (or to power-holders) was the safest guarantee of the right to hold private property and conduct economic activity on a large scale. Second, state interference into the process of market formation had weakened society in its relations with the state: the ability to conduct independent economic activity, based on secure private property rights, that was a crucial source of power and autonomy of the European third estate was greatly restricted in the second-tier countries.

While in the first-tier countries different spheres of social life underwent modernization concurrently so that its different “streams” – political, economic, and social – were connected and mutually reinforcing, the rulers of the second-tier countries pushed for economic modernization in contexts where the political and social conditions were not yet appropriate for it. The forced and lopsided character of the second-tier modernization created a mismatch between the modern and the traditional elements within and among different spheres of life and led to an accumulation of structural conflicts that came to the surface in the wake of the First World War.  

Russia, with its long traditions of peasant serfdom and military-bureaucratic autocracy, is an extreme example of the coexistence of different epochs and modes of life within the same society that is to some extent typical of all second-tier countries. The structural conflicts that have accumulated within Russian social system between 1850 and 1914 were so

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profound that the First World War and the revolutionary mobilizations of 1905 and 1917 destroyed it completely.

While Russia is clearly a second-tier country, Mexico sits somewhere between the second and the third tier. The beginning of its modernization process (1880s, under Porfirio Díaz) is within the standard third-tier range, extends from the late 19\textsuperscript{th} to the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, with considerable variation among the countries. However, the second stage of industrialization in Mexico (1940s-1960s) came rather early by the third-tier standards and is chronologically very close to the Russian one (1930s-1950s). More importantly, Mexico’s modernization (especially its second, post-revolutionary phase) was directed by the national state that was significantly more autonomous from domestic and foreign capital than is typical for the third-tier countries, where the foreign capital remained the main modernizing agent until the middle of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{66} In this respect, Mexico’s more closely resembles that of a second-tier country, where the playing field between domestic and foreign actors is more level, domestic capital and the state are “equal partners,” and the state initiates modernization because of its own geopolitical considerations and not through the pressure of foreign capital. Since I use the modernization tiers framework primarily to demonstrate the long-term impacts of the dominant role of the central state in the modernization process on state-society relations, I consider Mexico and Russia to be comparable, because the differences between them in

\textsuperscript{66} Although the foreign capital did play a key role during the Porfiriato, that regime also had strong domestic bases and its own vision of development: Mexico was neither a banana republic, nor an enclave economy described by the theorists of dependent development as the typical third-tier phenomena.
this respect are much smaller than the distance that separates either of them from the first-tier countries.  

1.4 Varieties of Environmentalism in Russia and Mexico

Human concerns about living in harmony with the natural world are probably as old as the human race: in this sense, the practice of environmentalism goes very far back in human history. However, I am primarily interested in modern environmentalism that emerges as a reaction to the Industrial Revolution and as a variety of modern social activism. Therefore, in this work I do not discuss either the traditional agro-ecological practices of peasants and indigenous people in Russia and Mexico, or the pre-industrial conservation measures undertaken by state and aristocracy to limit the use of forests, game, waters and other natural resources deemed important by the powerful. I begin my analysis of Russia and Mexico just before the turn of the 20th century, at the time when scientists and public intellectuals first became alarmed at the heretofore-unprecedented levels of human encroachment on nature caused by industrial modernization. In Russia, the first phase of industrialization took place between the 1840s and the 1890s, under the leadership of an autocratic imperial state; in Mexico, it began in the 1880s, during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. By the 1890s, the impacts of industrialization on the natural world – especially the degradation of forests and other natural landscapes – became quite noticeable in both countries.

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67 The comparison between Mexico and a second-tier country is not as unusual as it might first seem. Linz (2000: 173) compared Mexico with Turkey and classified them both as cases of “authoritarian regimes born on the eve of the First World War [that claimed] to carry out basic procedures of modernization [in order] to create preconditions for constitutional democracy like that of the more successful Western nations.”
Much like the development of socialism – another ideological reaction to the process of economic modernization – the worldwide evolution of modern environmentalism has greatly depended on the international diffusion and exchange of ideas. The basic pattern of industrial modernization that emerged in the first-tier countries and brought modern environmentalism into being was intentionally adopted and emulated by rulers of other realms. Thus, it is no coincidence that the main streams of modern environmentalism that arose in the societies of Western Europe, United States, Canada, and Australia can also be found in Russia and Mexico, as well as many other second- and third-tier countries. Nonetheless, just as the generic process of modernization took very distinct shapes in different societies, the environmentalist reaction to it is an ensemble of ideas and collective action forms that is unique to the society that produces it. The substantive filling and the relative importance of each stream of environmentalism as well as the timing of its emergence and its social origins are closely related to the way in which different aspects of modernization – economic, political, and social – affected the relationship and the balance of power between state, market, and society. In one way or the other, all environmentalists believe that nature protection can only be achieved through social change; yet champions of different currents have very different views of the nature and extent of this social change.

Social activists develop their strategies based on their perception of how susceptible different institutions and groups of actors might be to their challenges and
Rather than simply responding to “objective” political opportunities, they filter that information through their own perceptions of what is worth doing in the light of their goals, and what is feasible under current circumstances. As Gamson and Meyer (1996: 284) point out, this question of “relative opportunities” for different courses of action is always a highly contested one for any activist group or social movement. Environmental activists are no exception to this general rule and thus tend to focus their efforts on the actors whom they perceive to hold significant amounts of power in society and thus are particularly important to challenge or neutralize (the crucial adversaries) and/or particularly likely to advance the activists’ cause if they can be persuaded to adopt their perspective (the crucial allies and supporters).

While no environmental activist can afford to ignore the state, whose various structures and institutions are sources of both adversaries and allies, the crucial question to ask about environmental activists in societies with strong authoritarian traditions is whether they see the people as a source of power at all. I argue that professional environmental activists cannot become agents of social democratization until they come to see the ordinary citizens and their associations as an important part of the power field in which they operate and until they realize that increasing the power of the people relative to the power of the state and of the market is indispensable to the advancement of their cause. This propensity for grassroots-conscious and grassroots-oriented environmental activism does depend in part on the stream of environmentalism within which a particular individual or organization originates.

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1.4.1 Three Main Varieties of Environmental Activism in Comparative Perspective

In the words of Douglas Weiner, “nature protection … can only be understood as a cultural institution, functioning in very specific contexts of space, time, and political economy, reflecting ever-changing and constantly contested visions and myths.”\(^69\) In the US and Western Europe, the three main streams of modern environmental activism – preservationism/conservationism, reform environmentalism, and political ecologism\(^70\) – emerged in the same basic sequence, and the emergence of each stream occurred during time windows that are very comparable across different countries. In the cases of Russia and Mexico, chronological classification does not yield such a straightforward pattern, because the chronological parallels found among “Western societies” are not coincidental, but correspond to the underlying shifts in power distribution among different social actors that have no clear analogues elsewhere. Thus, my explanation of why and when different streams of environmentalism arose in Russia and Mexico hinges primarily on the stages in the evolution of state-society relations and on the activists’ changing positions vis-à-vis different sources of power. In particular, activists of the three main currents have different preferences for institutionalized political and economic power, held by the state and business actors, and non-institutionalized “power of the people,” manifested in social movements and grassroots associations.

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\(^{69}\) Weiner (1999: 448).

\(^{70}\) The basic description and dating of these streams can be found in Rootes (2004); see Brulle (2000) and Mertig et al. (2002) on the US; Kitschelt (1986), Rucht (1989), and Rootes, ed. (2003) on Europe; Pakulski and Crook (1998) and Hutton and Connors (1999) on Australia.
What follows is my attempt to define the three main streams of environmentalism as they came together in Russia and in Mexico. These descriptions are based on my interpretation of the existing historical analysis of environmental activism in these two countries and of the data that I gathered during my own fieldwork in 2004-2007. As I developed my descriptions of the general types of environmentalism for Russia and Mexico, I found myself drawing frequent parallels to three other countries that I have studied in some detail: Brazil, Indonesia, and the United States. While I cannot yet draw systematic comparative conclusions about the evolution of environmental activism in all five countries, the rest of this section includes some initial hypotheses about the sources of similarities and contrasts among them for future research. Apart from drawing the distinction between environmental activism in well-established democracies and in non-democratic settings to which I have already referred, I also advance a hypothesis that environmentalism in very large countries develops in ways that are systematically different from those of the small countries. This distinction becomes particularly relevant for the relative importance of conservationism and of the biocentric perspective within the environmental activist community.

I use the discussion of the three main varieties of environmental activism in Russia and in Mexico – conservationism, reform environmentalism, and social

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71 The history of Russian / Soviet environmental activism from the 1890s to the 1990s has been extensively studied by Oleg Yanitsky (1991, 1993, 1996, 2002) and Douglas Weiner (1988 and 1999). I was not able to find studies about Mexican environmentalists that would quite match the level of detail and the quality of analysis offered by these two authors. The Mexican part of my account relies mostly on Lane Simonian’s (1995) history of conservation in Mexico and on Joel Simon’s (1997) journalistic investigation of various key long-term environmental issues in different Mexican regions.

72 Other obvious countries to consider for such a comparison would be Canada, China, Australia, India, and Argentina. These countries and the five that I mention in the main text are among the 15 largest of the world.
environmentalism – as a tool for making a systematic evaluation of the contribution that environmental activism makes to the democratization process. These varieties of environmentalism are ideal types that I use both as labels for distinct approaches to environmental activism – each with its own ideology, preferred organizational forms, strategies, types of alliances, etc. – and as ways of classifying individual activists and organizations into distinct streams or currents at a given point in time. The rest of this section, insofar as it refers to Russia and Mexico, is focused on professional environmental activists. I draw the distinction between professional and grassroots environmentalism and discuss the different contributions that they make to the three main varieties of environmental activism in Section 1.4.2.

My discussion is based on a few assumptions that I made on the basis of what I currently know about the evolution of environmental activism in Western and Eastern Europe, Russia, the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Indonesia, and Japan. First, in democratic societies, the earliest manifestations of modern environmental activism come in two main flavors: grassroots protests against public health impacts of industrial pollution (known as the brown environmental issues) and campaigns for the

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74 In Western Europe and the US, the first records of such protests go back to the 18th and the 19th centuries, when “campaigns were waged for clean water, safe disposal of sewage and other waste, clean air and better public health” (Brulle, 2000: 181). This current brought together a wide variety of social actors and was closely linked to the struggle of the urban poor for better living conditions. Rootes (2004: 612) argues that until the 1950s this current existed as “a discrete series of campaigns mounted by distinct and separate interest groups rather than a single coherent social movement.” In Japan, where the democratic regime was installed as the result of foreign military occupation, this current inaugurated the era of modern
preservation of landscapes and ‘pristine nature’ (the green issues) led by natural scientists and other public intellectuals.\textsuperscript{75} For societies dominated by non-democratic regimes (Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, and Russia), there is little record of the early grassroots anti-pollution protests, and the earliest manifestations of environmental activism have a much more elitist and biocentric flavor. This relative weakness of grassroots environmentalism is most likely due to the more repressive nature of the state. In the absence of a broad grassroots base, natural scientists, geographers, engineers, foresters, and other nature-related professionals constituted the core of early environmental activists.\textsuperscript{76} Finally, the concerns about the preservation of wilderness and of rare species seem to be relatively more important for the early environmentalists of large countries, where there significant territories remained untouched during the first onslaughts of industrial development and were available for the creation of natural parks and other kinds of reserves.\textsuperscript{77}

In Russia and Mexico, conservationism was the first and the most biocentric environmentalist reaction to the industrial modernization.\textsuperscript{78} Early conservationists saw nature as national patrimony, which needed to be protected from destruction in the name of economic development. They charged the national state with the tasks of protecting environmental activism as citizen movements arose in the early 1970s in response to the intensive post-war industrialization effort (see McKeans, 1981).

\textsuperscript{75} In Britain, France, Germany, and the US, this current had a relatively broad middle-class base, even though many of its leaders were members of the intellectual elites. See the chapters by Rootes, Fillieule, Rucht and Roose in Rootes, ed. (2003), Andrews (1999), Brulle (2000), Mertig et al. (2002).


\textsuperscript{77} This greater emphasis on the green issues is very pronounced in the US, Brazil, Mexico, Russia, and Indonesia. It is also characteristically absent in Japan (a small country), while in the Western and Eastern European countries (Britain, Germany, France, Austro-Hungary) it takes the form of preserving natural-cultural landscapes rather than “pristine, untouched nature.” See Rootes, ed. (2003), Tickle and Welsh, eds. (1998).

\textsuperscript{78} This also applies to Brazil and Indonesia. See Hochstetler and Keck (2007); Mayer (1996).
nature and rationalizing the use of natural resources, because they saw it as the main guarantor of long-term public interests. Relative to other types of environmental activists, these early conservationists had the strongest preference for state power, which can be partly explained by the leading role that the central state played in the industrial modernization process in both of these countries.\textsuperscript{79} The central state was seen as the target for environmental influence, because its dominant position in the economy turned it into the main agent of environmental destruction and because its significant capacity to control the business sector (both state and private) and the rest of the society could in principle be highly beneficial for the goal of environmental protection. Thus, early conservationists felt that there were tremendous advantages to be gained and huge disasters to be averted, if only they could make the state leaders listen and heed to their arguments. Of all environmental activists, early conservationists had the greatest faith in changing the political and economic system \textit{from within} and in the appropriateness of \textit{hierarchical} institutions for the task of environmental protection.\textsuperscript{80} Their professional expertise in natural sciences – biology, geography, and ecology – made them feel that they were best-suited to advise those in power on environmental matters, and they tended to view popular mobilization with suspicion, unless it was organized and guided by them.

\textsuperscript{79} It would be interesting to investigate, whether such strong selective affinity for the central state can also be found in other second-tier countries – Germany, Austro-Hungary, Turkey, and Japan. Recio (1992), Eder and Kousis, eds. (2001), and Karamichas (2003) give evidence for this phenomenon in Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Greece. According to Economy (2004) and Ho (2007), this pattern also appears in China – the society that has spent centuries under imperial rule.

\textsuperscript{80} US conservationists and preservationists were no exception to this rule: see Andrews (1999) on the relationship of John Muir and Guifford Pinchot with Theodore Roosevelt.
Because of their emphasis on the creation of protected territories, early conservationists accepted grassroots action and broad social mobilization only in forms that were consistent with their vision of the appropriate balance between humans and nature. Their attitude towards “the people” was inherently ambivalent: they saw “the general population” as a source of both positive and negative potential for nature protection. “The people” could positively contribute to it, if they were properly educated and enlightened by the scientists. To this day, Russian and Mexican conservationists see environmental education as the key mechanism of social change, and feel a strong need to change mass behavior and attitudes towards nature in order to fulfill their environmental mission. At the same time, the early conservationists felt that, if they were left to their own devices, “the common people” were likely to contribute to the degradation of natural environment through overexploitation of natural resources and violations of the existing conservation laws. This conviction grew stronger as the conservationist intellectuals confronted the naked power of the masses during the years of revolutionary violence.

In the First World, *reform environmentalism* is a current that emerged in the wake of the 1960s social movements.\(^8\) It was based on scientific and legal approaches to environmental problems and its main goal was to push the state and other political actors to adopt laws and policies that, on the one hand, expanded and strengthened the system of protected natural territories and, on the other hand, created a framework for the use of natural resources and the prevention of environmental degradation of lands and waters

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outside the protected zones. This current is far more politicized than the preservationists and the conservationists and is often referred to as “mainstream environmentalism,” because it is the approach adopted by the majority of environmental activists and NGOs in countries such as the US, Canada, Australia, and the European Union. It strives to influence state environmental policy and environmental politics at high levels (primarily national and international) and to push business towards greater environmental responsibility by presenting it as a competitive strategy. Ensuring state and business compliance with the existing environmental laws and of extending and strengthening environmental legislation whenever possible figure prominently among its main tasks. As its name suggests, this approach does not call for a complete overhaul of the political economy. Its proponents are deeply disturbed by the effects of the industrial development model on the natural and human environment, but consider it essential to work within the existing political and economic institutions in order to minimize the damage. In other words, they work to reform the state and market institutions so that environmental considerations can be adequately included into the political and economic decision-making processes.

Unlike conservationism that, as the Soviet experience shows, can exist even under totalitarian conditions, reform environmentalism can emerge only when the state and society are significantly differentiated. In Russia, Mexico, and Brazil, the breakdown of the revolutionary regimes provided a major impetus for the emergence of this current, 

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82 Rootes (2004).
83 Cole and Foster (2001: 29) point out that these groups “desire to control the environmental establishment or at least to have power within it.”
because, on the one hand, it created multiple kinds of opportunities for the environmental activists to participate in the shaping of new political and environmental institutions and, on the other hand, it was accompanied by market reforms that created greater separation between the sources of economic and political power. While conservationists can in principle operate under conditions of complete indivisibility of political and economic power, as was the case in the Soviet Union, reform environmentalists base their strategies on the differences between the business sector and the state. The activists who adopt this approach focus their attention primarily on institutionalized sources of power, but, rather than focusing exclusively on the state, they choose their main targets and allies among state and market actors, depending on the context.\textsuperscript{84}

Like the conservationists, Russian and Mexican reform environmentalists are ambiguous in their attitudes towards “people power,” but for completely different reasons. Their emergence was contingent on high levels of social mobilization: they were propelled into positions of power by the collective action of social movements and other non-institutional actors. Yet, once they had made it to the decision-making chambers, they became eager to appear respectable and legitimate in the eyes of state and business actors. Precisely because they emerged in the wake of social protest and contention, they

\textsuperscript{84} As shown in Chapter 4, the last two decades were the time when the relations between environmental activists and the business sector underwent profound changes. In Russia, where there was no legal private economic sector before 1991, relations with private economic actors – domestic, foreign, and transnational companies – were a wholly new field for the activists to master. In Mexico, this field was dramatically reshaped as NAFTA gradually came into effect, and the PRI state abandoned its traditional protectionist and interventionist roles.
were eager to “shed the … skin of their amateur past”\textsuperscript{85} and to distinguish themselves from activists with more radical visions and strategies. In other words, while reform environmentalists often find themselves in the ranks of environmental and political opposition, they are anxious to be seen by the establishment as “constructive opposition,” and this greatly limits their ability to act on behalf of grassroots constituencies or form durable alliances with non-institutional actors. In essence, reform environmentalists are the product of social movement institutionalization.

While conservationists ally primarily with the state and reform environmentalists alternate between state and business actors, Russian and Mexican \textit{social environmentalists} tend to look for their main allies closer to the non-institutional extreme of the power spectrum. The ideologues of this approach place the highest value on freedom and autonomy and thus are extremely suspicious of both state and market power, because these types of power emanate from \textit{hierarchical} institutions.\textsuperscript{86} They hold political and economic hierarchies primarily responsible for the joint problems of environmental degradation and social injustice and see the solution in empowering the people to search for outside, non-systemic alternatives. In its most radical forms, social environmentalism calls for the complete elimination of state and capitalism, which it deems to be non-reformable, and for the replacement of representative democracy with its other “radical and direct” forms. As a practice, it places an emphasis on the creation of autonomous social spaces, where authoritarian and unequal power relations do not carry

\textsuperscript{85} This phrase belongs to Donald Snow (1991), who used it to describe a similar transformation that many US environmentalists underwent after the social movements of the 1960s gave way to the building of new environmental institutions in the 1970s. Quoted in Cole and Foster (2001).

the day. Professional activists of this current look to grassroots and popular groups as sources of alternative modes of power relations, collective action forms, and ways of organizing social life that are not dominated by the logics of state and capital.

1.4.2 Grassroots and Professional Environmentalists

My focus on social environmentalism makes it necessary to draw a distinction between grassroots and professional activists. The former are propelled into activism by the sense of personal and immediate threat, which often forces them to abandon or suspend their previous occupations. The latter come to activism through the process of deliberate reflection: they see their “conversion” to activism as the natural consequence of their evolution as professionals and citizens. While professional activists can be called activists by conviction, grassroots activists are activists by necessity. Both professional and grassroots activists feel that “if they don’t do it, nobody else will,” but for professional activists this phrase more often implies a sense of moral duty towards or solidarity with others who suffer, while grassroots activists are moved by the sense of great threat to themselves and those immediately around them. Professional activists often refer to specific events – social and environmental disasters – that made them sharply and suddenly aware of their personal responsibility and forced them to reshape their lives. As Rootes (2004) argues, professional environmentalists often begin with

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87 This sense of immediate threat is particularly acute for those who face toxic pollution. See Reich (1981) on Italy, US, and Japan; Cable and Benson (1993) on the US; and McKean (1981) on Japan.
88 Inglehart (1997) classifies such “intellectual and self-realization needs” as post-materialist.
89 I originally formulated these terms in Russian: активисты по убеждениям and активисты поневоле.
“principled” or “post-materialist” concerns, while grassroots activists start with the “material” base of personal interest and can gradually acquire a broader motivation.

Since they are farther removed from the source of the threat, professional activists preserve a greater sense of continuity between their lives before and after the moment when they turned to activism, than do the grassroots activists, who see this moment as a great rupture. This psychological difference also comes from the fact that professional activists are university-educated intellectuals,\textsuperscript{90} whose education and social background gives them both the habit for critical thinking and a better knowledge of the institutions that they later come to challenge as activists. While they are often pushed into activism when they learn something new and shocking about the social, political, or economic system under which they live, the sense of revelation and disillusionment that they experience is nowhere nearly as strong as that of the first-time grassroots activists, whose previous knowledge is much smaller. Professional activists often manage to maintain some sense of continuity by combining their activism with research, teaching, journalism, and other kind of professional employment that they held before their conversion. Most grassroots activists find that their conversion often aborts their professional careers and undermines their job security. They are often unable to continue working professionally, because their work environments tend to be less flexible to allow the significant time

\textsuperscript{90}This should not be taken to mean that there are no grassroots activists with higher education in Russia and Mexico. The crucial difference is that in the case of professional activists this education comes accompanied by an environment in which continuous critical thinking and questioning is the norm. Thus, graduates of elite universities constitute a disproportionately high percentage of professional activists, while university-educated grassroots activists tend to have degrees from less selective higher education establishments, such as technical and professional schools.
commitment that grassroots activism requires, while their employers might consider firing them if they feel threatened by their activism.

Grassroots and professional activists are not mutually exclusive categories in the sense that the individuals who follow the grassroots pathway to activism can turn into professional activists over time, as they accumulate experience and move from the original issue that motivated their conversion to other issues that do not concern them quite as directly and personally. However, not all professional activists begin at the grassroots level: Russia and Mexico yield plenty of examples of researchers and intellectuals who became professional activists without having gone through a grassroots mobilization experience.

The above discussion applies equally well to grassroots and professionals in all spheres of social activism, but there is one additional important difference that emerges in the particular case of environmentalism. Grassroots activists are rarely found among conservationists and reform environmentalists. These two modes of environmental activism require greater access to institutionalized power and resources than is available to most grassroots activists. Thus, the overwhelming majority of conservationists and reform environmentalists are professional activists. However, there is a pathway that propels grassroots activists into reform environmentalism: in the rare moments of major political openings, grassroots environmental leaders might get elected into legislative bodies. While working within these institutional power structures, they often find new professional and economic opportunities opening to them and might chose to sever their links with those who brought them into power and thereby become professional reform
environmentalists. While this has been known to happen in Russia and in Mexico at the time of political transition, most of the reform environmentalists in both countries are *professional* activists.

This general discussion should not be taken to mean that conservationists and reform environmentalists never ally with social movements or grassroots organizations. Mexican and Russian experience shows that they do so very willingly at the times when society as a whole is at the peak of the social mobilization cycle[^91] and when their causes find support among broader public. Even though conservationists and reform environmentalists do not consider direct action and protests to be their most preferred and effective strategies[^92], during this period they join and ride the protest wave. However, such situations are exceptions that confirm the general rule: at “normal” times, when broad public support does not come to them “by itself” and needs to be cultivated, conservationists and reform environmentalists tend to choose organizational forms that do not rely on a broad base of social support. Thus, they prefer to advance their causes through NGOs and other kinds of interest groups rather than through grassroots and social movement organizations. In fact, the degree of the reform environmentalists’ interest in “popular power” seems to be strongly correlated with the current stage of the mobilization cycle: they tend to pay more attention to the needs of the people, when the people are strong or becoming stronger.[^93] By contrast, professional social environmentalists are interested in organizing the people and working with them even

[^91]: See Tarrow (1998); McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996).
[^93]: My initial evidence for this hypothesis comes from the analysis of the latest mobilization cycle in Russia, found in Section 4.3.
during the troughs in social mobilization, when the capacity for autonomous organization is generally low. In spite of their strong ideological bias against institutionalized power, social environmentalists do negotiate with and make allies among state and business actors, although these alliances tend to be highly conditional on the powerful actors’ treatment of activists more as partners than clients or subjects.

Consequently, I do not see individual environmental activists and their organizations as forever “locked” within a particular approach just by virtue of when and how they came to environmental activism. Distinct streams of environmentalism are shaped by the macro-conditions under which they evolve, but, as these conditions change with time, individuals and organizations within the stream adapt to these changes by combining elements of different approaches. Thus, rather than firmly classifying a particular professional activist or group as “belonging” to a particular stream, I focus on the relative weights that they place on elements of different approaches in their thinking and action and on their ability to adjust these weights over time as they gain experience and react to changing conditions. I am particularly interested in the pathways that bring individuals and organizations to social environmentalism, because I see the strengthening of social environmentalism to be of crucial importance to the process of social democratization.

I define social environmentalism as an approach to environmental activism that has the following key characteristics. First, it draws the link between the issues of social

\(^{94}\) Hochstetler and Keck (2007) analyze this process with respect to environmental activism in Brazil; Umlas (1996 and 1998) provides a similar analysis for Mexico. Dryzek (2005) describes it as the adoption and mixing of different “environmental discourses” and illustrates how it happens in the US.
justice and environmental degradation. Second, it is based on a sustained alliance between grassroots and professional environmentalists. Third, it creates a bridge between environmental activism and other social movements inspired by the agenda of the political and social Left. Finally, it incorporates local environmental struggles into higher-level campaigns to address broader environmental issues.95 This approach emerges when a relatively old stream of environmentalism – grassroots environmental protests – comes into contact with a more recent generation of professional activists who give it an ideological foundation and begin to work systematically with the grassroots. In the US, it takes the form of the environmental justice movement, which arose in the 1980s, when the civil rights leaders began to form links to the grassroots anti-toxic movements and “the anti-toxics leaders adopted the racial critique of civil rights activists.”96 In Brazil, it is known as socio-environmentalism and its emergence is associated with “the return of the Left to the political stage” during the pro-democratic mobilization of the mid-1980s, when professional environmentalists came to see environmental degradation “as the result of massive economic and political exclusion.”97 Detailed discussion of how this approach emerged in Russia and Mexico can be found in Chapter 3; what follows is a brief summary.

I consider urban anti-pollution protests and rural struggles for access to land and to natural resources to be the historical precursors of social environmentalism and its

95 González Martínez (1992: 35) refers to this aspect as the “planet-conscious attitude toward local problems” (visión planetarizada de las problemáticas locales).
broad social base. This *grassroots environmentalism* is based on a broad and anthropocentric definition of the environment: the conflicts tend to be not “about nature, per se, but about land use, social impact, and human health.” These conflicts arise when ordinary people perceive that their living environment (with all its physical and social attributes) comes under threat because of state or business actions. The attitudes of the powerful actors towards these concerns produce a sense of distrust towards formal political and economic institutions among the grassroots, who begin to look for new channels that can “transform [them] from passive victims to significant actors” in the decision-making processes that concern them directly. The primary motivation for grassroots environmental resistance is a sense of social injustice and disenfranchisement; arguments about environmental degradation add weight to the claim that the wrong must be righted. Thus, grassroots environmentalism has one, but not all, key attribute of social environmentalism: the link between social injustice and environmental degradation. It can become social environmentalism when grassroots movements enter into a sustained interaction with professional activists who consider the fight against local environmental problems to be part of a larger struggle against global environmental degradation and against social injustice. As the carriers of social-environmental ideology, professional activists ground the self-defense efforts of grassroots groups within their broader vision of the struggle against political and economic hierarchies – state and market institutions – that cause both social injustice and environmental degradation.

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98 See Section 3.1 for a more detailed discussion.
100 Cole and Foster (2001: 14).
1.4.3 Pathways Towards Social Environmentalism for Professional Activists

Social environmentalism requires not only a broad social base of grassroots environmentalists, but also a rather special kind of professional activists. On the one hand, these professional activists are willing and capable of working with the grassroots. On the other hand, their actions are guided by a particular set of values and principles that allows them to see the connections between local environmental protests and the broader agendas of environmental protection and social change. Where do such professional activists come from? When I analyzed the historical and contemporary data on personal and organizational evolution of environmental activists in Russia and Mexico, I found three possible pathways. I do not consider these pathways to be the only available ones – they are simply the most typical trajectories that I see represented in my field data. First, individuals might adopt this approach at the moment when they turn to activism – I call them original social environmentalists (OSE). This pathway has been common for professional activists in both countries; I give examples of it in Chapters 3 and 4. Second, some non-environmental social activists add environmental concerns to their existing agendas – this pathway from social activism to social environmentalism (SSE) is described in Chapter 3. The majority of Mexican social environmentalists have followed this road, since post-1968 Mexico had well-established bases for social mobilization both at the elite and grassroots levels. Finally, other kinds of environmental activists –

101 See in particular the stories of Lev Fedorov (Section 3.5.3) and Miguel Valencia Mulkay (Sections 3.2.2 and 4.2.2).
conservationists and reformists – can evolve towards social environmentalism. This pathway (ESE) is particularly visible in Russia, where it became available in the late 1990s-early 2000s; it is described in Section 4.5.3.

I do not claim that social environmentalism is the endpoint for all other kinds of environmental and social activism. In Russia and Mexico, only some social activists followed the SSE road; similarly, not all reform environmentalists adopted the ESE pathway. At this point, I cannot yet explain systematically why some activists in each category chose to move towards social environmentalism while others do not. In other words, I cannot provide the micro-level causal mechanisms that account for the emergence of professional social environmentalists. What I attempted to do in this work was to provide some preliminary generalizations about the macro- and meso-level conditions under which each pathway became available in Russia and Mexico.

1.5 On the Sources of Social and Environmental Activism

Where do social activists come from? One way to answer this question is to focus on the issue of psychological types and motivations that “predispose” certain individuals to become activists. While there has been a lot of fruitful research on this subject, modeling individual choices does not give a full answer. The decision to become an activist is a deeply personal one – it has irrational and emotional dimensions that are hard even for the activists themselves to explain. Oliver (1986) cites a phrase – “if I don’t do it, nobody else will” – that one commonly hears from activists by way of explanation, but

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this phrase does better at capturing the general predisposition for becoming an activist than the precise moment when this event occurs. The decision to turn to activism seems to depend on a number of both short- and long-term triggers – while one can account for them individually, it is hard to give a generalizable explanation as to why and when these triggers coincide in time, act with enough force, and push the individual to make a life-changing decision. The question about precise timing and circumstances of such decisions might be among those that the social science cannot ever answer with great precision or in a generalizable way.

Apart from certain personal qualities and predispositions, future social activists also need a social niche – a space for sustained and meaningful interactions with others. Such niches help individuals to develop personal propensities for collective action and create a sense of solidarity and common purpose among those who share them. In societies with well-established traditions of both political and non-political associationism, many different kinds of social networks provide environments from which activists can emerge. These include religious and neighborhood groups, social clubs, university- and school-affiliated associations, ethnic and professional organizations, and many others.\textsuperscript{103} In social systems, where the state strives to penetrate and control all spheres of social activity, such “engendering environments”\textsuperscript{104} are harder to come by, but they never disappear completely. In such situations, activists come from two main “sources”: from social spheres that the state cannot easily penetrate or from state-created organizations and institutions that evolve in such ways as to render parts of

\textsuperscript{103} See Putnam (2000).
\textsuperscript{104} The term was proposed by Yanitsky (1996: 29).
their activity invisible or unintelligible to the state.\textsuperscript{105} Even in extreme versions of non-democratic political systems, such as the Soviet Union, the state was not able to penetrate society completely and to destroy all nuclei for independent activism.\textsuperscript{106} The question of engendering environments is of crucial importance to my analysis, because the character, the size, and the number of these autonomous and semi-autonomous spaces and the change in these parameters over time have acted as powerful influences on the nature of environmental and social activism in Russia and Mexico and on the ability of environmental activists to contribute to the process of social democratization. One of the sobering conclusions I had to draw from this comparison is that, while activists do have a significant capacity to resist their environments, those of them who were formed in authoritarian and totalitarian settings carry certain birth-stains that make it difficult for them to act as agents of social democratization.

The origins of social activists can also be traced to the higher level of broad social groups or classes. While I do not intend to make any general conjectures about the relative contributions of different social classes to activism in Russia and in Mexico, my subject – environmental activism and social environmentalism – calls for a closer examination of four social categories: the peasants, the indigenous people, the disenfranchised urban dwellers, and the educated elites – intellectuals and professionals. Their roles in the emergence of social environmentalism are examined in detail in

\textsuperscript{105} See Vorozheikina (2001) on the emergence of civil society elements from within state-created associations – labor unions, universities, and professional associations – in Latin America.

\textsuperscript{106} In this case, “independent activism” refers to collective action in pursuit of goals that are not explicitly mandated by the state and not contained in the official ideology.
Chapter 3; what follows is a brief overview of the characteristics that make these social groups especially relevant to the study of environmental activism.

1.5.1 Peasants

Among the social classes that currently provide collective bases for social activism the peasantry has the longest history; its roots go deep into the traditional society. Peasants occupy a place apart within the modern society and economy, because their social structures and ways of organizing productive activity are pre-modern. While the peasants have an impressive ability to adapt to changing socio-economic and political conditions, their original basis for solidarity and organization looks different and peculiar enough within the modern context and often brings peasants into conflict with the capitalist economy and the structures of the modern state.

What makes the peasant way of life different from those of modern social groups? Shanin (2002) and Lefebvre (1976) single out four ideal-type characteristics of the peasant social organization and economy. While the present-day rural communities present a much more complex and heterogeneous picture, elements of this “classic” pattern can still be distinguished and used to account for the particular forms of collective action elaborated and used by the peasant organizations and social movements. First, the basic unit of peasant life is the landed household – a family that lives on the land that it works. In contrast to the capitalist and the state socialist forms of rural economy, the classical peasant economy is based neither on individual private property, “exclusive and absolute,” nor on the predominantly collective, state property, but on family property, which is divided into shares, according to the number of household members, and
changes owners “according to traditional uses and customs rather than to the logic of the market.” Therefore, the property regime that emerges when peasant households come together as rural communities is a mixed one: on the one hand, each family has an usufruct right to its share of “collective or indivisible goods” (including land) that belong to the community as a whole; on the other hand, it has a private property right to the goods within its household. The survival of each peasant family thus depends both on its own property and efforts and on the multitude of economic and social relations that tie it to the community. These relations extend far beyond the equivalent economic exchanges found in modern markets and form the enormous and multifaceted domain of the “moral economy”\(^\text{107}\) or “the economy of trust,”\(^\text{108}\) which includes all kinds of non-equivalent exchanges, based on normative notions and expectations about mutual help and support within the household and the community.

Because of these characteristics, it has been often argued that the rural community is a ready-made base for collective action with a very high degree of organic solidarity. This solidarity is deemed to be particularly strong, because it arises from a base that is at once territorial and functional: since the peasants live and work on the same land, their communities are places of both residence and production. Ribeiro (1985) argues that the peasant community has been so resilient to the “advance of capitalism into agriculture” and, in Lefebvre’s words, capable of recasting itself into new forms in order to answer the challenges of modernity precisely because, rather than simply being “a productive force or a mode of production,” it constitutes “a form of organic community, which

\(^{107}\) Scott (1976).
\(^{108}\) Lopezllera (06.10.2006).
cannot be reduced to the mechanical solidarity of its individual parts."109 Meanwhile, members of the social classes that emerged thanks to the processes of modernization – industrial workers and urban dwellers – face the political and economic power structures as atomized individuals with no strong preexisting communal ties and solidarities in their places of work and residence. They, therefore, have to forge solidarity and to create secondary associations, while the peasants can count on a social organization – their rural community – literally from the moment of their birth.110

It is important to remember that this ideal-type model of a landed peasant community never fully described the rural reality anywhere in the world, even before the onset of social and economic modernization. Various forms of landlessness and servitude created very different models of peasant solidarity, adaptation, and resistance. Yet, the classical description of the rural community continues to be relevant in countries where the indigenous populations have traditionally engaged in sedentary agriculture and have not been completely deprived of their landholdings by the colonial or imperial administrations. When indigenous communities manage to retain at least some of their land and with it the social structures, customs, and the sense of ethnic and cultural identity, the result is a sense of solidarity and a foundation for collective action that are very similar to the ideal-type “organic solidarity of peasants” described by researchers. This pattern is particularly relevant for Mexico – a country where indigenous communities have traditionally constituted the backbone for peasant organizing and

resistance. By contrast, the connection between the peasant way of life and the indigenous cultures is much less strong in Russia, where most of the surviving indigenous groups are located in zones that are unsuitable for sedentary agriculture and where indigenous peasants have historically not been a key social category.

Because of their direct dependence on the land, natural resources, and the integrity of the ecosystem processes, peasants and indigenous people are often assumed by researchers to have a strong environmental ethic and some kind of natural predisposition towards environmental protection. This predisposition is said to manifest itself in the face of modernization, whenever peasants organize to oppose the large-scale extraction of natural resources conducted by modern state and market agents – logging, mining, construction of dams, roads, and tourist facilities and other activities that usually lead to the expropriation of communal lands and environmental degradation. However, it should not be assumed that the peasant and indigenous response to the coming of modernization into the countryside and hence their environmentalism is equivalent to that of the urban-based conservationists. These two classes of social activists frame the problems of modernization and environmental protection in very different ways:

112 For a comprehensive bibliography see Suliandziga (2006).
113 The question of indigenous peasantry and its special relationship to the land and to the environment is a very complex one and will not be fully addressed in this work. For the literature reviews and discussion of the Mexican case see Carruthers (1996) and Toledo (2000). Tutino (1986) gives a comprehensive account of the historical development of Mexico’s distinct agricultural regions and of the different patterns of peasant organization and resistance between 1810 and 1930.
conservationists separate the environmental and the social impacts of modernization and focus on the former; peasants and indigenous people confront both types of impacts at once. Conservationists mobilize to protect the natural world from all types of large-scale human impacts and call for the preservation of nature in its pristine state and for its own sake. Peasant and indigenous groups do not mobilize out of purely biocentric considerations: they see modernization as a process through which the modern state and markets penetrate into all aspects of rural life and undermine traditional forms of communal land-holding and autonomy. The degradation of land and its ecosystems – the issue of paramount importance to the conservationists – is seen as but one aspect of this broader process through which the land and its natural resources are being taken away from their traditional users and uses. Precisely because the land and the natural world serve as the primary foundations for their social institutions, peasants and indigenous groups act as social environmentalists: they see land and ecosystem degradation as an issue of social justice and react to the joint threat that modernization presents to their land and livelihood, the material and the social bases of their survival. Rather than protecting nature in its “pristine,” “untouched” state, peasants and indigenous groups strive to protect the particular kinds of human-nature interactions that develop in specific places. While conservationists think in terms of purely biological equilibria, peasant and indigenous actions are aimed at maintaining some kind of socio-ecological balance.

While modernization processes present many significant challenges to the peasant and indigenous ways of life, destruction and degradation of traditional rural communities and autonomy are not the only possible consequence of the encounter between the agents
of modern state and market on the one hand and the peasant and indigenous communities on the other. The outcome of this encounter depends greatly on the character of national state and on the balance of forces in the countryside at the onset of the modernization process. In this respect, Mexican and Russian experiences fall on the opposite extremes of the spectrum. Through the Cadiz Constitution of 1812 and through the agrarian reform in the aftermath of the Revolution, the modern Mexican state had twice confirmed the right of peasants and some indigenous people to communal land ownership and to local autonomy. As a result, the Mexican mestizo and indigenous peasants have shown considerable resilience in the face of industrial modernization and economic globalization. Meanwhile, both the imperial and the post-revolutionary Russian states have managed to destroy thoroughly the bases of rural autonomy through the institutions of serfdom and collective farming. Apart from completely undermining the peasantry as the base for social and political activism, these state policies have also rendered the peasants unable to adapt to changing economic conditions. While many researchers and activists consider the Mexican peasantry to be the source of new models of sustainable agriculture, natural resource stewardship, and local self-government, the Russian peasantry still shows no signs of recovery from the state of apathy and atomization that became an enduring legacy of collectivization and collective farming and has so far made no major contribution to any kind of environmental or social activism.

115 See Guerra (2007), Knight (1986).
1.5.2 Indigenous People

The Russian legislation defines “small native people of the North, Siberia, and the Far East” as “groups that reside on their ancestral territories, maintain their traditional lifestyles, and see themselves as distinct ethnic communities.”\(^{118}\) The 2000 registry issued by the government of Russian Federation contains 45 such ethnic groups, none of which number more than 50,000 people.\(^{119}\) According to the most recent national census (2002), the total “indigenous” population of Russia stands just below 268.5 thousand people (0.18% of the total population). For comparison, in Mexico “indigenous” people are officially defined as “the speakers of indigenous languages,” of which the 2000 census counted just over 6 million (6.2% of the total population). Nine most numerous indigenous groups thus defined number more than 200,000 each; the National Institute of Statistic and Geography Information lists 76 indigenous languages, out of which 50 are spoken by more than 100,000 people each.\(^{120}\) While in Mexico many indigenous groups live in highly productive agricultural regions of the Southeast and the Gulf Coast, the Russian indigenous people have survived mostly in tundra and taiga zones with harsh Arctic or highly continental climates, where settled agriculture is not possible. This

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\(^{118}\) Suliandziga (2005: 28).

\(^{119}\) According to the most recent national census (2002), the total “indigenous” population of Russia stands just below 268.5 thousand people (0.18% of the total population). The most numerous groups are the Nentsy (41,300; Arkhangel’sk, Tiumen, and Krasnoyarsk regions, and Komi Republic), the Evenki (35,500; 10 regions of Siberia and the Far East), the Khanty (28,700; Tumen and Tomsk regions and the Komi Republic), and the Eveny (19,000; Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Kamchatka, Magadan, Chukotka, and Khabarovsk regions); out of 45 groups listed 11 number less than 1000 people. Source: Statistical State Committee of Russian Federation; 2002 national sensus site, [http://www.perepis2002.ru/index.html](http://www.perepis2002.ru/index.html).

\(^{120}\) The most numerous groups are: the Nahuatl (1,449 thousands; Central highlands), the Maya (800 thousands; Chiapas, Campeche, Yucatan, and Quintana Roo), the Zapoteco (453 thousands; Oaxaca and Tehuantepec Istmus), and the Mixteco (446 thousands; Puebla and Oaxaca). Source: Instituto Nacional de Información Estadística y Geográfica (INEGI); 2005 Population Count; [http://www.inegi.gob.mx/est/contenidos/espanol/proyectos/conteos/conteo2005/default.asp?c=6224](http://www.inegi.gob.mx/est/contenidos/espanol/proyectos/conteos/conteo2005/default.asp?c=6224).
difference is fundamental to the legal status of indigenous people with respect to their lands: since the Spanish conquest, the Mexican indigenous peasants of the settled agricultural zones have managed to maintain a much more secure control of their communal lands than the nomadic hunters and pastoralists of the North. The indigenous groups whose lands were incorporated into the Russian Empire and later into the Soviet Union never had the degree of land rights recognition afforded by the “republics of Indians” in colonial Mexico and by communal land grants and ejidos after the Revolution.

In contrast to Mexican indigenous peasants, whose communal lands rights have been mandated for recognition by the 1917 Constitution, the “small indigenous people” in Russia have a very flimsy legal basis for their rights to ancestral lands. Just like the peasants, they lost the de jure power over their lands to the Soviet state in the 1930s, during collectivization. Their traditional practices of natural resource extraction – hunting, fishing, reindeer husbandry, collection of wild plants, berries, and mushrooms – were incorporated into the official Soviet economy through the same system of kolkhozes and sovkhozes that was used in agriculture combined with the state hunting and fishing cooperatives. Because most indigenous settlements of the Arctic North, Siberia and the Far East are small and widely dispersed through very remote areas with harsh climates and rugged landscapes, their inclusion into the economic system required significant and continuous state subsidies. The Soviet state served as the exclusive intermediary between the indigenous settlements and the rest of the country: it bought the products from the indigenous state enterprises, organized the delivery of basic goods and services to the
settlements, oversaw the education of indigenous children in boarding schools in district
and regional centers. Needless to say, this system fell apart after the collapse of the
Soviet Union and of its planned economy. During the 1990s, most indigenous
communities sustained themselves through a combination of subsistence activities and
the sale of more commercially valuable products to a host of new private and state
intermediaries.

The first wave of massive state incursion into the indigenous territories took place
during the industrialization drive of the late 1920s-1930s. This was the time when huge
industrial complexes were created in the Arctic North and in the Far East. The
development of the GULAG system of forced labor camps, Dal’stroy, and the founding
of large industrial centers, such as the city of Noril’sk – had a significant, but
concentrated impact, because these development projects were relatively compact.
Because of their remoteness and inaccessibility, ancestral indigenous lands remained
under de facto control of their residents until the late 1960s. Suliandziga (2005) argues
that the large-scale degradation of ancestral territories and their natural resources began
with the oil and mineral exploration of the 1960s – 1970s. It was accompanied by an
extensive infrastructure development that affected the indigenous territories to a much
higher degree than the creation of urban industrial centers in the 1930s and 40s and by a
significant in-migration of people from European Russia and other Soviet republics that
has significantly changed the demographic and cultural profile of the predominantly indigenous regions.¹²¹

In Mexico, the legal foundation for the indigenous rights to land was laid by the Article 21 of the 1917 Constitution and was then supported by deliberate efforts of the central state. In Russia, the legal acknowledgment of the indigenous rights to their “ancestral territories” and traditional self-government institutions only came in 1999-2001, after the breakdown of the Soviet regime and in the context of strong post-economic transition recovery of the oil, gas, and other extractive industries, which made the central state completely unwilling to intervene on behalf of the indigenous people. The three laws regarding indigenous people that were passed at that time required significant state involvement if they were to be turned into real, working guarantees of indigenous rights. That involvement was not forthcoming at the time when world oil prices were on the rise and the extractive industries became the main base of the Russian economy. This is most clearly demonstrated by the history of the Law on territories of traditional nature use by small native people, which was passed in 2001 and defined these territories as protected natural zones, where industrial or extractive activities are strictly forbidden. In order to obtain this special status, the indigenous communities had to officially form and register their ancestral territories with the federal government of Russian Federation. This law was met with great enthusiasm by the indigenous groups that immediately began to file their petitions, but met with a strong opposition of the Ministry of Economic Development and with a complete reluctance of the federal

¹²¹ See, for example, an extensive case study of the impact that diamond mining had on the Viluy Sakha of Yakutia in Crate (2002, 2003).
government and other state agencies to take the necessary actions. Thus, hardly any ancestral territories were registered under this law, which ironically left them even more vulnerable for development than before, because it made invalid all the territories previously registered by the lower levels of executive government.\textsuperscript{122}

In Russia, the Association of Small Native People of the North, Siberia, and the Far East (AKMNS RF) was formed in 1990 as a federation of regional and local indigenous groups and associations that formed in the late 1980s in places of conflicts with resource-extraction enterprises.\textsuperscript{123} This was the first time since the 1930s when Russia’s indigenous people were able to organize autonomously at the base level. Their movement formed part of the wider social mobilization that was unleashed by Gorbachev’s reforms. The mechanism of building this federation was very similar to that used by the Mexican indigenous people that confront development megaprojects: “first, village-level organizations appeared. Then, as people in different places realized that they were confronting the same problems, they formed alliances on the regional level. Most regions have more than one native group, and these came together [into single regional organizations], regardless of ethnicity.”\textsuperscript{124} The resulting national federation was supported by Gorbachev’s government and gradually transformed itself from a social movement into a high-level lobbying structure.

\textsuperscript{122} On the local and regional level, there still exists a considerable diversity of legal arrangements for acknowledging the special status of indigenous territories, and the indigenous groups actively use these provisions to defend their lands from development. However, the local and regional powers routinely violate them, once large resource-extraction companies appear on the scene. See Yakovleva (2005), Fufaeva (2004), Suliandziga (2003), Suliandziga (2005).

\textsuperscript{123} These early conflicts arose over the issues that are still at the core of indigenous protests in Russia: oil transport (Khanty-Mansi autonomous district), forest logging (Primorye), gold mining (Amur region), fishing quotas (Koryaksky autonomous district).

\textsuperscript{124} Pavel Suliandziga, vice-president of AKMNS RF, 2003.
1.5.3 Disenfranchised Urban Dwellers

In contrast to the peasants – the class that has provided a strong base for collective action long before modernization began – disenfranchised urban dwellers acquired a distinct voice and standing within social activism through one of the processes that made modernization possible – large-scale and rapid urbanization. The social consequences of this process in Mexico began to be felt in the 1950s, by which point the major urban zones of the country were replete with “lost cities” – unofficial, self-made, and poor neighborhoods that housed the recent migrants from the countryside in search of a better future. By the 1970s, these neighborhoods and their problems have become a major thorn in the side of the PRI state officials, who could not control them through the corporatist mechanisms that worked so well with peasants and workers. Around the same time, they also attracted the attention of the Left that was recovering after the events of 1968.\textsuperscript{125} After the Mexico City earthquake of 1985, the organizations of the urban poor became one of the best-organized and numerically most-significant branches of social activism, on par with the older peasant, teacher, and worker movements.

In Russia, where the exodus from the countryside to the city began around the same time as in Mexico, but had a much more coercive character because of the collectivization, the disenfranchised urban dwellers did not emerge as an organized social force until the very end of the Soviet period. On the one hand, state programs of mass housing construction, universal health care, and public education had provided the Soviet

\textsuperscript{125} On the origins of urban popular movements in Mexico and the role of the Left, see Moguel (1987), Bennett (1993), Haber (2006). Castells (1983) remains the classic comparative historical study of the subject.
peasants-turned-urban-dwellers with most of the services that their Mexican counterparts had to procure on their own or with the help of official “patrons.” The state also limited the speed and the scale of urbanization through the system of residence permits: the Soviet peasants were tied to the land on which they worked, while the cities siphoned off the rural youth through the institutions of higher education and the army. On the other hand, in the absence of the “social Left” – a critical mass of activist-intellectuals that could catalyze the process of self-organization within urban neighborhoods – recent rural migrants saw no ideological and organizational alternatives to the “Party line.” Just as in the case of peasants, the Soviet state used a combination of coercive and ideological power to almost completely deprive the new urban classes of any self-organization potential. Consequently, grassroots urban associations did not appear in Russia until late 1980s.

1.5.4 Educated Elites

In almost any society, the educated elites serve as the prime breeding ground for social activism. Both Russians and Mexicans often use the term intelligentsia to refer to the individuals within this social stratum who work in a variety of professions, but share a “passionate preoccupation for science, politics, and social justice”.\(^\text{126}\) Intelligentsia is a Russian word that first came into use in the second half of the 19\(^{th}\) century and referred to “persons with a good modern education and a passionate preoccupation with general political and social ideas.” These people – lawyers, doctors, engineers, architects,

teachers, scientists, writers, and artists – were everywhere products of modernization: they “grew in numbers and social prestige as the economy became more complex.” Those of them who, apart from discharging their professional duties, had acquired and maintained an active public and civil stance, often in direct or indirect opposition to the government, are also known by the name of activist-intellectuals in Mexico and public intellectuals (*obshchestvennye deiateli*) in Russia.

Intense and persistent questioning and critique of the “existing political and social system” are often considered one of intelligentsia’s defining characteristics. Yet the 20th century history shows that non-democratic systems possess a wide range of means – coercive and not – to obtain individual and group loyalty and acquiescence from the intelligentsia in return for material and status benefits. The comparison of totalitarian Soviet Russia and authoritarian Mexico demonstrates that the intellectuals are particularly sensitive to the limitation of civil freedoms and to the workings of the ideological propaganda machine that forces them into “the common mold” of loyalty and obedience and uses them and their work as one of the major sources of political legitimation. Olvera (2003) argues that the PRI state wielded significant power over “lawyers, doctors, engineers, economists, educators and other professionals” by controlling their unions. This control had both economic aspects, since the state was the main employer for individuals of these professions, and ideological ones, because the state presented itself to society as the main guarantor of social peace and justice.
Yet, these levers of control appear weak in comparison with the Soviet Union, where, after 1929, the state became the only legal employer for all citizens. Thus, for a Soviet professional or intellectual, losing employment “for political reasons” was essentially equivalent to not being able to work in his specialty field: there were no private hospitals, research centers, or bar associations to turn to, as in Mexico. The ideological pressure was also much greater: since the late 1920s, the Soviet state deliberately moved to colonize and control all spheres of professional and intellectual activity, forcing those who worked in them to provide the regime with an ever more elaborate scientific and cultural foundation for its ideology. By the late 1930s, the party-state made it all but impossible to pursue legally and publically the avenues of scholarly enquiry and artistic expression that it deemed “non-Soviet”; the list of these forbidden intellectual and artistic activities continued to grow as long as the Soviet system lasted. Finally, professionals and intellectuals have remained the main target for repressions and political “prophylaxis” until the very end of the Soviet system and long after the end of large-scale purges. While the intellectual heterodoxy did exist among Soviet educated elites, the stakes of “thinking differently” were much higher for them than for their Mexican colleagues, since they had fewer possibilities to make a living outside of the state and were subject to greater coercion. The majority acquiesced; the bravest few chose open resistance and paid the highest price for it; others chose the middle route by

remaining “within the system” and hiding their heterodoxy under some kind of “protective coloration.”

1.6 Social Activists and the State

The heavy emphasis that I place on the relations between the social activists and the state is due as much to my personal perspective (or bias), as to the nature of my research findings. I have grown up in Russia – a society that has been mesmerized and overwhelmed by the state for most of its history. I know how difficult it is, even for very critically minded and independent individuals, to engage in civic action without constantly keeping the state in mind as the main point of reference. Because the current version of the Russian state is, once more, the source of so many risks and abuses, environmentalists, human rights defenders, politicians, intellectuals, and researchers tend to spend an exorbitant amount of time and effort thinking about the state and setting their goals and strategies in reaction to what the state is doing or might do. Given my knowledge of the modern Mexican history, I was not surprised to find that many of my Mexican respondents shared this constant preoccupation for the doings of the state. As I became aware of this similarity and its importance, I could not help but ask myself about the effect that this fixation on the state had on the activists’ autonomy and ability to formulate goals and agendas independently from the state.

Given this disproportionate importance of the state both in the “objective context” and in the activists’ minds, I had to make a decision about the relative weights that I was

128 This term comes from Wiener (1988), who used it to describe the professional survival strategy of the Soviet conservationists.
going to give the state and the social activists in my analysis. Many Russian and Mexican researchers would agree that this is not simply a question of research design – this issue has normative and even moral aspects. By paying so much attention to the state that, at its worst, causes its citizens great harm and, at its best, can be profoundly indifferent to their fate, are we not giving it the importance and legitimacy that it does not deserve? In order to avoid falling into this trap, I wrote this work from the perspective of the people that challenge the state’s claim to have the last word about issues that matter to all. I write about the state and analyze it insofar as it is necessary to explain the context in which the activists operate. I deliberately chose to see the state mostly through the activists’ eyes: there were no state officials among my respondents. Thus, my information about the state’s doings mostly came from secondary sources: the press and the radio, the research literature, and from social activists and their publications. I am fully aware of the bias that such an approach carries with it. Yet too much literature about both Russia and Mexico has been written with the focus on the state and from its perspective: it is much easier to find books and articles about “environmental policy” and “environmental politics” than about “environmental movements” or “environmental activism.” I give preferential treatment to environmental activists in order to tilt the balance towards those who often fight with too many odds against them.

The overall goal of the democratic reform of the state is to make it “self-restraining”\textsuperscript{129} – committed to uphold the institutions that limit its own powers and promote the universal application of laws. This task necessarily requires social

\textsuperscript{129} Schedler, Diamond and Plattner (1999).
mobilization, because in societies with strong authoritarian traditions the balance of institutional power is so heavily shifted towards the state and its economic allies that the persistent use of non-institutionalized “people power” is often the only available way to turn things around. While many social movement scholars tend to see this type of power primarily as contentious – the ability to protest and challenge the state and other powerful opponents, this term also includes the more “peaceful” forms of power manifested in the operation of autonomous grassroots organizations and their networks – the power to do things without the state.

Absolute autonomy from the centers of institutional power – the state, the political sphere, and the markets – is hardly an achievable (or a desirable) goal for any civic organization. What matters more is the capacity of citizen associations, networks, and movements “to retain a sufficient margin of autonomy,” so that they can “maintain their potential for social and political change and to maximize their influence on others, while safeguarding their identities and their ability to devise independent strategies.” In other words, for an organization or a movement to be relatively autonomous, its agenda and strategies cannot be formulated solely as a reaction to the moves that the powerful political and economic actors make.

While such “reactivity” is the most natural course taken by social activism in situations where the balance of forces is strongly skewed against civic associations, its unintended consequence is to reinforce social authoritarianism as the dominant mode of

130 Tarrow (1998).
132 Haber (2006).
133 Schönwälder (2002: 21), emphasis added.
state-society relations. An activist organization that is purely pragmatic in its dealings with the state officials and the private corporations – “we need to speak their language if we want them to notice and understand us”¹³⁴ – risks adopting the methods of “those in power” and legitimizing the subordination of citizen interests to those of the “nation,” the “economy,” or even the “nature protection” instead of helping the citizens to gain the right of participation in decision-making about these matters. The activists’ ability to change the nature of power relations in society and thus to contribute to the process of social democratization depends strongly on their capacity (and desire) to promote values and modes of interaction different from those imposed by the powerful state and market actors.

The history of social activism in any society is always a history of the ever-changing balance of forces between the “establishment” and the “excluded.” Thus, the state and the activists always find themselves in a complex and ambivalent relationship. Yet this ambivalence is particularly strong in societies where the central state has historically positioned itself as the main arbiter among social groups and as the monopoly player in the political sphere. In such a “state-centered matrix” the state both tries to strengthen itself by absorbing all social energy and incorporating all initiatives coming from below and views these initiatives with suspicion and represses them, if they seem to challenge its power monopoly. Meanwhile, the activists are caught in their own dilemma. They want to break free from the state’s all-embracing tutelage and to be able to set their own goals and to act independently. Yet, since the state penetrates all spheres of societal

activity, the activists must first wrestle the needed space and resources from the state and then protect these dearly won autonomous spaces from state encroachment.

This dilemma is clearly reflected in all aspects of Russian and Mexican social activism – from ideology and goals to the choices of collective action forms and repertoires. In particular, the choice of the collective action form – a movement, an interest group, or something in between – is a very important indicator of how marginalized the activists feel vis-à-vis the political sphere and the institutions of the state. As Tarrow (1998) and Haber (2006) point out, social movements emerge precisely among those who feel excluded from the formal decision-making processes within society and have no regular access to its institutions – political, economic, and social. This choice is not simply the result of a rational calculus with respect to available resources, but is also closely related to the group’s ideology and ultimate goals. Interest groups are organizations geared towards achieving their objectives within the existing system: they are in the business of finding the most effective ways to satisfy the interests of their members by making the most out of institutions as they currently are. By contrast, social movements call for some kind of systemic change: political, economic, and social institutions do not serve them well in their extant form.\textsuperscript{135} The defining feature of social movements is that, while they do seek benefits for their participants (as interest groups would), their social base is broad enough and their participants’ problems are deep

enough to have a larger social relevance – social movements are motivated by goals of “transformative social change.”

The distinction between social movements and interest groups – the two poles of the spectrum of collective action forms – is of such importance for the analysis of Russian and Mexican environmental activists that it led me to reject the standard term “environmental movement” when defining the subject of this work. I deliberately defined my subject as “environmental activism” rather than “environmental movement.” Although these two phrases are often used interchangeably, “environmental activism” can clearly be used as a broader term that includes all forms of collective action in the name of a particular thematic goal – protection of the environment (variably defined, more on which later). Meanwhile, the term “environmental movement,” if used precisely and with reference to a particular country, seems to imply that environmental activism in that country takes the form of a coherent social movement – a description that might not necessarily be accurate. Therefore, to define my subject as the “environmental movement” would mean to confine myself to only one extreme of the spectrum, while my goal is to include the entire gamut of collective action forms – from movement to interest group, and including the majority of actors that falls somewhere in between the two poles.

While it is customary to refer to the ensemble of individuals, informal groups, and formal organizations that are linked by networks and “engaged in collective action motivated by shared identity or concern about environmental issues” as the

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136 Haber (2006: 30).
“environmental movement,” the heterogeneity of actors, goals, organizational forms, and strategies is usually such that many researchers question whether the ensemble amounts to a single and cohesive social movement in any given society.\textsuperscript{137} The main reason for this skepticism is the deep cleavage that runs through the environmental activist community in most contemporary societies and arises from the issue of the activists’ position in relation to the political sphere and the institutions of the state. By most definitions, social movements are characterized by their reliance on non-institutional channels of participation and means of action and largely remain “outside of the government or polity,”\textsuperscript{138} while many environmental organizations tend to become institutionalized, as the activist community evolves over time and undergoes differentiation and specialization. The organizations at the “institutionalized” end of the activist spectrum thus become much closer to interest groups – a different kind of collective actor that tends to be “embedded within the political arena” and has both easier access to state institutions and representatives and greater legitimacy in their eyes.

### 1.7 Research Approach and Methods

This work is an exploratory study of social environmentalism, its place within environmental activism, and its relationship to the process of social democratization in two particular societies. To the best of my knowledge, the research that exists on this subject is limited to individual case studies and does not yet allow us to speak about general patterns or representative cases. The causal processes at work are quite complex.

\textsuperscript{137} See, for example, Rootes (2004), Leff (1988), González Martínez (1992), Yanitsky (2006).
\textsuperscript{138} Snow, Soule, and Kriesi (2004: 7); Tarrow (1998); Haber (2006).
and operate over a variety of temporal and spatial scales; the individual causal factors are
not independent and the relationships between them are often non-linear – there are
complex interaction effects, feedback mechanisms, and critical junctures that lead to path
dependence. Thus, to identify the main causal variables – the factors that both contribute
to the development and social environmentalism and move forward the process of social
democratization – is just the first step: one must also be able to specify and analyze in
sufficient detail “the processes linking these variables to the outcomes.”

Such a research task can be best accomplished through a contextualized and historical
comparison of the cases that the researcher is best familiar with. In this case, as Jack
Goldstone (2003: 43) argues, “specific cases need to be thoroughly understood before
advancing to general patterns.” Since it is not yet known what the relevant population of
country cases might be for this research subject, I took two countries that I knew best and
analyzed them comparatively without making any a priori assumptions about their
“equivalence or representativeness.”

While I obviously did make preliminary conjectures about the relevant similarities and differences between them, establishing the
extent of these similarities and differences much more precisely has been one of the main
goals of my investigation.

In this work, it was not my goal to produce a comprehensive account either of the
current state and historical evolution of environmental activism or of the democratization
process in Russia and in Mexico. Rather, I investigated the dynamic intersection between
these two macro-social processes. Doing this required me to operate at least three

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139 Hall (2003: 394).
different levels of analysis: the macro-level of the political systems, the meso-level of social movement formation, evolution of social activism and of state-society relations, and the micro-level of individual and organizational trajectories of activists that operated within these broader contexts and modified them through their actions. While my main focus is on the meso-level – I focused on a particular kind of social activism and its effects on state-society relations – I strove both to place this account within the macro-social context and to make it more accurate, detailed, and vivid by making constant references to the micro-social processes.

Russian and Mexican social activists have traditionally confronted numerous structural obstacles to autonomous collective action. It is possible to use quantitative methods to show that most attempts at collective action under such conditions are destined to fail and to explain why it should be so by using the classical theory of collective action\(^\text{141}\) and the “political opportunity structure” and “resource mobilization” approaches to the study of social movements.\(^\text{142}\) However, the question about motivations and strategies of those few who do manage to organize and act against all odds requires a different research approach. As Haber (2006) points out, it is important for a scholar of social activism to see this phenomenon both from the outside – through the historical study of the environment, in which the activists operate, and its changes over time and space – and from the inside – through an in-depth study of individual perceptions of that

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\(^{141}\) See, for example, Olson (1965), Hardin (1982), Hechter (1987), Marwell and Oliver (1993).

\(^{142}\) See the edited volumes by Snow, Soule, and Kriesi (2004) and by McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1996) as well as Tarrow (1998) for good summaries of these approaches.
environment. I therefore used comparative process tracing\textsuperscript{143} for the macro- and the meso-level analysis and relied on the materials from personal in-depth interviews with activists, researchers, and journalists and participant observation to inform the micro-level illustrations of my argument.\textsuperscript{144}

1.7.1 Research Approach: Comparative Historical Analysis

The development of state and society in Russia and Mexico has followed the paths that are very different from those described by the liberal-pluralist model that is primarily based on the historical realities of Britain, France, and the United States. Therefore, many of the classic concepts, derived from this model, that are used to describe social and state structures as well as the relationship between state and society cannot be directly applied to the Russian and Mexican realities. As I compared the political systems of these two countries, I found myself questioning the meaning of many basic terms of political science, such as civil society, modern state, political and public spheres, political parties, interest groups, citizen associations, democracy, and democratization. For better or worse, this classic terminology is the language that I have to use in order to make my two-country comparison intelligible and relevant. Thus, I had to figure out which parts of the Russian and Mexican reality are unique and peculiar enough to be described in their own language, and in which ways (and with what limitations) the language of Western political science could still be used. Since I am writing about social activism, I have to use the language that would be consistent with the

\textsuperscript{143} See Hall (2003) for an overview and evaluation of this research approach.
\textsuperscript{144} See Sections 1.7.2 and 4.1 for information on my research design and field data collection process.
way that the activists themselves and their protagonists saw their actions. I need to balance the need to present the activists’ particular perspective with the necessity to make the analysis of their actions in the language that can be used for generalizations and comparisons across different epochs and societies.

In order to fully explain what stands behind the connection between environmental activism and social democratization, I chose to look at the full life cycle of the non-democratic political systems, within which modern environmental activism in Russia and Mexico developed. Covering the PRI and the Soviet systems from their revolutionary origins to their demise is necessary, because the nature of these systems had changed and evolved over time and, at each stage, had made possible one set of collective action forms while inhibiting or even altogether precluding others. The political and social processes at work are so complex and long-ranging that no existing theory adequately describes them. In order to understand, what kind of power relations and environmental activism these political systems have engendered and left in the wake of their breakdown, I had to draw on many different theories and to continuously evaluate their relevance and limitations for the analysis of two particular societies. Historical process tracing (Hall, 2003) is an appropriate research approach in such a case, because it allows “to see, if the multiple actions and statements of the actors at each stage of the causal process are consistent with the image of the world implied by each theory.”

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145 Haber (2006).
1.7.2 A Note on Methodology

One of the main choices I had to make with respect to methodology was whether this study was best framed as a qualitative or a quantitative enterprise. I chose to do a qualitative study due to the following considerations: the difficult circumstances under which social activism had to take place in Russia and Mexico; the relatively low level of general population involvement in social activism; and the lack of clear boundaries (at this stage of research) around the concept of social environmentalism, which makes it impossible to determine what the relevant population of activists is.

Overall, 20th century Mexico and Russia have presented social activists with numerous structural obstacles. Even after the PRI and the Soviet regimes have collapsed, the persistence of social and political authoritarianism make collective action a very high-cost and high-risk enterprise for most citizens. In Russia, where political authoritarianism has made a full come-back since 2000, the costs of organizing are so high that most people do not dare to do it, quite in accordance with the cost-benefit calculation models of the classical collective action theory. Yet, what interests me most are the motivations and strategies of those few who do manage to organize and act in spite of the very considerable obstacles and under circumstances when the “political opportunity windows” seem to be shut tight and the resources for mobilization are scarce indeed. In-depth individual interviews provided me with a number of unique stories of individuals and groups that did dare. From these stories, I can make

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147 Clément (2006a).
generalizations about what it takes to organize in hostile contexts. As Haber (2006) points out, it is not enough to study “the objective conditions,” in which a social movement develops; the subjective evaluation of existing conditions by individuals and organizations is equally crucial to their decisions. It is important for a scholar of social activism to see this phenomenon both from the outside – through the historical study of the environment, in which the activists operate, and its changes over time and space – and from the inside – through the in-depth study of individual perceptions of that environment.

Scholars of social movements study a phenomenon that usually involves only a small minority of inhabitants of any given country at any given time.149 Outside of the episodes of massive social mobilization, when this minority grows significantly larger and becomes politically and statistically “visible,” the activists that participate in social movement networks tend to slip through the mesh of the general population surveys. This is especially the case during the “trough periods” of the mobilization cycle and in situations when the environment is so hostile to autonomous collective action that the number of activists is reduced to a small core of individuals who are willing to keep up their work against all odds.150 As Clément points out, under these conditions, the mechanisms and results of autonomous social organization are “invisible at the macrosociological level” and can hardly be explained by the classical theories of social movements. The process of organization tends to occur “at the margins” (or “in the depth”) of society, and qualitative studies and in-depth interviews have to be used in

150 Tarrow (1998: ch.9).
addition to mass surveys in order to study it.\textsuperscript{151} Studies of countries that have recently undergone breakdowns of non-democratic regimes consistently show a very low level of participation in voluntary associations.\textsuperscript{152} The numbers of NGOs (boosted by foreign aid) did increase dramatically in Russia and in Mexico during the transition years, but this phenomenon can hardly be equated with the growth of civil society from below or with the overall progress of social democratization.\textsuperscript{153} The members of these NGOs often come to form a rather small and exclusive class, and it is highly debatable to what extent their work contributes to the increase in collective action capacity at the grassroots level.\textsuperscript{154} In order to avoid falling into this trap and consider a fuller range of actors that can contribute to social democratization, I chose to include different organizational forms of social activism – from well-structured interest groups and NGOs to much more amorphous informal groups, networks, and other social movement actors. The drawback of including a larger spectrum of social activists is the inability to choose a sample of homogeneous units, be they based on a particular kind of organizational form or group size.

While it would be good to be able to estimate the relative weight of social environmentalism within the broader field of environmental activism, in order to achieve this, one would have to begin with a cataloguing exercise that attempts to make an exhaustive list of all environmental activists, their networks, and organizations within each current and to follow the changes in their numerical significance through time.

\textsuperscript{151} Clément (2006a and 2006b).
\textsuperscript{154} Yanitsky (1996), Henderson (2002).
While some activists and researchers have attempted to create and maintain general databases of environmental activists and organizations, this proves to be an exercise in shooting at a highly mobile and very fuzzily defined target. Individuals join the ranks of activists and leave them, organizations are created, come together in networks that later fall apart; individuals move between organizations; there are organizations with very few or no active members and activists with no clear organizational affiliations. Thus the question of exactly how many “environmental activists” currently operate in Russia or Mexico and what their proportions are with respect to the total population at the national and the regional levels loses meaning and value. The answer depends entirely on how, whom, when, and where one counts. As to the related question of the strength of each current (in terms of members or number of organizations), it must be acknowledged that this classification has its limits: with time the different streams mix and organizations change their profiles, making clear types harder to distinguish.

The final reason for which my study cannot be based on a “representative sample of environmental activists” is that social environmentalists – the type of environmental activists that I am most interested in – are found at the intersection of several different thematic fields of social activism. Their joint emphasis on prevention of environmental degradation and social justice links them to reform environmentalism, but also to human rights activism, peasant, indigenous, and urban popular movements. Social environmentalists have their origins in each and all of these traditions of social activism, but bring the elements of these traditions together in a way that makes them distinct.

155 In Russia, such attempts have been made by activists Sviatoslav Zabelin and Askhat Kayumov; in Mexico – by the Mexican Philanthropy Center (Cemefi).
Much of the data that I rely on Chapters 3-6 comes from my own fieldwork in Russia and in Mexico between 2004 and 2007.\textsuperscript{156} The scholarly literature that I was familiar with focused mostly on environmental NGOs; what I wanted to get was a more comprehensive picture of environmental activism that would include other organizational forms. I was also looking for groups and individuals that straddled the divide between environmental work and other kinds of social activism. I used my professional and personal networks to help me establish contact with a few prominent professional environmental activists, researchers, and journalists in each country, who served as my key initial informants and the starting points for snowball sampling of professional and grassroots environmental activists.\textsuperscript{157}

I used face-to-face, open-question interview format to gather narratives about particular campaigns as well as individual and organizational evolution over time. All the stories told in the subsequent pages use real names of individuals and organizations: the activists that I mention operate publicly and are conscious of the associated risks. Many of them, especially the grassroots respondents, wanted me to tell their stories, so that others in similar position might learn from their experiences. For personal and organizational profiles in Chapters 3-5 as well as for the case studies of recent social-environmental campaigns in Chapter 6, I did my best to corroborate my interview

\textsuperscript{156} See Section 4.1 for a more detailed description of my research design.

\textsuperscript{157} In Russia, my key informants were: Oleg Yanitsky, Sviatoslav Zabelin, Lev Fedorov, Marina Katys, and Andrey Petrov (Moscow); Askhat Kayumov and Dmitriy Levashov (Nizhniy Novgorod), and Bela Nikitina (Samara). In Mexico, I began with Ignacio Peón Escalante, Miguel Valencia, and Luciano Concheiro Borges (Mexico City); Carlos Padilla Massieu and Diego Pérez Salicrup (Michoacán). The list of individuals that I interviewed can be found in Appendix 1.
materials with press accounts and activist publications. I accept full responsibility for any mistakes, omissions, and imprecisions.
Chapter 2: State-Society Relations and Social Activism in Post-Revolutionary Systems: Russia and Mexico Between 1910 and 1956

This chapter provides a historical and macro-political frame for the development of environmental activism in Russia and Mexico for the period between 1910 and 1956. It systematically compares the revolutionary non-democratic regimes whose formation, development, and breakdown have dominated the twentieth-century history of the two countries. The main goals of this comparison are: 1) to evaluate the extent to which the revolutionary state managed to gain control over the two main bases for social mobilization that are most relevant for the development of environmental activism: intellectuals and peasants; 2) to assess the long-term impacts that the state’s ideology, repressive apparatus, and corporatist institutions had on the capacity of these two social sectors for autonomous collective action; 3) to show how this macro-context affected the shape of the oldest, conservationist, stream of environmental activism.

2.1 The Revolutionary Foundations

The Soviet and Mexican 20th century political systems are quite comparable with respect to two important functional characteristics: centralization of political power and incorporation of the lower classes. Yet they are highly distinct in the degree to which they limited political and social pluralism – a difference that is fundamentally related to the different roles played by ideology and repressions within these political systems. As a result, the Soviet party-state has had a much more profound and negative effect on social autonomy and capacity for collective action that the PRI state in Mexico. This chapter
explains the difference in social impact by analyzing the differences in ideological and political origins of the two party-states as well as in the social landscape upon which they acted. Overall, the Mexican party-state proved much more willing to adapt its ideology and structure to the social reality it faced, whereas the Soviet party-state was a much more artificial creation that continually forced social reality into a pre-made ideological mold.

2.1.1 The Party-State

The post-revolutionary systems of Soviet Russia and Mexico were built around a *party-state*. This term refers to the political arrangement under which access to government posts and other important decision-making positions is completely controlled by “a self-appointed organization,”¹ often called single, dominant, or hegemonic party.² Neither of the two Parties was a political party in the classical Western sense: they did not arise out of society (from below, from the grassroots) as voluntary political associations and their primary purpose was not electoral participation or legislative work.³ Although they did serve as vehicles for mass mobilization, their members were recruited from above and through the institutions of the central state. In both countries, the victorious revolutionary factions used the Party as an instrument to secure its

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¹ Malia (1994: 115).
² In the Soviet Union the system of “dual administration” – Party oversight of state officials – initially arose from the need “to use bourgeois specialists from the old order whom [the Bolsheviks] could not trust politically.” What at the beginning might have been thought of as a temporary measure became one of the fundamental and most enduring features of the Soviet system: even “in the mature Soviet order … [bureaucrats were] monitored from behind the scenes by a parallel and unaccountable Party administration that had the real power of decision” (Malia, 1994: 120).
monopoly on political power. Yet, in spite of these functional similarities, the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (of Bolsheviks) and the National Revolutionary Party had very different political origins and ideological foundations, and these differences reflected fully in the nature of the post-revolutionary political systems that these parties came to build. The creation of the Mexican dominant party in 1929 was the result of the revolutionary process and a rather pragmatic attempt by the victorious revolutionary faction to justify its monopoly over political power. In Russia, the Bolshevik Party was created long before the toppling of the old regime and was meant to serve as the vehicle of transition to a completely new social order.

The Mexican PNR was a single party of the authoritarian type, “created by the group [already] in power” in 1929, when the revolutionary war was largely over. In fact, the creation of the Party was an important milestone of the transition from violence and coercion to more subtle and institutionalized forms of political control that gradually took place throughout the 1920s. Meanwhile, the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (of Bolsheviks) had the typical origins of the single party of the totalitarian kind: it was

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4 The names of both Parties changed several times, as their structure and purposes evolved. The Mexican Party, created in 1928 and christened National Revolutionary Party (PNR) by its founding father Plutarco Elias Calles, was reorganized and rebaptized by Lázaro Cárdenas as the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM) in 1938, and acquired its definitive shape under the name of the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) in 1946, after the political reforms of Avila Camacho. The Party that came to power in Russia in October 1917 under the name of Russian Social Democratic Worker Party (of Bolsheviks) had changed its name to Russian Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) (VKPb) in 1918, became the All-Union Communist Party in 1925, after the creation of the Soviet Union, and finally mutated into the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (KPSS) in 1952. Under this name, it existed until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December of 1991. The Communist Party of Russian Federation (KPRF) was formed in February of 1990 from the Russian statist-nationalist current within KPSS and can be considered its ideological heir.


“a party-conquering power,” a small “conspiratorial body of professional revolutionaries,” guided by an elaborate ideology and aimed at the armed seizure of the central state and at the transition towards a completely new social order.\(^7\)

### 2.1.2 The Role of Ideology

None of the “makers” of the Mexican Revolution saw their task as the creation of “an ideological blueprint” for other countries – the problems they aimed to resolve were largely internal to Mexico.\(^9\) By contrast, the Bolsheviks saw their revolution in Russia and the subsequent creation of the first socialist state as an example to the rest of the world. They aimed both to extend the victory of proletarian revolution to other countries of the world and to enlarge the first socialist state as much as possible; thus, Soviet Russia became the nucleus of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

#### 2.1.2.1 Mexico

According to Linz (2000), the Mexican dominant party never came to develop an ideology that would be original and elaborate enough to contain “a sense of ultimate meaning [and] long-run purposes,” or “an a priori model of ideal society” – the elements that were so crucial to the totalitarian character of Soviet ideology. He refers to the “so-called ideologies of authoritarian regimes” as “pseudo-ideologies,” “mentalities,” “sets of ideas derived from a variety of sources haphazardly combined to give the impression of being an ideology [like the one that exists] in totalitarian systems.” Rather than being

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\(^7\) Linz (2000: 162).
\(^8\) Malia (1994: 75).
\(^9\) Knight (1986: 497).
utopian plans for the creation of a new social order they are “mimetic and derivative in
character”: their main purpose is not social engineering, but the reduction of conflict
among “the complex coalition of forces, interests, political traditions, and institutions …
that otherwise would require either institutionalization or more repression than the rulers
could afford.” Hence, they refer “to generic values like patriotism and nationalism,
economic development, social justice, and order” in order to “allow the rulers … to
neutralize opponents, co-opt a variety of supporters, and decide policies pragmatically.”

The theoretical distinction made by Linz is very precise when seen in the light of
the comparison between the “revolutionary rhetoric” of the PRI regime and the Soviet
ideology. The Constitutionalists – the revolutionary faction that took control of the
Mexican state in 1916-1917 – “sought to make Mexico a progressive, modern, capitalist
society, broadly along the lines of Western Europe and North America.” Meanwhile,
the Bolsheviks used their homeland for an experiment in building a social order that was
meant to be in all ways antithetical and superior to the capitalist economic system and to
its political counterpart – the “bourgeois democracy”. While the Soviet regime did carry
out the program of industrial and social modernization that in many ways resembled and
drew on the Western European and North American models, its ultimate goal was to

11 This term comes from Knight (1992).
12 The Constitutionalist Army was formed in 1913 through the union of three major revolutionary armies,
headed by Venustiano Carranza from the state of Coahuila, Alvaro Obregón (Sonora), and Pancho
(Francisco) Villa (Chihuahua). Different subgroups within this faction are also referred to as “the
Carrancistas” – the supporters of Venustiano Carranza, the head of the Constitutionalist Army and the first
post-revolutionary president of Mexico (1917-1920), – and “the Sonorans” – the revolutionary armies
formed in the northwestern state of Sonora and led by generals Alvaro Obregón (1920-1924) and Plutarco
Elias Calles (1924-1928). The dates in brackets are years of their presidential terms.
13 Knight (1986: 500).
14 See Malia (1994) and Cheshkov (1994).
surpass these models and to propel Russia into a completely new social and economic reality.\textsuperscript{15}

The primary motivation for the creation of the PNR was pragmatic and political rather than ideological. Its founding father, Plutarco Elias Calles acted out of an acute political need for a centralized organization that would serve to bring a large number of “regional caciques and revolutionary caudillos and their political parties and movements”\textsuperscript{16} under the control of the central state. The Party was also meant to provide an institutional solution to the problem of presidential succession – every change of top executive in the 1920s was accompanied by violence.\textsuperscript{17} The adherents of the Constitutionalist faction had extremely diverse political leanings, revolutionary histories, professional and ideological backgrounds – their coming together into a single party would not have been possible on the basis of a very specific and well-developed ideology. The party subsequently went through two transformations, but even the final version, the PRI of 1946, did not stand on a very elaborate ideological foundation. The Party contended itself with a broad commitment to social justice that was implied in its being the “institutional embodiment of the Revolution.”\textsuperscript{18} From its very inception in 1928 and to the end of its domination in 2000 it was meant to be an organization capable of incorporating very diverse and divergent social interests, an expression of the state that served as the main arbiter between different groups and classes – such mission precluded

\textsuperscript{15} See Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008), Malia (1994).
\textsuperscript{17} Carranza was assassinated after the end of his presidential term in 1920; Obregón – after his reelection in 1928. 1934, the year when Lázaro Cárdenas became president, was the first time when presidential succession brought only exile, but not physical elimination to the incumbent (Calles).
\textsuperscript{18} Collier and Collier (1991: 570).
the formulation of any kind of messianic and exclusive ideology. In the words of Linz, the PNR-PRM-PRI was based on “the minimum common denominator of the [ruling] coalition,” which allowed the rulers to neutralize “a maximum of potential opponents” and “to retain the loyalty of disparate elements” and facilitated “adaptation to changing conditions.”

2.1.2.2 Soviet Russia

Instead of deriving its agenda directly from Russia’s social and political reality, the Bolshevik Party based its instrumental programs on an adaptation of Marxism – a theory that arose from the analysis of “advanced industrial societies” whose developmental trajectories have been fundamentally different. According to Marx and Engels, Russian society was by no means ready for a socialist revolution at the eve of the world war. The arguments of the ideological fathers did not dissuade the Bolsheviks from trying to build socialism in Russia. Lenin agreed that “the objective social conditions” in Russia were not yet ripe and that the socialist revolution could not take place through the spontaneous mobilization of the exploited classes. Yet in his view this was a very strong argument not against turning Russia into the first socialist society of the world, but in favor of doing so under the leadership and the control of a strong “vanguard party” that would “force the hand of history” through violence and class warfare. As Scott (1998) cogently argues, the Bolshevik leaders had a typical mentality of social engineers, for whom social reality and local context in their current state were not an objective

limitation to be respected, but “an annoyance to be circumvented,” a challenge and a call to a large-scale transformation campaign.\textsuperscript{22}

The ideological universalism and maximalism were clearly among the main causes of the unprecedented ruthlessness with which the Party began to reshape the Russian society once it came to power. From October 1917 to Stalin’s death in 1953 the rulers’ field of vision was so completely filled with the ideological constructs that they became completely blind to the social reality of the country they had to deal with. They saw all social cleavages and conflicts in Russia in terms of Marxist ideal types. Hence, their policies were aimed at the elimination of the original causes of socio-economic inequality – private property, profits, and the market – along with those individuals and groups that they saw as the social base for these “capitalist” institutions and the carriers of the “bourgeois” values. By founding the entire Soviet system on the ideology of building socialism through class struggle and warfare, the central state essentially claimed for itself and its agents the exclusive right to define the social identity of each citizen. By the mid-1930s, when the regime consolidation was complete, it became very difficult to form and maintain collective identities different from those imposed by the state. As Malia notes, while the Soviet system could not achieve “total state control over society,” it has managed to create “a total state framework of social organization.”\textsuperscript{23}

The Soviet messianic ideology has backfired on the very people that it was supposed to benefit: in practice the building of socialism led “not to an assault on the

\textsuperscript{22} Scott (1998: 197, 210).
\textsuperscript{23} Malia (1994: 172).
specific abuses of ‘capitalism’, but to an assault on reality tout court.”

The improvement in the living standards and general well-being of the population – seen in the West as the ultimate rationale for the industrial modernization – became a concern for the Soviet rulers only when the pursuit of abstract goals drove the population to such extremes of penury and made the entire system so unworkable as to threaten the regime’s very survival.²⁵ Ironically, the opportunistic, pragmatic, and even cynical builders of the Mexican revolutionary state, who “avoided sacred texts” and instead had “cobbled together a broad, eclectic, inconsistent program,”²⁶ turned out to be much more humane and better attuned to the social reality of their country than the Bolsheviks, whose main goal was to eliminate all inequality, exploitation, poverty, and injustice, first in Russia and eventually worldwide.

2.1.3 Sources of Legitimation

Both parties originally justified their power monopolies with references to revolutionary expediency and legitimacy: the Party presented itself to society as the only actor capable of fulfilling the revolutionary mandate and the institutional embodiment of the social revolution that brought it to power. When seen in this light, the final version of the Mexican Party’s name, Partido Revolucionario Institucional – the Revolutionary Institutional Party – no longer sounds as an oxymoron and very adequately reflects its raison d’être. In order to carry out its social justice mandate the revolutionary state needed social foundations that would be qualitatively different from those of the “old

²⁵ See Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008), Malia (1994).
²⁶ Knight (1986: 498).
regime.” This task required the restructuring of the “old” society and changing the balance of power between the dominant and the subordinate classes.\(^{27}\)

The PNR-PRM-PRI was closer to a true political party than its Soviet analogue, because the Mexican state did use it as a vehicle for electoral mobilization and because it gradually became more and more dependent on the existence of opposition parties that lent it “the aura of electoral competition.”\(^{28}\) In a marked contrast to the Bolsheviks, the victorious faction of the Mexican Revolution found it necessary to preserve regular elections both as an additional, procedural source of regime legitimation and as a mechanism for the rotation of elites. The periodic electoral shows that the PRI always won were the central element of the Mexican “surreality” – the electoral process was tightly controlled and routinely manipulated at all levels, and both the rulers and the ruled knew these “political democracy” procedures to be only a “disguise” for the Party’s authoritarian domination.\(^{29}\) Yet, even though the electoral institutions in Mexico were intentionally “corrupted” so that they could not serve the purpose of power contestation, when the process of political democratization did begin in earnest, it proved possible to refill the empty institutional shells with real substance. To make the electoral show more credible, the PRI tolerated the existence of one true opposition party over most of its lifespan. This party, Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN, the Party of National Action) was created by a coalition of right-wing politicians and entrepreneurs in 1939. Since the early

\(^{27}\) Malia (1994); Collier and Collier (1991: 205).
\(^{29}\) Gómez Tagle (2007).
1980s it gradually turned into a real electoral adversary for the PRI; its candidate’s victory in the presidential elections of 2000 has put an official end to the PRI regime.

There are two major reasons why the Mexican electoral show was much more elaborate and consequential than the Soviet one. The first is that while in the Soviet Union elections had no importance apart from being a formal mechanism of “plebiscitary legitimation” at home and a democratic façade maintained for the benefit of foreign observers, in Mexico they also satisfied the regime’s internal needs – those of stability, succession, and conflict-resolution. Regular elections of federal and regional executives and legislatures and the ban on presidential reelection allowed the Mexican party-state to resolve the problem of executive elite rotation to which the Soviet regime found no institutional solution. The second reason is that electoral procedures were highly incompatible with the functioning of the Soviet regime, given its foundational ideology, because for the Bolsheviks elections were the political cornerstone of the “bourgeois society” that had to disappear along with the capitalist mode of production.

Since the Bolsheviks were “forcing the hand of history” by building socialism in a country that was not “objectively ready” for it, they could not rely on the electoral process for the elimination of political competitors, because these competitors were more numerous and had much stronger social bases than the Bolsheviks themselves. Yet, since the Party was guided by a superior ideology and a priori declared the only vehicle for

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30 Magaloni (2006: 32) considers the mechanism of presidential succession to be the one “truly exceptional trait of the Mexican political system,” which distinguishes it from other “hegemonic-party autocracies” – political systems in which “one political party remains in office uninterruptedly under semi-authoritarian conditions while holding regular multiparty elections.”

31 See Malia (1994) and Cheshkov (1994).
delivering Russia into socialism, all rival political organizations became its class enemies the moment it seized state power and, as such, they had to be eliminated by force.\textsuperscript{32} The Bolsheviks saw the events of 1917 as “a once-and-forever transmission of democratic legitimacy from people to the Party,” and from the spring of 1918 onwards the political police became the main instrument of eliminating political opposition.\textsuperscript{33} By 1923 all other political parties were completely eliminated, and until 1990 the state party was the only player in the political field.\textsuperscript{34}

By contrast, the Mexican revolutionaries did not feel arrogant or audacious enough to rely exclusively on force. In Knight’s apt description, the Carrancistas and the Sonorans “were products, not initiators of the revolutionary process”: unlike the Bolsheviks, they did not come into the revolutionary fighting with preconceived, fully formed, and immutable agendas. Thus, “their action was informed by the experience of the Revolution as it unfolded: hence their celebrated opportunism, pragmatism, and cynicism. Hence, they avoided sacred texts [and] cobbled together a broad, eclectic, inconsistent program. … Hence [they called] for reconstruction, hard work, social equilibrium, and shared effort.”\textsuperscript{35}

Just like the Bolshevik state, the new Mexican regime was confronted with multiple types of regional and local violence throughout the 1920s – landlord and military rebellions, the Cristero War, local agrarian struggles, and banditry – and had to assert and justify its monopoly on power. However, while the Bolsheviks relied almost

\textsuperscript{32} Malia (1994: 102-106).
\textsuperscript{33} Malia (1994: 106, 118).
\textsuperscript{34} Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008).
\textsuperscript{35} Knight (1986: 498-500).
exclusively on coercion of the Red Army, “class warfare,” and the political police for this purpose, the Constitutionalists used a much wider repertoire of strategies in order to tame the country whose capital they occupied in 1915. The “punitive expeditions were reserved for the incorrigibles” – such as the Yaqui Indians of Sonora, the Mayo Indians of Sinaloa, and the Zapatistas – while the less formidable and independent adversaries and opponents were “brought into the political mainstream” through a combination of “individual glad-handing, education, party and union organizations, [and] manipulation of popular [and revolutionary] symbols.”\textsuperscript{36} Throughout the 1920s the revolutionaries had gradually made a transition from violence and coercion to more subtle and institutionalized forms of political control.\textsuperscript{37} The creation of the official state party – the PNR – in 1929 was an important milestone of this transition.

\textbf{2.2 The Revolutionary Period (1910-1920): Ambivalent Effects on Social Autonomy}

The revolutionary period is usually delimited by the deposition of the old regime and the destruction of its main power bases on the one end and with the definitive seizure of the central state by one revolutionary faction on the other.\textsuperscript{38} – had very different duration and character in Russia and in Mexico. In Mexico, this process began with the resignation of Porfirio Díaz from the presidency in 1911 and ended with the election of Venustiano Carranza as president in 1917. The time between these two dates was filled with a series of revolutionary wars conducted by a multiplicity of regionally based

\textsuperscript{36} Knight (1986: 521).
\textsuperscript{37} Collier and Collier (1991), Knight (1986: 492).
\textsuperscript{38} See Goldstone (2003).
revolutionary armies. In Russia, the complex process of demoting the old regime was compressed into the short interval between February and October 1917, and the revolutionary war took place after the Bolshevik faction had laid claim to the central state. In Mexico the main “carriers” of revolution were regional revolutionary armies with broad social bases. Carranza – the leader of the victorious faction and the first post-revolutionary president – was only one among many revolutionary generals; the National Revolutionary Party was created as an instrument of compromise and as a mechanism for transitioning from violent to “normal,” institutional politics. In Russia the Bolshevik Party originally had no mass base; after it came to power in October 1917 it quickly institutionalized violence and coercion as the main strategy of dealing with political opponents.

2.2.1 The Revolutionary Crisis and the Fate of the Old Society

The Russian revolution originated from a regime crisis that was much more profound and all-encompassing than that of the Porfirian regime. The full reasons for this difference go a long way back in history and cannot be fully detailed in this study. Overall, the pre-revolutionary levels of economic dispossession and political oppression were much higher in Russia than in Mexico. The memory of peasant serfdom was less than half a century old in Russia by the time the revolution began. While the Mexican revolution was in the large part driven by the grievances of individuals and communities

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39 Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008) give a very detailed and comprehensive account of the development of the Russian autocratic state since the 16th century. The essays in the volume edited by Servín, Reina, and Tutino (2007) give a comprehensive account of the Mexican political evolution in the period between Independence and Revolution. Please refer also to the discussion of Russia as an extreme case of the state-centered matrix in Chapter 1.
who have been deprived of their historical land rights during the Porfiriato, the peasantry of European Russia lost any resemblance of a “historic right to land” back in the 16th century, and the “liberation” of 1861 has not been accompanied by an agrarian reform. In Mexico, the 19th century was the time of intense political turbulence in Mexico and the stratum of the Mexican population endowed with political rights was extremely small between 1824 and 1910. Nevertheless, under the rule of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910) Mexico did experience a constitutional regime that could be described as an oligarchic republic.40 By contrast, the Russian monarchy had no constitutional limits of any kind until the final decade of its existence when Main Laws of 1906 were forced onto the monarchy in the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution. This autocratic state presided over an extremely fragile social order, in which the peasant majority had no sufficient material stake. Thus, within the span of one year – between February and October 1917 – Russia was confronted with a host of political issues that Mexico taken most of the 19th century to resolve. The political system of the Russian Empire that came to the point of rapid and complete collapse in 1917 was so over-centralized and deprived of feedback mechanisms that, once it began unraveling, all its structures – “the state, the army, the Empire, the economy, and both the urban and the rural societies – came apart simultaneously.”41

40 Mexico’s first constitution was the result of the negotiations between Spain and representatives of its former colonies in Cadiz in 1812. This constitution was of crucial importance for the subsequent development of the country, because it granted constitutional legitimacy to the traditional indigenous communities – pueblos – that have acted as a preserve of local and communal autonomy throughout the subsequent two centuries, in spite of the multiple attempts of the central state to dismantle them. See articles by Guerra, Annino, and Reina in Servín, Reina, and Tutino, eds. (2007).
The First World War gave an additional and very significant impetus for the disintegration of both the political and the social system in Russia. It did not have a comparable effect on Mexico, because there the “old regime” had been toppled before the war started and because Mexico remained very much on the margins of this international conflict, while Russia found itself in its very midst. The causes of the 1910 political crisis in Mexico were entirely internal, and its population bore no costs of direct fighting that were so significant for the Russian peasants. Most Mexican revolutionaries took little heed of the international context and problems beyond the issue of the US interventions into the revolutionary fighting.\textsuperscript{42} Although the war did inflict economic damage on Mexico in that it interrupted the European trade flows, the overall economic balance for the country was a positive one, because it benefited from the wartime boom in the United States.\textsuperscript{43} National politics did not always have the top priority for the leaders and members of the numerous revolutionary armies that were often created primarily to address regional and even local problems.

The war both deepened the crisis of the already strained Russian economy and intensified the social tensions that were already very significant by the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and became greatly magnified during the 1905-06 revolutionary episode. Malia (1994) argues that the war has supplied the two mass phenomena that gave the events of 1917 the character of a social revolution – the mass desertion of peasant-soldiers from the

\textsuperscript{42} Neither the invasion of Veracruz in April – November 1914 nor the Pershing expedition of 1916-1917 have had a significant effect on the course of the civil war. Knight (1986) argues that Wilson’s recognition of the Carranza regime and the exclusive arms aid that it received from the US after November 1915 did not give the Carrancistas anything resembling a decisive advantage in their fight against other revolutionary armies that continued until 1920.

\textsuperscript{43} Katz (2007).
front in the summer of 1917 and the subsequent “universal peasant jacquerie” that resulted in a nationwide liquidation of landed gentry and large private estates.\textsuperscript{44} The course of the Mexican revolution was much more “natural” in the sense that it depended much less on the promotion of abstract and radical ideology and was to a much greater extent determined by domestic events. By contrast, the Russian revolutionaries saw Russia’s participation in the “imperialist European war” as one of the main crimes of the old regime and hoped that the events in Russia would cause a chain reaction of socialist revolutions throughout Western Europe. According to Malia (1994), the Bolshevik socialist experiment in Russia became possible precisely because the war provided it with “a social tabula rasa” by “pulverizing civil society and creating a void of countervailing [social] power.”

### 2.2.2 Intensity and “Social Depth” of Revolutionary Violence

If one compares the social landscape in Russia and Mexico by the end of the civil war fighting in mid-1920s, the extent to which the structures of the old society were destroyed in Russia is truly striking. While the revolutionary violence in Mexico has dramatically affected the old elites,\textsuperscript{45} it did not result in the elimination “of all social groups above the ‘toiling masses’ as cohesive bodies.”\textsuperscript{46} Why were the effects of the revolution and the civil war on Russian society so much more devastating, even though

\textsuperscript{44} Malia (1994: 106).
\textsuperscript{45} See Knight (1986) and Katz (1981).
\textsuperscript{46} Malia (1994: 132).
the fighting in Mexico lasted longer\textsuperscript{47}. Part of the explanation lies in the profound ideological difference between the revolutionary factions that gained control over the central state. Knight (1986) argues that the Mexican revolution can be described in Tocquevillean terms of having “served to reinforce – rather than to subvert – many of the features of the old regime it overthrew.” Although the political base of the Carrancista – Sonoran regime was very different from that of the Porfiriato, there was continuity between the two in the broad goals of “capitalist economic development and state-building.”

There was no such continuity of state aspirations in the Russian case: while Russia in 1860-1914 can be compared to Mexico under Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910) in that both states aimed at turning their countries into “modern capitalist societies, broadly along the lines of Western Europe and North America,”\textsuperscript{48} the “modernization from above” in post-1917 Russia had a fundamentally different goal. According to Malia (1994) the “unprecedented social leveling” that occurred in Russia between 1917 and 1921 would never have been possible, had the revolutionary faction that seized state power not made the abolition of private property its central aim. The Carrancista regime allowed the revolutionary generals to enrich themselves from the land and enterprises confiscated during the revolutionary war; it also returned land and property to many members of the old Porfirian elite, on the condition that they would not meddle into

\textsuperscript{47} In Mexico the armed confrontations between pro- and anti-revolutionary forces began in 1911; the fighting at the local and regional level continued until the end of the 1920s. In Russia the fighting began in 1917 and was largely over by the end of 1922.

\textsuperscript{48} Knight (1986: 500).
politics. On the contrary, the Bolsheviks carried out systematic land and property confiscation from the old elites; these properties were nationalized, and the Party made it clear to all social groups that they could not be privately used for any kind of economic gain.

### 2.2.3 The Decisive Issue of Private Property

The revolutionary state in Mexico was born out of the war waged in 1914-15 by the professional armies of the North. As Knight (1986) argues, the necessities of these armies (led by Villa, Carranza, Obregon, and their numerous allies) determined the attitudes of their leaders towards agrarian reform. While the revolutionaries did confiscate the haciendas from Porfrian landowners, they did not distribute the land to the peasants, as Zapata’s army did in the South. Instead, the revolutionary generals became the managers of these estates themselves or contracted them out to operators. This arrangement had two important consequences. First, the productive potential of the estates was preserved, and the army could be provided with resources obtained, just as in the Porfrian times, through the export of produce and cattle to the United States. Second, the generals became entrepreneurs – they were given a sizeable material stake in the post-revolutionary regime and formed one of the nuclei of its new elite. After 1915 Carranza made the return of the haciendas to their original owners into something akin to an official policy. According to Knight (1986), “the Carranza regime showed itself

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Knight (1986: 458-65).
Malia (1994); Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008).
Katz (1981); Knight (1986).
remarkably forgiving as regards property rights: old Porfiristas could return to their estates, so long as they eschewed politics."

The Bolsheviks solved the same problem of army provision in a very different way during the Civil War years. In the summer 1918 they introduced a system of forced grain and resource requisition from the peasants that formed the core of the War Communism – a system of political and economic measures that drove the country to the brink of complete economic and political collapse by 1921. This system was the result of desperate efforts to bridge the enormous gap between ideology and reality: since the Bolshevik state was proclaimed to be the state of workers and peasants, it was expected that the peasants would provide the grain to the workers in the cities and the army out of class solidarity and without any regard for economic incentives. When the peasants refused to comply with this ideological commandment, the revolutionaries waged an all-out coercive campaign on the village, declaring it to be the preserve of capitalism and private property that had to be destroyed.

2.3 State-Society Relations During “the Formative Years”: 1920-1940

2.3.1 Incorporation of the Lower Classes

Incorporation of the lower classes by the state built in the aftermath of a social revolution is a highly ambivalent process that increases the political and economic power

54 See Malia (1994: ch.4) and Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008: ch.5).
of the previously disenfranchised groups at the expense of reducing their autonomy.\textsuperscript{55} By declaring itself to be the champion of better life for all its people, the revolutionary state claimed the right to intervene into spheres of social life to which its predecessors had no or little access. On the one hand, the revolutionary state had acknowledged, for the first time in the country’s history, that the “lower classes” had legitimate interests and granted them the right to organize and to express these interests in the political sphere. On the other hand, the state reserved the right to determine what individuals and organizations were the “legitimate representatives of a particular class or group”\textsuperscript{56} and what forms that representation could take. As Scott (1998) argues, a state that sets ambitious goals has to have very detailed knowledge of the society that it purports to rule. In the process of making social reality more “legible” and “manageable” for its agents, the state also acquires greater degree of social control.

As Knight (1994) points out, “it is empirically almost impossible for popular movements to avoid the embrace of the state,” especially if the state in question comes to power through social revolution in a country with an economically marginalized and politically disenfranchised majority. “The relationship between the state and popular movements is a mutually conditional one, albeit rarely, if ever, an equal one.” In order to stay in power, the new revolutionary state needed popular support; popular causes, in turn, “needed state champions.” In the words of Vorozheikina (2001) for many among the newly incorporated the feeling of becoming political and social protagonists was well

\textsuperscript{55} In this context, I define power as the capacity for social change – the ability to reshape the existing institutions, norms, and patterns of behavior. Autonomy is the ability to set one’s own goals, to implement one’s own vision of social change, as opposed to that of the powerful actors, especially of the state.

\textsuperscript{56} Hernández Castillo (2006; fn.6).
worth the price – the dependence on the state institutions and leaders that made this transformation possible.

While the Bolshevik regime was the first to incorporate the workers and the peasants into the political, economic, social and cultural life of the country, it did so in an extremely authoritarian fashion: its complete monopoly of political power after 1921 allowed it to dictate the terms on which this incorporation took place. The Bolshevik state was not the one with which peasants, workers, or any other social actor could negotiate: the complete collapse of the old order left no social or political structure with enough power to challenge the Bolsheviks effectively. The Party’s aim – to build socialism – was far more radical than the demands of the social groups in whose name it supposedly acted. Industrial production was, for obvious ideological reasons, the first sphere to be “colonized” by the state. The Party called for nationalization of industry and centralized state planning, while the workers aspired to secure the standard package of labor rights and to the anarcho-syndicalist models of direct worker control over production. From the factory floor, the drive to mobilize everyone from above and to eliminate all independent players spread to other spheres of social life. The Party’s ultimate aim in agriculture was the creation of large-scale mechanized production units on state land, while the result of peasants’ self-made agrarian revolution of 1917-1918 was “an egalitarian sea of peasant households oriented towards subsistence farming” and communal land ownership. The Bolshevik state eliminated these alternative visions by subjugating the workers’ unions in 1921 and destroying the traditional rural commune in 1930-33.

The Mexican Party-state accepted that the society which it governed was composed of a variety of social groups, whose goals and interests were divergent. From its very beginning, the role of the revolutionary state was to serve as the “sole arbiter of inter-group relations.”\(^{58}\) The architects of the PNR-PRM-PRI system have gradually aggregated the diverse social groups into a few large corporations – “workers,” “peasants,” “entrepreneurs,” and “the popular sector” (mostly the state employees) – each of which was allowed to defend their socio-economic interests vis-à-vis the state and the other corporations as long as its actions did not challenge the state’s monopoly over political power.\(^{59}\) The main difference from the Soviet system lies in the fact that the Mexican state ideology was not based on the notion that each and every group in society must share the commitment to a single supreme goal. While the regime did base its claim to legitimacy and power monopoly on a commitment to “social justice” that was to be achieved through “capitalist economic development” guided by a strong central state,\(^{60}\) state-society relations in Mexico from the 1920s onwards were characterized by a tacit agreement of all significant players that each could find a way to comply with this “national project” while also satisfying its own interests. Knight summed this attitude up very precisely in his description “the revolutionary entrepreneurs,” who “conceived of their individual efforts [to enrich themselves] as serving the nation, as well as themselves, and thus conforming to the collective, revolutionary ethic.”\(^{61}\)

\(^{58}\) Collier and Collier (1991: 246).
\(^{59}\) Fox (1994).
\(^{60}\) Collier and Collier (1991: 579); Knight (1986: 497).
\(^{61}\) Knight (1986: 511).
By contrast, in the Soviet Union the state not only defined a much more specific and unattainable supreme goal – the construction of a new political, economic, and social system that would constitute an alternative to capitalism – but also refused to grant to any social group or individual the right to organize and act in the name of interests and motivations unrelated to this “national project.” Each individual’s and group’s right of access to vital resources, social and material status, and (at least before 1953) often their very existence were determined through the state’s evaluation of their loyalty and contribution to the supreme goal.\(^\text{62}\) Thus, while in Mexico individuals and groups could pursue a certain range of socio-economic goals without threatening the political monopoly of the central state, in the Soviet Union even such limited autonomy was impossible, because “every aspect of life was made political; and everywhere the politics expressed the ideological purposes of the party-state.”\(^\text{63}\) “The building and defense of socialism” was the main reason for the existence of the central state and the magnitude of the task – the justification for its virtually unlimited power, and this turned any social group that operated autonomously into a political challenger and an agent of subversion.

It is with respect to this difference in the degree of social autonomy that a clear distinction can be drawn between the authoritarian Mexican and the totalitarian Soviet regimes. While in Mexico the political sphere (in which social actors could not contend with the state) has become hypertrophied, the remaining non-political space, in which individuals and groups could autonomously pursue goals and interests that had nothing to do with the state, was still significantly larger than in the Soviet Union. There, the


necessity to “subscribe, or at least render lip service, to socialism as the supreme meaning of life” in all social situations, aside, perhaps, from the circle of family and closest friends has weakened all non-state bases of group cohesion. Malia (1994) calls the end product of state assault of the 1930s a “shadow society,” which “found covert ways to resist or evade the pretensions of the state, thereby restricting [its] freedom of maneuver.” However, this “enduring recalcitrance” was the weapon of the weak in that until the very end of the regime there emerged no collective social actor that the regime did not see as a threat to be eliminated, but instead as a contender that could be bargained with and accommodated in the same way that the PRI had done in Mexico.

All of the above should not be taken to mean that social autonomy had completely disappeared under the Soviet regime. The state was not omnipresent – it went only as far as groups and individuals let it penetrate the social fabric. Even within “a total state framework of social organization” – “a context where politics, economy, and culture had all been collapsed into a ‘mono-organizational’ Party-state” – it was possible to create “islands” of autonomy, provided that they were hidden from state view by (sometimes very elaborate) “protective coloration.” The totalitarian dream of complete state control over collective action in all spheres of social life never quite came true in the Soviet Union. As Yanitsky explains, “even during the most repressive periods, centers of self-organization, reflection, and intellectual life kept functioning, albeit only in a latent form and within the confines of institutional structures sanctioned by the regime. As soon as

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64 The phrase belongs to James Scott (1985).
65 Fox (1994).
67 The term comes from Wiener (1988).
the repressions diminished, many social organizations sanctioned by the regime began to function – partly and by stealth – in the self-organization mode.”

Scott (1998) argues that there is a general mechanism behind the survival of the “informal life” under the regimes that “undertake social engineering on a large scale.” Such regimes are based on “radically simplified designs for social organization” and on oversimplified models of how the social world functions. This simplification is imposed on society through the state apparatus and administration mechanisms that are themselves very simple compared to the reality they act upon. By using massive coercion and acting upon societies that have been rendered defenseless by wars, economic crises, and revolutions, they might initially achieve a high degree of control, but this control can never be complete, or else the state collapses under its own weight. Over time, what makes such regimes survive are the spontaneous, informal processes that the state cannot call into being but that constitute the indispensable second side of the coin to the “simple” structures designed by the state.68

2.3.2 Limitations of Political Pluralism and Autonomy

The central state’s capacity to control local political and social life has been greater in the Soviet Union than in Mexico. The Mexican party-state linked its support bases at the regional and local level to the traditional and very deeply rooted institution of caciquismo – the power structure based on a political leader and patron, cacique that emerged from within the local society and acted as a mediator between his local or

regional clienteles and the central state.\textsuperscript{69} As Knight points out, the role of these structures under the revolutionary regime was distinct from the one they played under the Porfiriato: after the Revolution, they became part of the much more inclusionary networks that linked “people and government: local caciques, party bosses, ejidal bureaucrats, labor leaders.”\textsuperscript{70} These networks provided the party-state with one of its most important channels for communicating with society and made it possible for the society to make effective demands on the state.

In order to be effective, the caciques had to cultivate a local base of support: those who failed to deliver the goods and services demanded by their clients and disregarded their grievances were regularly toppled. This meant that the central state could not penetrate into local political and social life very deeply in places where such local and regional power networks were strong.\textsuperscript{71} As Rubin argues, “the presence of the Mexican state” constructed by Cárdenas was “uneven and incomplete” at the regional and local levels, because it was based not on “an all-controlling center,” but on “numerous changing forms … of domination and resistance.”\textsuperscript{72} While Cárdenas managed to transform “the national institutional landscape,” he also relied on the “human occupants of those institutions at the state level” who have been brought into positions of power through the revolutionary struggle and were often not personally beholden to him.\textsuperscript{73} The long-term result of such state structure was to limit the penetration of the central state

\textsuperscript{70} Knight (1992: 138).
\textsuperscript{71} The southern states of Chiapas, Guerrero, and Oaxaca are the most commonly cited examples of this phenomenon. See Harvey (1998), Bartra (1996), Rubin (1997).
\textsuperscript{72} Rubin (1996: 86-88).
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, p.102. See also Hernández Chávez (1979) and Hamilton (1982).
into society. Between the 1930s and the 1960s, cacique politics not only “challenged the directives and projects of the central state,” but also “sheltered and recreated forms of *local autonomy* [emphasis added], including distribution of the *ejido* land,\(^\text{74}\) use of indigenous language, administration of local justice and manipulation of electoral activity.”\(^\text{75}\) The death and displacement from power of many prominent regional and local “revolutionary” caciques in the 1950s-1960s have dramatically changed the political dynamics and contributed “to the emergence of new forms of political voice and negotiations” in the 1970s and 1980s.\(^\text{76}\)

By contrast, the Soviet system developed no similar mechanism that served at once to preserve a limited degree of local and regional political autonomy and had a stabilizing effect on the regime as a whole. The degree of centralization and vertical control over political appointments was much higher in the Soviet Union, especially during the Stalinist period. Although the central control over republican and regional administrations did diminish dramatically during Khrushchev’s and especially Brezhnev’s tenure,\(^\text{77}\) the actions of subnational party bosses and patrons were much less conducive to the development of social autonomy than those of their Mexican counterparts. A typical Soviet patron was originally a stranger appointed from Moscow who developed his clientelist network from above, rather than being a product of the local political and social processes.

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\(^{74}\) See Section 2.3.4.  
\(^{75}\) Rubin (1996: 114).  
2.3.3 Promises not Kept: The Peasants in the 1920s

The time between the land grab of 1917-1918 and the “grain procurement crisis” of 1927-28 that led to collectivization was a rare period for most Russian peasants\(^{78}\) when they had an opportunity “to organize their own affairs,” because the old police and fiscal institutions of the central state had collapsed, and the new Bolshevik state still had largely no control over the countryside.\(^{79}\) However, this “experiment in self-organization” took place under most unfavorable conditions – economic crisis and displacement caused by the First World War mobilization were compounded by the violence, uncertainty, and scarcity of the Civil War (1917-1921) – and was forcefully aborted by the Bolsheviks at a very early stage, before it could produce strong and lasting social structures. The Mexican peasant armies of the Center and the South fought in the name of villages and towns whose experience of local autonomy and self-government often went back to Independence or even to the colonial period.\(^{80}\) By contrast, the peasants of European Russia had to begin from scratch in 1917, because their “traditional commune”

\(^{78}\) This argument applies mostly to the European Plane, where serfdom was the rule of the land; I do not discuss the special cases of the “industrial peasants” in the Urals, of the Cossacks, and of the runaway peasants that escaped serfdom and settled in the European South and in Siberia. Not surprisingly, the regions where the peasantry was free and where the commune (obshchina) did not exist produced some of the strongest peasant movements of the 1920s. [See Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008: vol. I), Figes (1989 and 1997), Yaney (1982)]. Region-specific types of peasant movements during Mexican and Russian revolutions lend themselves to fascinating and very informative comparisons that are, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this study. In particular, strong parallels exist between the Zapatistas of Mexico and the Makhnovtsy of Southern Russia and Ukraine – see Golovanov (2008) on Makhno, Womack (1968) on Zapata, and Wolf (1969) for a brief comparison.


\(^{80}\) See Annino (2007), Knight (1986), Tutino (1986).
(obshchina, mir) was an institution that since the 16th century had primarily served the fiscal and military needs of the imperial state.\textsuperscript{81}

During the Civil War of 1917-1921, local peasant leaders emerged all over Russia to defend their villages and districts against forced requisitions of grain, livestock, and men, repressions and marauding by both the White and the Red Armies. In places where these leaders had strong bases of local and regional support Unions of Laboring Peasants were created and functioned essentially as autonomous peasant republics. The main goal of these republics was the defense of the results of the land redistribution that the peasants carried out in 1917-1918, when they confiscated the lands that belonged to gentry, church, and the state. What made these armed movements so numerous and widespread was the Bolshevik state itself: its policy of forced grain requisitions introduced in 1918 in order to feed the cities had called into life peasant resistance movements that were so numerous and widespread that by 1920 they amounted to a nation-wide peasant war against the new regime.\textsuperscript{82} In contrast to the central and northern Mexico, where the peasant armies were usually formed before the land redistribution took place and were directed against the landholders of the old regime,\textsuperscript{83} the Russian peasant armies were created to defend their right to work the land that they had already

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\textsuperscript{81} See Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008: vols. I and II).
\textsuperscript{83} The regional and local diversity of the Mexican revolutionary movements is quite formidable. This argument applies to the “original revolutionary zones” – Chihuahua (Villa), Durango (Arrietas), La Laguna, eastern San Luis Potosi (Cedillos in La Huasteca), Morelos (Zapata), Tlaxcala (Arenas, Máximo Rojas) – “where the power of landlord and cacique was most resented and precarious.” [The names of the revolutionary leaders are given in parentheses.] See Knight (1986), Tobler (1994), and Tutino (1986) for detailed and careful discussions of these regional variations and for the explanation of the situation in the Bajio and center-west (Jalisco, Aguascalientes, Michoacán, Guerrero), and in most of the Southeast (Oaxaca, Puebla, Veracruz, Tabasco, and Chiapas) – the zone of local landlord-directed and peasant-supported rebellions against the central state, collectively known as felicismo.
\end{flushleft}
taken vis-à-vis the central state that came to deprive them of all that they could produce. In other words, for the Mexican peasants the right to land came together with the right to choose whether they used it for subsistence or for some other purpose. Meanwhile, the Russian peasants found themselves up in arms against the revolutionary state that denied them the right to be subsistence producers on the land that they themselves had taken before the new state had even come into existence. For them independence and autonomy had come to mean, first and foremost, the right to produce food for themselves, not for the state.

In Russia, land redistribution and elimination of rural elites – landed gentry, priests, merchants, money-lenders – had reduced the social differentiation in the village and returned it to an archaic and traditional state, where subsistence was the main goal of agriculture. The relationship of this “egalitarian sea” of smallholdings84 to the central state remained highly ambiguous throughout the 1920s, but it was precisely this ambiguity that gave the peasants some room for maneuver, and, as it turned out, more freedom than they were ever going to have within the next 70 years. The Land Code of 1922 made the state the sole owner of all lands in the country, thus making the communal and private land ownership that dominated in the countryside a legal impossibility. At the same time, the Land Code gave legal status to the “land societies” – the post-revolutionary reincarnation of the “commune,” where local affairs were decided through general assembly. These village assemblies gave effective voice to the “privileged” (and most productive) peasants, who were disenfranchised by the Constitution of 1918 as

84 The term belongs to Malia (1994).
“propertied classes” and could not vote in the elections for rural Soviets. The rural Soviets – the main and often the only state institutions present in the countryside – were often financially dependent on the village assembly for funds and much less competent in local decision-making; the share of Communists among their members in 1923-27 never went above 17%. This state of affairs, where the de-facto land ownership had no legal basis, but where the peasants were able to act as political and economic agents at the local level, was, however, a temporary one: the Bolsheviks viewed the New Economic Policy as a temporary concession to the countryside, which their state could not yet control.

2.3.4 The 1930s: Cardenismo and Stalinism Compared

If one compares the situation of the Russian and the Mexican peasants around the year 1940 – the time, by which both regimes have acquired their essential characteristics and the period of revolutionary state-building was largely over – the contrast is drastic. The Cárdenas administration has, to its best ability, fulfilled the revolutionary demand and restored the system of communal land ownership through the creation of ejidos.85 Meanwhile, the Soviet state has deprived the peasants of land and destroyed the traditional rural commune through collectivization. The results of post-revolutionary institutionalization for the Russian peasants were all the more ironic, since they were actually able to carry out their preferred version of the agrarian reform completely on their own, before the Bolsheviks could even get hold of state power. However, in 1929-

85 See Esteva, ed., (1985) for the history and statistics of the Mexican agrarian reform; see Knight (1991 and 1994) for an overall evaluation of the Cárdenas sexenio.
the Bolshevik state very deliberately dismantled this arrangement, because small peasant landholdings, whether communal or individual, had no place in its vision of socialist agriculture based on full nationalization of land and large-scale mechanized production units. The collectivization drive was a de facto war of extermination against all types of peasant producers that had, in the eyes of the state, any inclination for agricultural production based on private property for land, draft animals, and all other “means of production.”

Consequently, the results for the national economy and agriculture were also drastically different. From 1920s onwards, Mexico kept it focus on agricultural exports (from large commercial agricultural estates in the North) as one of the major sources of national revenue. By the mid-1940s, the commercial agricultural sector was able to feed the cities and to generate a large surplus, which was used to finance the industrialization program, while the subsistence ejido sector gave the peasants the ability to feed themselves. Meanwhile, in Russia the urban food supply remained insufficient at least until the early 1950s: half of the time between 1917 and 1953 food was subject to rationing. Neither could the collectivized peasants feed themselves – the peasant famines were frequent and widespread in the 1930s and 1940s. Finally, the country that used to be the number one wheat exporter of the world before the revolution could no longer generate the grain surpluses for export after 1917. Grain exports did take place and were used by the regime as one of the main sources of foreign currency, but the peasants who

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used to sell the grain voluntarily in the markets now confronted continuous state expropriations.

2.3.4.1 Patrons and Clients: The Mexican State and its Peasants

The history of the relationship between the Mexican party-state and the peasants is a long and convoluted one and cannot be fully recounted here. Its post-revolutionary episode that matters most for the evolution of peasant capacity for collective action is the institutionalization of the *ejido* both as the new form of corporatist enclave and as the preserve of social and economic autonomy for indigenous peasants under President Lázaro Cárdenas (1936-1940). The distribution of land to peasants through the creation of *ejidos* and the state recognition of communal land rights through the registration of *bienes comunales* has relegitimized the traditional communal form of land holding and gave new life to the rural base for collective action and local autonomy – the indigenous *pueblo*. The agrarian reform of the 1930s has essentially created a dual agricultural economy: the subsistence-oriented *ejidos* and *minifundios* sector that was concentrated in the center and southern regions of the country and gave employment to the bulk of the

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89 *Bienes comunales* are community lands that were traditionally used by peasant and indigenous communities, expropriated by the landowners during the Porfiriat and returned to the original owners during the Revolution. Amnesty International (2007: fn.7).

90 Outside the “core” area of the Central Highlands (México, Hidalgo, Puebla, Tlaxcala) numerous ejidos were also created in: La Laguna, Yucatán, Baja California, Sonora, as well as parts of Chiapas and Michoacán – see Knight (1994).

91 Land parcels of less than 5 hectares held under individual private property. See Lambert (1985).
rural labor force, and the capital-intensive export-oriented sector on large land holdings located mostly in the north. The initial capital for industrialization came primarily from the second, commercial sector; unlike in the Soviet Russia, there was no attempt either to squeeze the necessary resources from small agricultural producers or to bring them together into large-scale agricultural operations on state lands. The post-revolutionary leaders that preceded Cárdenas saw the *ejido* as a complimentary institution that would allow the rural laborers to sustain themselves during the periods when they were not employed in the commercial sector. Even though they considered this form of land tenure to be a transitional stage, what matters is that they recognized the right of the peasant majority to use the land primarily for subsistence purposes. Ejidal and *minifundista* land tenure in Mexico was not conditional on the peasants’ obligation to feed the rapidly growing cities – that task fell to the large-scale commercial enterprises, which have dramatically increased their output in the 1940s and 1950s and have also received the lion’s share of state investment in infrastructure and irrigation. The ultimate meaning of the arrangement was that the small group of agricultural entrepreneurs who controlled the best lands would both feed the cities and earn foreign currency needed during the first stages of industrialization, while the peasant majority was left to take care of itself on smaller parcels of what was often marginal land. By contrast, the Bolsheviks never even considered making a deal with the peasants.

The overall result of the agrarian reform in Mexico was to create a great de facto diversity of land tenure regimes and types of agricultural production, which made the diversity of land tenure regimes and types of agricultural production, which made the

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92 Lambert (1985); Knight (1986).
agriculture infinitely much more flexible and functional than in the Soviet Union, where
the same mode of production was imposed regardless of natural and social conditions. As
Ribeiro (1985) points out, the actual organizational forms and property regimes
subsumed under the heading of “ejido” were quite diverse – the spectrum ran from
individual exploitation of ejidal parcels to cooperation and even collectivization – the
precise content was defined by local conditions and necessities. The Mexican post-
revolutionary system has created a preserve for the natural, organic forms of peasant
organization, which has allowed the Mexican peasants to survive as a cohesive social
entity not only through the period of inward-oriented industrialization, but also through
the period of globalization of agriculture.93

What makes Cardenismo unique and unusual from the Russian point of view is
that it was a period of genuine two-way interaction between the state and society, during
which the demands and actions of popular organizations left a lasting imprint on state
institutions and policies. Popular mobilization was undoubtedly used by the regime for its
own purposes (primarily, the consolidation of political power), but the state also acted as
a genuine promoter of the interests of workers and peasants to a greater extent than ever
before or afterwards.94

Thus, the National Confederation of Peasants (CNC) created by Cárdenas in 1935
was an umbrella organization that brought together a large number of regional and local

93 The work of Barkin (2006), Bray (2003), and Toledo (2000) gives strong evidence for the considerable
resilience and capacity for adaptation that “the traditional rural Mexico” has shown in the face of economic
and political changes that had taken place since the 1980s. Their views contrast sharply with the common
opinion that the Mexican countryside has been destroyed by the withdrawal of the PRI state and by
NAFTA.
peasant organizations, which were the result of genuine popular mobilization of the early 1930s in reaction to Calles’s abandonment of agrarian reform. The incorporation of peasants (through CNC) into the Party-state in 1938 thus cannot be seen solely as an act of ensuring state control over the peasants; it has conferred unprecedented legitimacy onto the peasants’ agrarian demands and reconfirmed the “foundational” obligation of the state towards them. The manner in which the incorporation of peasants took place remains significant, even through from 1940 onwards the CNC has gradually lost its capacity for genuine popular mobilization and became above all an instrument of management and control that only attended to the peasants’ most urgent demands while keeping them “at a safe distance” from state power. As Knight points out, the fact that Cárdenas turned CNC into one of the corporatist “pillars” of the PRM meant a recognition on the part of the state that the peasants were a social actor of considerable strength and importance, and that the legitimacy of the state depended in part on satisfying their demands. At no time during its existence did the Soviet state exhibit a comparable willingness to incorporate the peasants’ “real” preferences (which were far from socialist) into its agrarian policy.

95 Lambert (1985).
96 Knight (1994: 92-94). As a result of this strong clientelistic relationship and of the greater ease with which the PRI could manipulate the electoral process more easily in rural areas, the peasants have remained PRI’s most solid base of electoral support. See Haber (2006) and Magaloni (2006).
2.3.4.2 Soviet Collectivization – A People’s Tragedy

In his comparative study of peasant roles in the 20th revolutionary wars Eric Wolf (1969) contrasted the almost immediate satisfaction of land demands in post-revolutionary Russia with the slow and reluctant movement of the new Mexican state towards an effective agrarian reform. Such a contrast can be made only if one limits, as Wolf indeed does, the Russian part of the analysis to the pre-1928 period. If the Russia-Mexico comparison of the gains that the peasants made through the Revolution is extended until the end of 1930s, the Russian side of the picture becomes considerably bleaker. The long-term significance of the Revolution for Russian peasants and the process through which the state “settled its accounts” with this “least revolutionary of the exploited classes” are in many senses the direct opposites of the Mexican story.

True enough, with the notable exception of the Zapatista zone, the Mexican landless peasants were not able to secure land ownership during the revolutionary war of 1910-1917 and had to wait until the Cárdenas administration (or even later) to receive the land, to which they had the right under the Constitution of 1917. By contrast, the Russian landless peasants made significant gains early on during the revolutionary period. According to Malia, “the peasant jacquerie of the winter 1917-1918 transformed the Russian countryside into an egalitarian sea of peasant households oriented towards subsistence farming.” This outcome was the result of a genuine revolution from below, in which the Bolsheviks played no part. What the peasants of Central European Russia

97 The phrase in the title belongs to Figes (1997). This section is based on Malia (1994) and Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008, vols. I and II).
did by themselves in 1917-1918 was equivalent to the complete elimination of large private estates – something that in Mexico was only achieved in the Zapatista zone, where the autonomous communities “took back” their land from the haciendas. Even Cardenas’s reforms did not come anywhere close to such a radical and complete land redistribution.

However, the Russian peasants gradually lost these gains to the state over the next two decades. The Soviet state had deprived Russian peasants of the revolutionary gains they made in 1917-18 in two stages. The first onslaught occurred during the period of War Communism (1918-21), when the abolition of private markets and the program of grain requisitions made it impossible for the peasants to receive legal income from what they produced on “their” land – the land that they captured during the “peasant revolt” of summer 1917 – spring 1918. The second (and this time mortal) blow was delivered in 1929-33 in the form of total collectivization. This blow was felt all the stronger, since it came after a short period of recovery under the New Economic Policy (1921-28). Stalin’s version of collectivization entailed a de facto nationalization not only of land, but also of all means of production. In the process, it deliberately and systematically destroyed both small- and medium-sized agrarian units, without discriminating between those that were engaged in subsistence production and those that produced for the market. This “ploughing under” of the countryside took place not just in the name of the greater economic efficiency that the large-scale planned agriculture was thought to bring, but also in the name of the “class warfare in the countryside.” It was a matter of destroying, once and for all, the social bases for self-organization and resistance in the villages that
gave the Bolsheviks so much trouble during the Civil war and the War Communism years.

Soviet collectivization was based on the assumption that “large-scale mechanized agriculture” would produce superior results for all crops and all climatic conditions\textsuperscript{99} – a heroic assumption that would be untenable anywhere in the world, much less in Russia. The equivalent of such policy in Mexico would have been to impose the “northern” ("Sonoran") method of production onto the Center and the South. The Mexican North had always been sparsely populated, so there the shortage of labor was compensated for by the large size of landholdings, construction of irrigation works, and high levels of chemical inputs and machinery use. Meanwhile, the densely populated Center and South made labor-intensive kinds of agriculture much more sensible. Ultimately the constitutional Article 27 and the Law of Agrarian Reform proved flexible enough (or easy enough to circumvent) for a huge diversity of production forms and scales to emerge and coexist in all regions of Mexico; even the umbrella category of the ejido in reality covered a large diversity of land tenure arrangements and production organizations\textsuperscript{100}.

Collectivization had destroyed the more capable and productive groups within peasantry – those that could and were beginning to serve as a basis for rural autonomy during NEP. Its social impact was particularly devastating in areas where the peasants did not receive land as the result of the 1917 revolutionary mobilization. These areas – the black soil belt in the south of the European Russia, the Southern Urals, and Eastern and Southern Siberia – contained the most productive and export-oriented peasant

\textsuperscript{100} Ribeiro (1985).
households. In addition, they also had significant potential for self-government, since, unlike the European Center, their peasant communities did not come together under serfdom and therefore did not take the artificial form of state-controlled peasant communes.

The effects of collectivization on Russian peasantry have been not only devastating, but also extremely long-lasting. As Malia (1994: 213) points out, collectivization produced “a chronically dysfunctional agrarian economy. The Russian peasantry had become … a demoralized, listless, and largely alcoholic workforce suspicious of state power and unwilling to take any initiative on its own.” By 1985 more than three quarters of the working-age rural population in Russia were employed at the collective farms – kolkhozes and sovkhozes. These agricultural enterprises gave not only employment, but also housing and a more or less complete (albeit low-quality) set of social services. Thus, during the Soviet period most Russian rural dwellers essentially stopped being peasants and turned into waged laborers employed by the state.\footnote{See Ovchintseva (2004).} Many have lost the sense of strong attachment to the land and of stewardship that is so often said to be the essential characteristic of the traditional peasantry and creates a natural link between peasant movements and social ecology.\footnote{See, for example, Scott (1976), Shanin (2002), Ribeiro (1985).} The overall level of paternalism and dependence on the state was much higher among the peasants of Soviet Russia than of PRI Mexico. Thus, the retreat of the state in the 1990s, when the neoliberal reforms had come to both Russian and Mexican countryside, has produced much more disastrous consequences in Russia. The Soviet state gave rural dwellers a higher overall level of
access to education, health and infrastructure than those available to peasants in Mexico. As a result, the expectations of Russian peasants vis-à-vis the state have been and remain much higher and their capacity to do things for themselves – much lower than that of their Mexican counterparts.

Just like the epoch of the First World War (1914-1918), the 1930s are a critical juncture in the evolution of state-society relations in Russia and Mexico – the point at which long-term differences between the two systems became “locked in” for decades to come. During Cárdenas’ presidency, the Mexican state opened up to society and drew strength from the social mobilization of the previously excluded classes (especially the peasants and the workers). For the Soviet state, the 1930s marked the closing of the state structures to spontaneous, independent activism “from below.” On the one hand, the programs of forced industrialization and collectivization were implemented in a way that broke the backbone of the worker and peasant resistance that was so significant in the early 1920s. On the other hand, as I will show later in this chapter, the state managed to penetrate into and to gain control over the spheres of social and intellectual life that had traditionally served as the preserves of social activism and autonomy. While both states had managed to drastically reduce the space for autonomous collective action through the process of selective incorporation, the character and the impacts of this incorporation have been very different. In particular, the Mexican variant of this process had allowed to accommodate and to preserve a much greater diversity of social and economic forms, especially in the countryside. This institutionalized diversity had not only contributed to
the stability of the regime for decades to come, but also laid the foundations for future social mobilizations that had no Soviet analogues.

2.4 Social Activists and the Soviet State: Incorporation in Return for Autonomy

Between 1917 and 1922 the revolutionary state acted primarily as a promoter of social activism: organizations with leftist social agendas could petition it for material resources and official recognition without having to give up their autonomy in exchange; they could interact with the state and receive help from it largely on their own terms. However, throughout the 1920s, as the new state gained both legitimacy and capacity for social control, it became increasingly weary of autonomous initiatives “from below.” There were many cases of individual state officials providing help and resources to social organizations\(^{103}\) out of genuine desire to support citizen initiatives. Yet the overall rationale of the state policy towards social movements and grassroots initiatives was to let them perform the functions which the state was yet not large and capable enough to perform. As it grew larger and stronger, the state progressively displaced autonomous organizations from all important spheres of social, intellectual, and cultural life either by reshaping them and subjecting them to the direct control of the corresponding state agencies, as it happened with Proletkult in 1921,\(^{104}\) or by eliminating them, if, like the

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\(^{103}\) Lunacharsky – head of the Commissariat for Education until 1929 – and Smidovich – the revolutionary leader of the Moscow Soviet and later president of the TsBK – were particularly sympathetic towards scientific and kraeved societies – see Weiner (1988).

\(^{104}\) See Malia (1994: 230-33). This radical Leftist organization for the “promotion of new proletarian culture” was created on the basis of an autonomous social movement in 1918 and by 1920 had more members than the Bolshevik party itself. At the end of the Civil War in 1921 it was “subordinated … to the Party and thus killed … as a [social] movement.”
Central Bureau for Local Studies (TsBK), their mass membership proved too independent-minded and unwilling to be subordinated.

The bitter irony of the story is that in the first post-revolutionary decade “active citizens” have quite willingly compromised the autonomy of their organizations by seeking affiliation with and support from the new state. The events of 1917 stimulated an unprecedented surge of new social energy and self-organization, especially among the urban dwellers. The new self-help and self-government organizations became part of the older wave of autonomous social organizing that emerged in the 1890s and reached its peak by 1905. Both “new” and “old” groups turned to the sympathetic individuals within the Bolshevik state apparatus for personal patronage, which was the key means of securing access to necessary resources. The lure of being able to conduct activities on a much greater scale through the centralized system of state institutions was too great and the interest of state officials and the overall state commitment to support social mobilization in the name of socialist construction seemed too sincere for the activists to suspect that an alliance with this “new and different” state would eventually turn into a trap. On the other hand, from 1917 to 1928 the new regime expressly relied on this great upsurge of spontaneous social initiative for its legitimacy: the promotion and institutionalization of grassroots initiatives was the best proof that in this new state every

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105 See Yanitsky (1991) and Weiner (1988). The Central Bureau for Local Studies (TsBK) was a network of organizations for the study of local nature, history, and culture; Weiner (1988: 45) describes it as “the only group led by scientists that could properly be called a mass organization”; by the late 1920s it had 60,000 members in its 2,270 local branches. The attack on TsBK began in 1930; a 1937 decree “decapitated” the organization by specifying that local societies could not unite into any kind of central organization (Weiner, 1998: 166). Thus, from being a powerful network with a central Moscow-based coordination body, the organization was reduced to isolated small local groups that could no longer act together.

person who cared could participate in government, that the construction of socialism was the enterprise that engaged the entire society.

It is not an accident that this period of greater tolerance for autonomous social organizing coincided with the years of the New Economic Policy, which was seen by many Party members as an inevitable, yet temporary retreat from the task of eliminating private property. The economic concessions granted in agriculture, service, and commerce sectors were the result of an acknowledgement, reluctantly made by the Party in the spring of 1921, that the forced and fast installation of socialism through the methods of War Communism was causing “the human and material fabric of the country” to disintegrate beneath the state.  

However, the situation changed with the abandonment of the New Economic Policy and the onset of industrialization and five-year plans in 1928. After that time, the regime no longer needed spontaneous initiative from below in any sphere; it sought either to eliminate the autonomous associations and movements all together or to make them completely dependent on the state. Before the advent of the Great Offensive – the program of forced industrialization and collectivization that was adopted by 1929 – the only requirement for a voluntary association to be registered with the state and continue to exist was that its goals did not contradict the Constitution and other laws. From early 1930s onwards, it could only continue its activities under the aegis of a particular state agency. This “statization” of social movements was carried out systematically and deliberately in all spheres, from university-based science and research and associations of

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radical leftist intelligentsia to municipal self-government, production communes and cooperatives, and the nation-wide movement for local studies (*kraevedenie*).  

### 2.4.1 Limits on Professional and Intellectual Freedom

Although the Mexican revolution did produce a very significant social displacement, the new, post-revolutionary elites in Mexico did not become so directly beholden to the central state as the new “elites” of Soviet Russia.  

By the end of 1930s the Soviet regime had produced its own “cadres” – a new generation of state officials and managers that came from “toiler backgrounds” and acquired the necessary skills and education through the state program specifically designed for the production of a new, “worker” intelligentsia. These people were more than just “state employees”: apart from their jobs, they also owed to the state their educational advancement as well as the promotion to much higher levels of both material well-being and social status. Through its extensive “cadre program” the Soviet regime was sending a clear message to the entire society that it had the exclusive right to judge the “usefulness” of each individual for the purpose of building socialism and to grant access to professional careers, material rewards, and privileged social status based on that criterion.

It is questionable whether the top, privileged layer of the Soviet society that emerged by the late 1930s can be truly described as “elites”, because until Stalin’s death in 1953 no individual within that layer had any guarantees that his status, wealth, and

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109 This paragraph is based on Malia (1994: 205-210).
110 This is Malia’s translation of the Russian term rabochee i krestianskoe proiskhozdenie (worker and peasant origins), which was officially applied to all the “have-nots” of the pre-revolutionary society.
even physical freedom would be permanent.\textsuperscript{111} The purges served as a very crude but powerful mechanism of “elite turnover” and as a reminder that in the Soviet Union any social advancement was linked to the definitions of political and ideological loyalty that emanated from the very top of the power pyramid and changed continually and in an absolutely unpredictable fashion. In complete contrast to the Mexican political system, which was readjusted in the 1940s to give greater certainty and permanent guarantees to the upper classes, the operation of the Soviet political system between 1935 and 1953 was governed by extreme and pervasive uncertainty. This uncertainty has disproportionately affected the old (pre-revolutionary) and the new (Soviet) intelligentsia.

The issue of intellectual freedom brings into sharp relief the difference that existed between the Soviet and the Mexican regimes throughout their lifespan and that is often difficult to capture and explain through the comparison of formal institutions. It is a difference, which is almost immaterial, and yet can be clearly perceived by those intellectuals who have experience of living under both totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. I was struck by this difference as I listened to the stories of activist-intellectuals from both countries – those whom I interviewed myself and those quoted by other researchers – as they recalled their lives “before the regime change.” The professions, the modes of life, the passion for critical thinking were similar; what differed were the very atmosphere of their social and political environments and their perceptions – of themselves, of their professional and moral duties, and of the state. Mexico under PRI produced no equivalent of the schizophrenia, the atmosphere of moral degradation and

\textsuperscript{111} Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008) list such guarantees as one of the fundamental characteristics of a true elite.
decay that was so characteristic for the Soviet Russia of the 1930s-1950s and that Weiner reproduces with great skill and precision in his account of the fate of Soviet conservationists under Stalin. Neither did the Mexican intellectuals of the 1960s-1980s felt “the “lack of fresh air, of forward movement” with the same acuteness as their Soviet colleagues during the “years of stagnation” (1968-1985).

While the Stalinist period (1928-1953) was undoubtedly the most draconian one in terms of the risks of physical elimination for ideological non-compliance, the universal and all-penetrating dependence of the professionals and intellectuals on the state and the whims of its leaders of all ranks continued to be one of the fundamental features of the Soviet regime until its very end. Unlike their Mexican counterparts of the 1960s and 1970s, Soviet researchers had no privately financed universities and research centers, no independent think tanks to turn to for employment if they were dismissed from state educational and scholarly organizations for their views. Ironically, Mexico of the 1970s and 1980s holds a special place in this regard in comparison not only to the Soviet Russia, but also to the rest of Latin America. During that time of military dictatorships and bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes, Mexico became a safe haven for many intellectuals from Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and many Central American countries. These political exiles have greatly contributed to the creation of a special atmosphere, of islands of intellectual freedom within Mexican universities and research centers. As David Barkin ruefully noted, “not that there was a lot of freedom [in Mexico],
The formal structures faced by the intellectuals in Soviet Russia and in Mexico were more or less the same; the informal procedures, the “filling” of these structures made a world of difference.

2.4.2 The Question of Repressions

The question of intellectual freedom has to be seen within the larger context of state repressions. This is one of the key dimensions that make the Soviet and the Mexican 20th century experience profoundly different. Both societies underwent about two decades of revolutionary violence: in Russia, the first revolutionary episode began in 1905, and in some regions the Civil War continued until the mid-1920s. In Mexico, the revolutionary upheaval began in 1910, and the campaigns of the central government against local and regional warlords continued until the end of the 1920s. In addition, Mexico underwent two episodes of state-inspired religious persecution known as the Cristiada – the first and the most violent took place in 1926-29; the second – in 1932-34. Yet nothing experienced by the Mexican society in the 20th century comes close to the catastrophic loss of life associated with the political repressions of the Stalinist period (1927-1953) and the Second World War.

Volkogonov (1998) estimates the total number of those affected by repressions in 1927-1953 at 21.5 million, out of whom about 10 million were the peasants. These figures include 7-8 million collectivization victims (1929-31); 6 million arrested by the OGPU-NKVD for political reasons (1927-53), out of which over 4 million were

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113 Jean Meyer (1973-74, 1976) is the leading historical authority on this question. See also Knight (1986).
114 Danilov, Manning, and Viola, eds. (1999-2006).
convicted and executed\textsuperscript{115}; and 3.5 million who were deported on ethnic grounds. The minimum number of those who died at the labor camps stands at 1.1 million; the famine of 1932-33 claimed the lives of 6-7 million people,\textsuperscript{116} another 1 million died in the famines of 1943 and 1946-47.\textsuperscript{117} The officially recognized figure for the combined civilian and military Soviet losses in the Second World War is 27 million people, of which about 15 million are military losses.\textsuperscript{118} Although both the Soviet and the current regime did their best to conceal the information about these events, they have lived on in the collective memory and served as a constant reminder that the state could and would claim the right to the very lives of its citizen-subjects.

The post-1953 repression levels in Russia and in Mexico are more comparable. Under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, political persecution became much more selective: its main targets were the dissident intellectuals – human rights, nationalist, and religious activists.\textsuperscript{119} The total number of people who have been political prisoners between 1956 and 1986 stands at a few thousand, although many of these served several terms. Political executions became a rarity during this period, and, after the human rights movement was decimated at the end of the 1970s, the KGB increasingly focused on “prophylaxis measures.” Meanwhile, in Mexico state violence has markedly increased between 1956 and 1982. In 2006, the Special Commission on Social and Political Movements of the Past (FENOSPP) created under the President Fox to investigate cases of political

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Kokurin, Petrov, and Shostakovsky, eds. (2000).
\item Danilov, Manning, and Viola, eds. (1999-2006).
\item Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008: II).
\item These are documented by the Ministry of Defense and are more reliable than the civilian losses, for which 12 million is likely to be an underestimation. Igor Dolutsky, personal communication.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
repression published a key report that pooled together all available data on this period (many archives still remain closed). Although the report does not give the overall estimates for the number of political prisoners, putting together its particular accounts could easily yield a figure of about 10,000 people who spent some time under detention or arrest for political reasons. Although Mexico “has avoided the extremes of bureaucratic authoritarianism” compared with the rest of Latin America,\(^\text{120}\) the expression “to disappear a person” (desaparecer a una persona) was coined there.\(^\text{121}\) In 2006, FEMOSPP counted 797 at least partly documented cases of “forced disappearances” (desapariciones forzadas) that are still not closed. The bulk of these cases has to do with the so-called “dirty war” (la guerra sucia) – the state-led campaign against guerrilla groups and political opposition that took place between 1968 and 1977. The majority of the “forced disappearance” cases (537) and of the extrajudicial executions (about 90 out of 100 mentioned) come from the state of Guerrero, which has been the focus of both federal- and state-level campaigns against the opposition between 1960 and 1982.\(^\text{122}\)

While in the Soviet Union the main target of post-1956 repressions was the intelligentsia, in Mexico state violence was also directed against labor and peasant leaders and other social movement actors. This difference has to do with the fact that there was much more social protest in Mexico than in Soviet Russia between 1956 and 1986.\(^\text{123}\) As Knight (1992), Castañeda (2000), and Magaloni (2006) point out, the PRI state used repression as the last-resort strategy in dealing with social protests and

\(^{120}\) Knight (1992: 100).
\(^{121}\) Tatiana Vorozheikina, personal communication.
\(^{122}\) FEMOSPP (2006); Tlachinollan (2009).
\(^{123}\) See Chapter 3.
reserved its harshest forms for the opponents that it saw as most anti-systemic and intractable. Even for these, there were periodic chances for redemption: for example, many members of the radical Left that were imprisoned in 1968 were released and some were even offered government posts after Luis Echeverría became president in 1970. A more generalized political amnesty followed in 1976-77 and was coupled with the electoral reforms that made the Communist Party of Mexico legal once more. The Soviet regime demonstrated no such flexibility and resourcefulness in dealing with its opponents.

Finding out the truth about the state’s war against its own citizens remains one of the main tasks that both Russia and Mexico face as they deal with the legacies of their post-revolutionary regimes. In Mexico, the unknown human cost of the events of October 2nd, 1968 is the most often mentioned symbol of society’s inability to discover the truth about its past. In Russia, the question about the human cost of the entire Soviet period and its particular episodes remains at the center of socio-political controversy, as the current regime blocks all public attempts to bring this issue up for thorough reevaluation by the society as a whole.

2.5 Conservationists – The First Wave of Environmental Activism

The oldest stream of modern environmentalism in Russia and Mexico originated around the turn of the 20th century, when scientists and public intellectuals became

124 Fox and Hernández (1992), Magaloni (2006)
125 The official figures (quoted in the 2006 FEMOSPP report), stand at 32 killed, 100 wounded, and 1043 arrested. Unofficial counts (also included in the report) have estimated the number of dead at 350 and even 500, and the number of wounded and detained at “several thousands.”
alarmed at the hitherto unprecedented levels of man’s encroachment on nature produced by the first stage of industrial modernization.\textsuperscript{126} In United States the reaction to the coming of industrial age took two distinct forms – preservationism and conservationism – that came into conflict right before the First World War.\textsuperscript{127} An equally clear division based on the motivation for nature protection (intrinsic and aesthetical versus utilitarian and economic values) and the choice of object for that protection (individual natural resources or landscapes and ecological communities) is hard to draw for Russia and Mexico. In pre-revolutionary Russia, the balance was heavily shifted towards landscape protection and the promotion of \textit{zapovedniki} (an extreme form of preservationism).\textsuperscript{128} In Mexico, the first stage of industrialization “produced” one activist – engineer Miguel Angel de Quevedo – who combined preservationist and conservationist characteristics, for he stood at the origins of both forest conservation (for ecological services rather than economic use) and the national park system (largely based on the US model). Meanwhile Enrique Beltrán, a figure more analogous to the classical conservationist Gifford Pinchot, had not appeared until the second round of industrialization. While acknowledging the differences in meaning that the term “conservationists” has in the United States and Europe on the one hand and in Russia and Mexico on the other, I follow Yanitsky (1996),

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{126} In Russia this stage took place between the 1840s and the 1890s, while in Mexico it began in the 1880s, under the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz.
  \item \textsuperscript{127} See Andrews (1999) for an excellent historical analysis and Rootes (2004) for a good summary.
  \item \textsuperscript{128} The term \textit{zapovednik} (its plural form is \textit{zapovedniki}) refers to “a parcel of land or marine territory completely and eternally taken out of economic use and placed under the protection of the state.” Sergey Zalygin’s definition, quoted in Weiner (1999: 4).
\end{itemize}
Weiner (1988), and Simonian (1995) who use this term to refer to the first wave of environmental activists in Russia and in Mexico.\footnote{Yanitsky (1996: 167) uses the Russian term prirodookhranniki (literally “those who protect nature”) and translates it as “conservationists.” Likewise, Weiner (1988: ix) translated the Russian term “protection of nature” (okhrana prirody) as “conservation and used it in accordance with “how Russians construed this term prior to the mid-1930s: a concern about wildlife, landscape protection, and wise husbandry of resources.”}

The striking feature of these Russian and Mexican activists that makes them close relatives of their American and Western European analogues is their faith in science and in the power of the central state (informed and advised by scientific experts) to “protect nature” through sweeping measures, such as the creation of natural preserves and the large-scale environmental restoration projects.\footnote{On the early history of US environmentalism see Andrews (1999); see Simonian (1995) on Mexico and Wiener (1988) on Russia.} This fascination with the rationalization of natural resource use and nature preservation based on the models of natural science was a feature of the time in all societies that were under significant European and American influence. Scott (1998) coined the concept of “high modernism” to describe “the strong version of the beliefs in scientific and technical progress that were associated with industrialization in Western Europe and in North America from roughly 1830 until World War I.” At the core of this ideology was the faith in continuing progress of human societies through the development of knowledge and technology, “the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and, not least, an increasing control over nature.”\footnote{Scott (1998: 89).} In Russia – the country within the second tier of modernization – and in Mexico – the country that is closer to the second tier than it is to the third – this ideology has influenced the pre-revolutionary intellectual elites and was adopted, under
various guises by the revolutionary regimes. Thus, it is not surprising that while small-scale efforts to protect select natural resources (especially forests and game) existed in both countries before the revolution, the large-scale protection of natural territories and ecosystems became possible primarily through the involvement of the revolutionary state.\(^\text{132}\)

### 2.5.1 The Zapovedniki Movement in Russia (1898-1953)

In spite of the fact that the first nature preserves in Russia were established on private lands that belonged to “enlightened landowners,” sympathetic to the cause of landscape preservation and scientific study of natural communities,\(^\text{133}\) many of the early Russian conservationists felt that the task of preserving Russian natural wonders could not be accomplished without an active involvement of the central state. Borodin, Kozhevnikov, and Semenov-Tian-Shanskiy saw nature protection as a higher, public goal that would not be voluntarily pursued by private economic actors of the nascent capitalist system or by the “ignorant” peasant population. Yet, they found the Russian imperial state to be quite indifferent to their pleas for making resource conservation and nature preservation prime national concerns. Thus, they saw the revolution of 1917 as a tremendous window of opportunity: a new state was in the making, and its leaders seemed to hold natural science in high respect. During the first decade of the Bolshevik

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\(^{132}\) Simonian’s heavy emphasis on the biographies of a few key individuals – Quevedo, Beltrán, Macías, and Blom – leaves me wondering what the early Mexican environmentalists were like as a community. On the basis of Simonian’s account alone I cannot say whether Mexican conservationists were really less numerous and active than their Russian colleagues, or whether the Russian activist landscape appears better populated and more complex simply because of Weiner’s (1988) higher quality account.

\(^{133}\) See Weiner (1988: ch.2) for the history of Askania Nova.
rule, the conservationists were able to find patrons and allies in the highest ranks of the
government, and their ideal of state and scientists united in the task of educating the
people about the right way to treat nature seemed to come true.

For the Soviet environmentalists, the efforts to save the cause and the people
through “protective coloration” had a high cost for Makarov – the head of the State
Committee for the Protection of Nature in 1930-49 – and many of his colleagues. What
the activists meant to be only a staged show of compliance required exorbitant and
growing amounts of time and effort, twisted and sometimes arrested the development of
conservationists as scientists and as researchers. “To say the right words” was not enough
– the state required continuous proof that one kept true to those words, and the Soviet
activists found themselves caught in impossible moral dilemmas. They were living under
constant psychological strain, in a moral split between that which they held to be right
and honorable and that which was needed to survive and keep working in one’s
profession.

2.5.2 Nature Conservation in Mexico from Revolution to 1984

Like their Russian colleagues, Mexican conservationists lived in a society where
the central state was the most powerful social actor, both before and after the Revolution.
Therefore, all their initiatives either engaged the central state in one way or another or
were undertaken from within it. For these activists, the best place to be was close to the
ears of those in power. They achieved this position either by occupying government posts
or by creating state-affiliated research institutions that allowed them to establish
themselves as well-reputed advisors on conservation matters. However, relative to
Russian scientists, they had much more room for maneuver, because they could also occasionally rely on the support of the private business.

Miguel Angel de Quevedo’s lifelong campaign for forest conservation in Mexico is a story of an impressive tenacity with which this “apostle of the tree” looked for allies and patrons in the high circles of power from the times of late Porfiriato until the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas. The main aspects of his strategy can be easily recognized in the actions of Russian conservationists of the 1900s-1920s: create a scientific society of experts and use the authority and passion of its members to pressure the central government to pass crucial legislation and provide funding for key projects; frame nature and resource conservation as a patriotic endeavor and place a major emphasis on public (and especially youth) education. The first-wave activists in Russia and Mexico shared the vision of the ideal arrangement that would bring their societies into harmony with nature: the scientific experts – ecologists, botanists, zoologists, agricultural specialists, and geographers – persuade the state leaders that “only they, through their expert study [can] determine the appropriate economic activities for specific natural regions”; the central state takes them in as advisors and together they embark on a campaign of public education and action. The “society” is only present in this picture as an undifferentiated mass of people who are ignorant about the workings of nature, and whose unenlightened actions result in ever-growing levels of environmental damage.

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134 The following summary of Quevedo’s activities is based on Simonian (1996).
Quevedo was an engineer by training, and his interest in forest conservation developed from his concern for the regulation of hydrological regime and for the public health and safety. He knew that the forests played a key role in flood and draught prevention and wanted to push the Díaz government to pass forest conservation laws. For this purpose, he spearheaded the creation of Junta Central de Bosques, a group of natural scientists and engineers who would lobby for such laws and for forest conservation projects. In 1904, this group was incorporated into the Ministry of Public Works, and Quevedo used this niche within the government for his two key projects: the creation of the Coyoacán tree nursery in Mexico City and the planting of forests on sand dunes around the port of Veracruz. Quevedo’s view of nature protection was infinitely more anthropocentric than that of the Russian conservationists. Unlike the authors of the zapovedniki system, who stressed the need to preserve all types of ecosystems, he gave the highest priority to forests because of the ecosystem services that forests provided to humans as well as their scenic and recreational values. During the revolutionary period, he made a key contribution to the creation of Mexico’s national park system and of its forestry institutions.

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136 Viveros de Coyoacán produced trees both for urban parks and for the drained lake beds and hillsides around the city that were producing dust storms. In 1907 Quevedo began to receive government funding for their operations with the help of Limantour, Díaz’s Secretary of Treasury.

137 In 1910, Quevedo persuaded Francisco Madero to create forest reserves in Quintana Roo and Desierto de los Leones. In 1917, he convinced Venustiano Carranza to transform the latter into the nation’s first national park.

138 In 1922, Quevedo created the Mexican Forestry Society by bringing together “a group of individuals convinced of the important role played by forest vegetation … in the maintenance of climatic equilibrium, in the protection of soils and waters, in the general economy and the public’s welfare.” Under Obregón’s government, he participated in the work of the commission that produced a draft forestry law in 1923, which was later enacted by Calles.
The heyday of Quevedo’s influence came during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, who offered him the top post in the new federal Department of Forestry, Fish, and Game. After he had a chance to get to know Cárdenas better during their joint trip to Veracruz in 1934, Quevedo decided that this was the chance that he had long waited for and accepted the offer. According to Simonian, he felt that “Mexico’s forest problem was so complex and so difficult that only a permanent government campaign that enlisted the support of the entire citizenry on behalf of forest conservation would succeed.” With Cárdenas’ support, Quevedo was able to create a nation-wide network of forest reserves, which included community-run forest cooperatives (comunidades forestales) in the densely populated indigenous zones of the Southeast that subsequently became one of the bases for autonomous rural organization.

With Quevedo’s encouragement, Cárdenas gave shape and substance to the Mexican national park system: the forty national parks created during his sexenio constitute about $\frac{3}{4}$ of its present-day area. Unlike the Soviet zapovedniki, many of which were sited in remote areas of the country, where nature was found by scientists to be still close to untouched, pristine state, the main bulk of the Mexican national park system were “the most accessible” high coniferous forests of the densely populated central plateau. In contrast to the Russian conservationists, who saw the zapovedniki “first of all as institutions devoted to scientific research” – a function which they considered to the

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139 The Cárdenas administration used three main criteria for the siting of national parks: scenic beauty, recreational potential, and ecological value. Ten of the forty national parks were chosen primarily for historical and archaeological reasons. This mixed approach is drastically different from that of the zapovedniki system’s architects, who privileged “pure nature,” preferably without traces of human presence or modification.
Quevedo saw the recreational needs of the emerging urban middle classes as a valuable lever that could be used to create a grassroots support constituency for Mexico’s protected territories. The majority of his Russian colleagues were not nearly as concerned about harnessing the support of the general public as they were about the possibility that natural resource exploitation would make its way into the zapovedniki in the wake of opening them up for tourism.

When President Ávila Camacho made an alliance with the private business and launched Mexico’s industrialization program in 1940, economic considerations have all but displaced those of nature protection within the Mexican federal government, which became “a principal agent in the country’s environmental decline.” Over the next 30 years, the federal conservation agencies became dominated by officials who dismissed as romantic the arguments for strict nature protection measures based on “aesthetic, ethical, or biological grounds.” Conservationists of Quevedo’s type found that there was little room left for them in the government offices and were replaced by a new generation of more pragmatic activist-officials. Biologist Enrique Beltrán is the key figure of the period whose evolution illustrates the nature and the limits of the space that was available for environmental activism during the “mature” phase of the PRI regime.

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141 Weiner singles out the dissident opinion of Kashkarov, who saw the need for “a popular tourism-oriented national parks program” and proposed the creation of multi-zone protected territories that would include “an extensive zone for recreational activities” along with “an inviolable zone for scientific research.” This was essentially the same approach that was later implemented in Mexico by Enrique Beltrán (Simonian, 1996: 139).
143 This rhetoric is quite similar to that of Malinovskiy, who took over the Soviet Main Zapovednik Administration after the expulsion of conservationists from this agency in 1948-49. See Weiner (1999: chs.4-5).
Although he was a biologist by training, Beltrán advocated a much more interventionist and pragmatic approach to nature protection than that of engineer Quevedo. Beltrán argued that Quevedo aimed too high by promoting forest conservation laws and measures that were too stringent to be effectively implemented. As the Undersecretary of Flora and Fauna (1958-64), he reduced the area of Mexico’s national parks and argued that “Mexico could not afford to create new [ones], since it could not effectively administer the [old].” Although Beltrán did not say so openly, his pragmatism in not setting the conservation goals too high was based on the knowledge that the reach of the central state that promoted the conservation laws was very limited. Given the high priority assigned to economic development and the low state capacity for law enforcement, Beltrán considered it best to adapt conservation policies to the existing realities.

Having begun his career as a government official, Beltrán eventually found a more independent format for his activism by creating the Mexican Institute of Natural Resources (Inmernar). The original funding for this research and advocacy organization was provided by a private US foundation and by one of Mexico’s leading industrial groups headed by Miguel Arango. While Inmernar has greatly increased its resource base

144 Simonian (1996: 128). In 1962, he proposed a 3-zone system for national parks: recreational with and without amenities and “core” reserved for scientific study and “opened only to qualified groups and individuals.” He doubted that “the populace could be convinced to ‘voluntarily deprive itself of the economic or recreational use of land only to have it serve as a tract for scientific studies … whose value the majority of the public does not know or is not capable of evaluating adequately.” (Ibid., 139)

145 From 1933 to 1935 Beltrán served as the first director of the Biotechnical Institute – a government agency that centralized scientific research work related to the conservation of natural resources – that can be considered the precursor of the National Institute of Ecology (INE). After a brief period of employment at the Ministry of Education (1935-38), Beltrán worked at the state Institute of Health and Tropical Diseases (1939-52).

and influence during Beltrán’s term as the Undersecretary for Fauna and Flora under President López Mateos (1958-64) and its publications were supported by the Ministry of Education, this institute cannot be considered a pure state creation. Rather, it was a hybrid structure that made use of resources and influence levers both within and outside of the state to create “an inventory of natural resources,” charter programs for their sustainable use, and to “promote conservation education” for the general public. Inmernar researchers had considerably more room for maneuver than the Soviet conservationists who worked in state research institutes. While they did not engage in systemic critique of the Mexican economic development model, they neither had to justify it the way that the Soviet ecologists were pressured to do under Stalin, nor were confined to a purely scientific study of nature. The focus on “natural resources” rather than on “nature protection” allowed Inmernar to carve out a niche, in which its members could discuss socio-economic problems without antagonizing the state and made Mexican state-affiliated conservationism into a “patriotic endeavor.”

Natural scientists were not the only promoters of conservation in Mexico during this period. Frans and Trudi Blom, the founders of Na-Bolom Scientific Research Center, came to the Lacondón region of Chiapas in the 1940s as anthropologists and sociologists interested in the study of indigenous culture. However, as they observed the accelerating

147 Amigos de la Tierra (Friends of the Earth), founded in 1951 by Gonzalo Blanco Macías, was another conservationist group that worked on similar premises. It aimed “to conserve the soils, water, flora and fauna of Mexico and increase their development for the well-being of the people.” It also made use of government institutions for its environmental education and mobilization efforts as it organized citizens and especially peasants for tree planting and soil conservation (Simonian, 1995: 140). In Soviet Russia, a similar mission was entrusted by the state to the All-Union Society for Nature Protection (VOOP). See Weiner (1999, chs. 9, 15).
deforestation, they realized “that it would be impossible to protect the Indians without protecting the forests.” As true conservationists, the Bloms saw the situation primarily as an “ecological disaster” and did not look into the complex socio-economic problems that drove migrants from other regions of Chiapas into the Lacondón jungle. Instead, they petitioned the state and federal governments to create national parks. Only gradually, towards the early 1980s, did Trudi Blom become aware that “the government [could not] solve ecological problems without the civic support of the people.” In contrast to the Leftist intellectuals and priests that came to Chiapas in the 1970s, Blom’s effort to provide the Lacondón dwellers with viable economic alternatives to the destruction of rainforest had no political underpinning and was not meant to help indigenous communities to achieve greater autonomy vis-à-vis the state.

The conservationist current that existed mostly in the form of privately-founded but state-affiliated research centers during the heyday of Mexico’s economic miracle (1940-1968) expanded and became more diverse as the PRI regime entered the period of political and economic crisis. New domestic conservationist organizations that were established in the early 1980s, such as Pronatura and Pro-Mariposa Monarca, were much more independent from the state than their predecessors, as they relied on the funding

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148 Because of the strong landlord resistance movement, the land reform did not come to Chiapas until the Cardenas years. Even then the lands that were distributed were the low-quality “available lands” (terrenos baldíos) – there was no land expropriation from the corn, coffee, sugar cane and cotton estates (fincas). In the 1950s, the estate owners (finqueros) began converting their lands to cattle pasture – by 1976 Chiapas became the second largest producer of beef in the country. At the same time, the size of land holdings was highly unequal: in 1960 estates of more than 1000ha occupied 52% of the territory, while minifundios of 5ha and less (35% of total number of properties) occupied only 0.6% of the territory. This has produced a huge surplus of landless rural labor and an exodus of agricultural workers (jornaleros agrícolas) to the Lacondón region, which has served as a major safety valve for land pressures in the state from late 1930s until 1970s. See Harvey (1998) and Toledo (2000).

from Mexican private business and international foundations. These organizations are staffed with university-based natural scientists, referred to as *ecólogos* by other environmental activists, and focus on the classic conservationist goals of creating new protected territories and preserving threatened flora and fauna. In 1985, the main conservationist NGOs came together in a network called the Federation of Mexican Conservationists (Fecomex).\(^{150}\)

### 2.6 Conclusions

In both Russia and Mexico, modernization has been primarily a state-driven process. The revolutionary origins of both political systems have allowed the state to penetrate deeply into society. Yet, post-revolutionary Mexico has demonstrated a much higher social capacity to resist state power than did Soviet Russia. The Mexican society was better able to resist the onslaught of the revolutionary state in part because the crisis that preceded its formation was not nearly as destructive for the social fabric, as it has been in Russia. But the greatest source of the differences lies in the unique nature of the Soviet revolutionary state, its infinitely greater willingness to use coercion, its messianic ideology, and the different nature of political incorporation of the lower classes that this ideology entailed. By the late 1920s, the Bolshevik state completely rejected the principle of political pluralism (both within and outside the Party) and the procedural norms of electoral democracy. By contrast, the Mexican revolutionary statesmen kept elements of both. Since the 1940s, when the institutionalization of the PRI regime was completed,

\(^{150}\) Umlas (1996: 64); González Martínez (1992: 42).
Mexico possessed several preserves of autonomy that had no analogue in Soviet Russia. Most important among these were the private economic sector, which became a privileged member of the ruling coalition, and the regional and local clientelist networks that never came under the complete control of the central state.

In both countries, the installation of the revolutionary regimes has profoundly changed the nature of state-society relations. The revolutionary state claimed to be the main provider of material welfare for its people, and this generated the corresponding expectation on the part of the population that came to see itself as entitled to a certain basic, minimally sufficient level of social and economic protection. In Mexico, this relationship mostly took the form of clientelist exchanges, while in the Soviet Russia it was much more unequal and cannot be seen as bargaining between the state and the population. A much greater availability of social and economic spaces, into which the PRI state could not reach, meant that greater psychological distance between the state and its subjects was maintained in Mexico. By contrast, the Stalinist system had greatly diminished this distance, causing many individuals to lose the distinction between the state’s interests and their own. This self-identification with the paternalistic state that was at once the employer, the policeman, and the welfare agent had long-lasting consequences not just for the overall social capacity for autonomous organization, but also for the individual and collective ability to challenge the state about the environmental and social costs of its economic and military activities.

The two post-revolutionary systems were radically different in their treatment of peasants. In the long-run, the promise of land distribution that constituted one of the most
important foundations of the PRI regime has strengthened the Mexican peasants’ capacity for collective action, as they organized to occupy new lands and held the state accountable for its promises to recognize their property rights as user-occupiers. Meanwhile, the violent introduction of collective agriculture in 1929-33 had completely destroyed the bases for rural autonomy and self-organization in Soviet Russia. In the long run, this has deprived Russia of the rural mobilization bases for environmental activism that became so important for Mexican social environmentalism.

The type of environmental activism that acquired shape in both countries during and after the installation of revolutionary regimes was primarily the reaction to industrial modernization – both its pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary variants. The revolutions did not drastically change the nature of the first wave of environmental activism. Since both the pre- and the post-revolutionary phases of industrial modernization were state-driven, the activists placed the relations with the central state at the center of their attention, because it was the most powerful societal actor. For the early conservationists, the central state simultaneously represented the main threat to the integrity of the natural systems and the main hope for their adequate protection. While these scientists-turned-activists held freedom of thought in high regard, their approach to society was essentially authoritarian: they wanted the central state to make rapid and drastic changes required for the creation of a network of protected natural territories and to give them the institutional foundations needed “to educate the population” about the values of pristine nature. In part, this attitude was a natural reaction for intellectuals that have just witnessed the unbridled power and the violence of “the common people” during
the social upheavals of the revolution and the civil war. In part, it was due to their desire to put limits onto the “exploitation of nature” by the “private” economic actors that were aided and protected by the pre-revolutionary state.

The comprehensive ecosystem-based coverage combined with a high degree of inviolability that the Russian ecologists wanted for the country’s system of protected territories has proved impossible to achieve in any country of the world in the 20th century. Compromises towards recreational and economic uses proved inevitable even (and especially) in first-world democratic societies, like the US, where interests of different constituencies had to be politically reconciled. In Mexico and in Soviet Russia, state-led industrialization drive had overpowered the conservationists, in spite of their significant ability to penetrate the state power structures at the highest level. The creation of the zapovedniki system became possible during a unique and very short window of political opportunity that the Soviet state presented in the 1920s, when it was still flexible enough to incorporate scientific activism. Ironically, the rapid evolution of that state towards totalitarianism and the onset of industrialization became the main threat to the continuing existence of the strict nature protection regime that it brought into being.

The consolidation of the Soviet totalitarian system after 1929 presented the Russian conservationists with a very stark dilemma. Some chose to surrender their principles and essentially stopped being environmentalists by accepting the state’s right to interfere into the zapovedniki for natural resource extraction and pseudo-scientific experimentation. Those who wanted to remain true to their ideals were forced to retreat into social isolation and deep biocentrism. Yet, by retreating from the state, they also
estranged themselves from the population, because there were no channels for interacting with “the people” apart from the state-provided ones. Thus, Soviet conservationism became essentially anti-social: it strove to protect nature against human interference, making little distinction about whether this interference came from “the people” or from “the state,” since the boundary between the two became blurred.

The Mexican conservationists were able to maintain a much more moderate stance, because they operated in a completely different political context. Both Quevedo and Beltrán could say what they thought and even do what they considered necessary under all post-revolutionary administrations. Apart from Cárdenas who seemed to have his own ideas about “ecosystem management”151, no other Mexican president meddled into biology and conservation with the zeal and the fervor of Stalin and other top Soviet officials. While industrialization did load the dice against Mexican conservationists, as advocates of intensive resource use competed with them for the attention of the state leaders, there were no purges or repressions directed specifically against conservationists at any point after the Revolution.152 Since the PRI regime did not eliminate the distinction

151 Simonian (1996) describes one such case of Cárdenas’ direct and ill-informed intervention when he ordered the removal of a predatory black bass from Lake Pátzcuaro in Michoacán. This episode caused a permanent split between Cárdenas a Beltrán, who was in charge of the local limnological station. To punish Beltrán, Cárdenas turned the station over to Quevedo’s Department of Forestry, Fish, and Game. This story is a much milder version of the controversy that arose in the USSR over the management of Askania Nova nature reserve in 1933. The attack was launched by Lysenko and Present, pseudo-scientists who became the main supporters of Stalin’s “nature-transforming programs” and promoters of grand-scale agricultural acclimatization experiments and led the campaign against geneticists in 1948. Stanchinskiy, the founder of Askania Nova and the head of its research tema who criticized them, was arrested, sentenced to two years of forced labor, and barred from teaching for the rest of his life. See Weiner (1999: ch.2).

152 Monique Mitastein (09.10.2006) mentions that when in 1975-78 the regional office of the World Health Organization (WHO) conducted a retrospective study of the Miguel Alemán dam – a major “development project” completed in 1954 – and found that instead of improving the conditions of the local population the dam had made them worse, the project was suspended by the Ministry of Health. However, WHO could continue its work in Mexico afterwards, and its Mexican staff members who carried out the fieldwork for
between the state and the society, the conservationists could find bases of social support
while opposing the state. The more complex nature of the society in which they lived and
the greater degree of professional and intellectual freedom have tempered their biocentric
tendencies and made their activism more socially-oriented.

Soviet environmental activists can be considered pure conservationists, because
they operated under a totalitarian system, where boundaries between state and society and
between the sources of economic and political power were blurred. They saw the state
system as their main target, opponent, and ally, because there were no other centers of
power available. By contrast, Mexican environmental activism prior to 1968 had more
mixed characteristics. Even though it was conservationist in its ideology, its strategies
have reform-environmentalist aspects. Since the private business did constitute an
important alternative center of power in PRI Mexico, environmental activists were often
able to obtain its support and use its resources either in addition to or instead of those
provided by the central state. Thus, while the real flourishing of reform environmentalism
in Mexico did not occur until the period of democratic transition, its elements were
already present in the environmental activism mix as early as the 1950s. By contrast, in
Soviet Russia reform environmentalism did not begin to develop until the late 1980s.

the project did not suffer any repercussions. Such a study, even if it were conducted without any
international involvement, and the publication of its results were impossible to imagine in the Soviet
Russia.
Chapter 3: The Roots of Social Environmentalism in Russia and Mexico: 1956-1993

This chapter analyses the engendering environments for professional and grassroots environmentalists and the process through which they came together to form the social environmentalist current. Grassroots environmentalism has much deeper roots in Mexico, because the PRI regime did not have such a detrimental effect on the levels of social mobilization and on its organizational bases as the Soviet regime. In Russia, where the revolutionary state had destroyed all the main bases for autonomous social organization, social mobilization levels were extremely low between the 1920s and the late 1980s. In Mexico, where such bases were preserved, both the levels of social mobilization and its autonomy from the state corporatist structures have been gradually increasing since the late 1960s.

The crucial factor for the appearance of professional social environmentalists is the ability of intellectuals – the social group that professional social activists predominantly come from – to reorient themselves from institutionalized to non-institutionalized sources of power. This chapter explains why Mexican intellectuals were able to turn away from the state and towards the people much earlier than their Russian counterparts. On the one hand, the PRI regime had greatly alienated progressive intellectuals by its brutal handling of political and social protests in 1968. While the Soviet intellectuals also experienced a growing sense of alienation from the system during Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods, they remained much more dependent on the state and faced much greater restrictions on intellectual freedom than their Mexican
colleagues. While the Mexican intellectuals both sensed the growing power of the “hav-enots” and felt a desire to assist and direct them in their struggle against exclusion and inequality, the Soviet intellectuals, faced with much more atomized and passive social landscape, developed no such strong sense of solidarity with the people.

In Mexico, social environmentalism began to emerge in the 1970s, when some of the intellectuals that worked with grassroots groups gave it an ideological foundation by interpreting the ideas of Schumacher, Illich, Bookchin and Marcuse. At that time, grassroots environmentalism also grew stronger as the result of the overall increase in the levels of social mobilization after 1968. These developments gave Mexican social environmentalism a head start relative to Russia: it had almost twenty years to develop before the onset of the democratic transition drastically changed the distribution of power in society. By contrast, Russian social environmentalism emerged only very shortly before the democratic transition began. This was the case in part because the professional social environmentalists took longer to emerge – eco-anarchism only came together as an ideology in the late 1980s-early 1990s – and were not nearly as diverse as in Mexico. On the other hand, grassroots environmentalism only began to develop in 1987, when perestroika became a mass movement and the levels of social mobilization rose abruptly after a very long and profound trough.¹ Yet this first opportunity window for social environmentalism was much smaller than the Mexican one, because political and economic conditions in Russia rapidly became very hostile for grassroots activism after 1991, and it did not resurge as a mass phenomenon until after 2004.

¹ Informal Russia (1990); Suslova, ed. (1990); Yanitsky (1991); Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008).
It is important to note that social environmentalism can emerge and survive under authoritarian conditions: in Russia, Mexico, and Brazil it appeared before the breakdown of the non-democratic regime. However, since it needed a broad social base, it could not take root until the overall levels of social mobilization begin to increase in response to a regime crisis: grassroots environmentalism was part of an overall sense that the regime was losing legitimacy and was unable to adequately respond to social needs. In Mexico, this sense was greatly deepened by the regime’s handling of political and social protest in 1968 and by its response to the Mexico City earthquakes in 1985. In Russia, a similar legitimacy crisis was unleashed by the 1986 Chernobyl accident and by Gorbachev’s attempts to reform and strengthen the Soviet system.2

3.1 Grassroots Environmental Struggles as the Precursor of Social Environmentalism

Grassroots environmentalism has been sometimes referred to as “the ecology of the poor” – “the ecological content, both hidden and explicit, of social movements from the past and present geared to defend access to [land and] natural resources against the advance of the generalized market system [and] opposed to political domination and to existing patterns of distribution of assets.”3 Apart from access to land and natural resources, its agenda encompasses the issues of nuclear energy and waste, urban land-use change, and pollution from manufacturing and extractive industries. The relative importance of these thematic components varies widely across societies. For example,

2 As Chapter 4 shows, the second window of opportunity for social environmentalism in Russia has opened during the second half of Putin’s presidency as a result of growing popular discontent with the progress and direction of the economic reform process.

Japan’s grassroots environmentalism of the 1970s and the US environmental justice movement place the main emphasis on the toxic pollution issues. In Mexico and Brazil, grassroots concerns about industrial pollution have been accompanied by equally strong preoccupations about “the displacement of rural communities by large economic projects, violence against smallholders and organizers in rural and forest areas,” and the incursion of genetically-modified organisms into agriculture. In the former Soviet Union, grassroots environmentalism had a strong initial focus on the nuclear issues.

Based on my analysis of the US, Japan, Brazil, Mexico, and Russia, I identify the following key characteristics of grassroots environmental struggles. First, they make an explicit link between the social injustice and environmental degradation. Second, they are formed and maintained through self-organization efforts “from below” and often at the “base” of society. This self-organization is triggered by the sense of social, political, and economic exclusion and disenfranchisement that is aggravated by the environmental problems. Finally, grassroots environmentalism uses a broad definition of the environment and is often, although not always, based on territorial rather than functional collective identities and solidarities.

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4 The US environmental justice movement has both rural and urban components. The rural component is represented by the migrant farm-workers’ movement which first emerged in the 1960s, when Cesar Chávez led a United Farm Workers’ campaign for unionization and the banning of dangerous pesticides. See Pulido (1996) and Cole and Foster (2001).


6 See Feshbach and Friendly (1992), Khalil, ed. (1996), Tickle and Welsh, eds. (1998). See also Cable, Walsh and Warland (1988) on the grassroots response to the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island in the US. In Mexico, mobilization against the construction of nuclear power plants at Lake Pátzcuaro (Michoacán) and Laguna Verde (Veracruz) have also been major instances of grassroots environmentalism – see Sections 3.4.3 and 4.2.2.
The terms “at the base” and “from below” have three distinct and equally important meanings in this context. Firstly, they refer to the collective action that arises from civil society as opposed to being promoted by the state or other institutionalized political actors. They imply self-organization and autonomous setting of goals – people come together because of something they need to get done for themselves and reject the corporatist forms of organization imposed by the autocratic state. Secondly, “the ‘base’ level of society” means the (numerically very significant) portions of the population that are “marginalized” or “excluded” from access to formal political, economic, and social institutions. It is important to note that this description does not refer exclusively to “the poor” or the “low-income” groups: it can mean any group disenfranchised by state and/or market agents, any part of the population whose citizen rights are not secure. In Russia, Mexico, and other societies with a strong authoritarian tradition, significant portions of the so-called “middle classes” can fall into this domain. Finally, “base-level organizations” (also known as “grassroots organizations”) are usually characterized by face-to-face interactions and direct participation of their members in decision-making.

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7 Here I use the term civil society in its narrowest sense of the “non-political public sphere” and the “aggregate of horizontal social networks, institutions and associations autonomous from the state.” See Cohen and Arato (1992), Gellner (1994), and the edited volumes by Kholodkovsky (1998) and Olvera (2003).


10 Speaking about Latin America, Oxhorn (1995: 301) describes these as groups with limited access to “state educational, employment, health care, and welfare” services and without “safeguards against the arbitrary use of the state’s repressive apparatus.” Brazil’s Environmental Justice Network refers to them as “low income populations, racially discriminated groups, traditional indigenous ethnicities, working class neighborhoods, and [other] marginalized and vulnerable populations” (quoted in Hochstetler and Keck (2007: 217)). Clément (2006b) speaks of the Russian equivalent as “people that belong to diverse social categories [but are] living ‘on the edge’ – those at high risk of losing their material well-being.”


These organizations often arise out of frustration with the existing forms of political representation and their members attempt to create alternative decision-making structures.\textsuperscript{13} Although they are often parochial in their origins, grassroots organizations do not have to remain local and isolated: given sufficient level of their development and a minimally favorable environment, they “may form the foundations for higher-order structures,” such as networks and confederations.\textsuperscript{14}

In principle, “grassroots” or “base-level” collective action can arise from either territorial or functional solidarities. However, grassroots environmentalism often emerges first in places of residence rather than production – in places where people live rather than in places where they work.\textsuperscript{15} This selective affinity is by no means coincidental. Grassroots environmentalists understand environment broadly, as “the area of an individual’s [daily] activities and the set of accessible resources required for his survival.”\textsuperscript{16} The original impetus for this kind of collective action is a threat to the natural and social integrity of “the place where one lives” – the family home, the land on which it stands, air and water, soils and forests that make it livable, the larger urban neighborhood

\textsuperscript{15} Nevertheless, the experience of the US environmental justice movement and the recent literature on labor and occupational health movements in the maquiladora cities of the Mexican-US border region and in the Mexican immigrant communities in the US shows that under certain conditions grassroots environmental mobilizations can arise from a primarily functional base. The origins and mechanisms of this workplace-based environmentalism deserve a separate treatment and are not considered in this work. On Mexico, see the volumes edited by Clough-Riquelme and Bringas Rábago (2006) and by Carlsen, Wise, and Salazar (2003) for literature reviews and case studies. Hochstetler and Keck (2007: 217) also point out that the associations of industrial workers exposed to environmental hazards (expostos) are among the most active members of Brazil’s socio-environmentalist community.
\textsuperscript{16} Yanitsky (2006: 34). This definition of the “environment” bears a striking resemblance to that given by the US environmental justice activists: “We refer to the ‘environment’ in a broader context [as the place] where we live, where we work, where we play, and where we learn.” Charles Lee, 1996 in Race, Poverty and Environment; quoted in Cole and Foster (2001: 16).
or rural community where it is located. “The constant refrain” of the people who find themselves in such situations is that if their “place” is degraded or destroyed, they “will have nowhere else to go”\(^{17}\) – the very bases of their life and well-being become threatened. In other words, they are primarily concerned about self-defense\(^{18}\) against various risks and threats generated by state and market actors, but not with the defense of natural environment for its own sake.

The distinction between territorial and functional basis for solidarity is not equally sharp and significant for all social groups. While it hardly matters for a peasant engaged in subsistence agriculture, whose rural community provides him with an “organic” basis for organization and solidarity that is both functional and territorial,\(^{19}\) it does apply to urban dwellers, for whom home and workplace are often spatially separated and associated with distinct social networks. This difference results from several distinct aspects of the modernization process: from the spatial separation of residence and production brought about by urbanization and commercialization of agriculture and from the conflicts that industrialization and formation of large-scale markets create among different social roles played by each individual. Two pairs of roles – resident / worker and consumer / producer\(^{20}\) – are relatively well aligned in the ideal-type case of a subsistence-oriented peasant living on his own land. If he lives and works in the same

\(^{17}\) Yanitsky (1991: 111).

\(^{18}\) The importance of self-defense as the primary basis for solidarity and the primary motivation for collective action is emphasized by many scholars of Russia and Latin America. See, for example, Clément (2006a), Vorozheikina (2008); Oxhorn (1995), Schönwälder (2002).

\(^{19}\) See Ribeiro (1985: 146-150).

\(^{20}\) I took the idea of conflicting social roles of the same individual from Yanitsky (1991: 129), who based his description of the worker-resident role pair on the experience of Soviet environmental activists before the onset of neoliberal economic reforms; I added the consumer-producer role pair to emphasize the environmental impact of capitalist markets.
place and consumes most of what he produces, there is little ground for conflict between his interests in each of the four roles. Once he starts producing for an external market and buying goods made elsewhere, a tension might appear between what suits him best as a consumer and as a producer.21

Likewise, in the case of an urban dweller who earns a living from industrial employment it is quite possible that his actions in the producer/worker and consumer roles generate detrimental environmental and social consequences for him as a resident. The worker-resident conflict is especially acute in situations where residents of an industrial town work at a plant that pollutes both their residential and workplace environments. As residents, they are interested in ecological modernization or even closure of the plant, but as workers they fear the associated wage cuts and layoffs and prefer “slow poisoning” to economic insecurity and unemployment.22 This dilemma is routinely faced by the residents of industrial centers in Russia and Mexico,23 but is by no means unique to these two countries.24 I refer to it as the “pollution acceptance syndrome” and discuss it in detail in Chapter 5.

Grassroots environmentalism is a form of collective action chosen by those who have very limited access to conventional resources and formal institutions. Consequently,

21 Here I refer to both environmental and social externalities of consumption and production that are spatially, socially, and temporally separated: long-distance transportation and social division of labor mean that consumers and producers of a given product are not in any kind of direct contact and do not share in each other’s problems. This is the gap that the promoters of local currencies, “organic” and “fair trade” markets and “solidarity exchanges” are trying to fill. See Helleiner (2002) and Lopezllera Méndez, 06.10.2006.
22 Quote from Weiner (1999: 437).
23 Levashov, 04.09.2006; Popova, 28.08.2006; Rozhina, 29.08.2006; Padilla, 14.11.2006; Verduzco, 05.12.2006; Diaz Barriga, 10.10.2007.
grassroots environmentalists rely heavily on the abilities, inventiveness, and resourcefulness of the people – the members and leaders of grassroots groups as well as their external allies. Grassroots environmentalism turns into social environmentalism when the search for allies brings grassroots groups into a sustained contact with activist-intellectuals – concerned professionals, students, researchers, priests, and Leftist militants – who make the connection between the localized struggles for access to vital resources and the broader, “systemic” imbalances and injustices created by states and markets. One Mexican social environmentalist described these two components as the “minimalist” and “maximalist” versions of “ecologism” (one of the Mexican names for social environmentalism). The “minimalist” is someone like “a peasant who defends his own field and knows nothing of the theory,” while the “maximalist” is an activist who has “a much deeper vision of the historical and philosophical question” and is both theoretically and practically trained for “social struggle.”

Social environmentalism takes root in places and times where these two types of social actors coincide, find each other, and begin to interact.

3.2 The Ideological Origins of Professional Social Environmentalism

In contrast to grassroots environmentalism, which does not need an elaborate ideological base, social environmentalism relies on a relatively elaborate theoretical foundation, which was originally laid in the First World by the post-war radical thinkers who questioned the fundamental assumptions about the ability of capitalist economy and

technological progress to produce positive social change. Mexican and Russian professional social environmentalists took as their main points of reference two broad intellectual debates that emerged in Western Europe and the United States of the 1960s and 1970s – the Leftist discussions about social theory and the directions of social change and the literature on global environmental crisis and its systemic social causes. Mexican “ecologism” and Russian “eco-anarchism” emerged as the intellectuals reflected on the relevance of these debates to their home countries and adapted these ideas to political, economic, and social contexts.

3.2.1 A Key Departure Point: Bookchin’s Social Ecology

At the end of his life Murray Bookchin pointed out that he was guided “to formulate and promote the concept of social ecology [neither by] an unbridled passion for wildlife, wilderness, organic food [nor by] localism [and] a belief that ‘small is beautiful’, [but] by the compelling … need to formulate a viable imperative that doomed capitalism to self-extinction.”

A long-term Leftist activist, by 1964 Bookchin had behind him years of classical Marxist training and a vast practical experience of organizing industrial workers. The post-war reality that he and his comrades saw in Europe and in the United States showed none of the signs of the “moribund [capitalist] economy and society” that Marx had predicted: “by the 1950s it was evident that Marxist (and anarchist) ‘breakdown’ scenarios were palpable nonsense.” The glaring invalidity of the “economic imperative” did not shatter Bookchin’s deeply held belief that the demise of capitalism

26 All direct quotes in this section, unless otherwise noted, are from Bookchin (2003).
was a “historical inevitability.” He thus replaced the failed economic imperative with an “ecological” one – an argument that “capitalism stood in an irreconcilable contradiction with the natural world,” because its logic of competition and commodification would lead it “to simplify all the ecosystems … and give rise to a planet that was incompatible environmentally with advanced life forms.” Having first formulated the idea in 1964 in an essay entitled “Ecology and Revolutionary Thought,” Bookchin later developed this argument at length in his 1982 magnum opus, “The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy.”

Bookchin felt the need to bridge the gap between the radical Left, which “had been oblivious to ecological issues” and saw them as a “petty bourgeois” diversion from the task of “abolishing capitalism,” and “Carson and her admirers” – those who were becoming increasingly worried with the impacts of industrial development on nature and human health, but saw its main cause in the “immoral behavior” of individuals, rather than in “the specific social order – capitalism and entrepreneurial rivalry.” Bookchin argued that the domination of humans over nature that was pushing the planet towards an ecological catastrophe was the product of domination “of human by human,” and called Leftists and environmentalists to join forces in the struggle against “political and economic hierarchies” that would liberate both humans and nature at the same time. The need for a radical social transformation logically followed from Bookchin’s conviction that the ever-increasing levels of production and consumption and competition for natural resources were the very essence of capitalism: “making a few small changes would not
solve the ecological problem — on the contrary, a transformation into a rational, egalitarian, and libertarian society was necessary.”

The solution proposed by Bookchin rested on the anarchist ideal of a self-governing community as “the arena of a truly political life”: “the overriding problem is to change the structure of society so that people gain power. The best arena to do that is the municipality — the city, town, and village — where we have an opportunity to create a face-to-face democracy.”27 However, he warned that communal autonomy “is a myth” that could never be achieved because individuals and communities have always and everywhere been linked by relations of interdependence. Bookchin cautioned against parochialism – the tendency of tightly knit communities to expel or exclude those who are “different” – and stressed that “small is not always beautiful — small units can sometimes be destructive and reactionary.” He therefore placed a great emphasis on networks and confederations, within which popular assemblies should be nested in order to create “a popular government – not a state (which is an instrument of class rule and exploitation), but a government, where the people have the power.”28

In order to achieve this state of “communalism” Bookchin proposed to create a social ecological movement that would consist of the base organizations – “popular assemblies where people can discuss and make decisions about the economy and society in which they live” – and the “educational vanguard” of “radical leftists” who would develop “tactics and methodology” and “raise consciousness through “an organization … that is controlled from the base and confederally [sic!] organized.” Together with popular

28 Ibid.
assemblies, this organization will gradually “build up an opposition to the existing power, the state and class rule.” I consider this dual structure – base organizations created on the principles of direct participation and self-government and a network of activist-intellectuals oriented toward the base – to be the fundamental characteristic of social environmentalism, at least in its Mexican and Russian varieties. The synergy of self-organization at the base of society and of deliberate involvement of Leftist intellectual elites into this process seems to me a much more reliable criterion for identifying social environmentalist groups than the question of whether or not their members see the destruction of capitalism and state as their ultimate goals.

Bookchin singled out the environmental depredations of capitalist societies as the main cause of global environmental crisis. Since he meant his explanation to be universally valid, the question about the abysmal environmental record of the “real socialist” systems arises almost inevitably: what made them destroy nature, if they were deliberately built as negations of the capitalist system? While Bookchin had never explicitly analyzed the environmental impact of real socialism, he did seem to address this question implicitly by arguing that “strong centralized states will do [great ecological damage] in any society,” not just the capitalist one. Therefore, since state socialism is based on a hypertrophied political hierarchy, Bookchin did not seem to consider it a viable alternative to capitalism. Otherwise, how is one to explain his silence on the
subject of the collapse of the Soviet Union – an event that has produced a catastrophic impact on many Leftists around the globe?  

3.2.2 Social Ecology in Mexico

The 1970s was the time when Mexican social environmentalism acquired a theoretical foundation and with it an intellectual following that turned toward systemic critique of political regimes and economic development models. I argue that social environmentalism emerged in Mexico when the intellectuals provided it with an ideological base and began to share that ideology with the grassroots environmentalists.

Bookchin’s ideas found a grateful audience among the Mexican Left, in part because they resonated well with the concept of dependent development. The 1960s and 1970s gave them ample evidence for the operation of “ecological imperative,” as the natural resources in their countries were being rapidly depleted either by parastatal enterprises, or by domestic and foreign private corporations acting with the consent and license of the national state. The magnitude of social and ecological costs of such “development model” in the Third World as well as the information about the consequences of industrial pollution in the First made many Third World dwellers doubt whether they wanted to follow the path of the “economically advanced” nations toward

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29 Late in his life Bookchin (2003: 10) seems to have settled on the view that true socialism had not been achieved in practice by any society: “Socialism was meant to be a rational society, not a replication of Stalinism and totalitarianism. It will require a profound social imperative – in my view, an ecological one – to move this mass, even lethargic society along rational lines. Socialism will come about as the result of logical necessity, the product of deep-seated forces for social change.” Bookchin’s repeated emphasis on the need to reorganize contemporary societies “so that reason and an ecological outlook will prevail” and his calls for “an educational vanguard” do smell of social engineering. I see a contradiction between these aspects of his approach and his emphasis on self-organization and free formulation of communal interests: Bookchin does seem to hope that self-governing communities will naturally choose “the right things,” or that “the vanguard” will correct them, if they do not.
prosperity. Why could these countries, instead of being “resource appendages” to the “core” capitalist region, not break their own, different and better paths, and become a laboratory for alternative models of economic and political development?

The Mexican intellectuals who read Bookchin also read Schumacher’s “Small is Beautiful,” which gave them arguments against the infrastructural, tourist, and agricultural megaprojects, promoted by the state as a way to make Mexico “develop” and catch up with “the core capitalist countries” in levels of material wealth and commodity production. After Ivan Illich opened his Intercultural Documentation Center in Cuernavaca, all those who cared to make a short trip from Mexico City could come and hear him discuss the perverse effects of the economic and social institutions of capitalist society and the “war on subsistence” waged by the Catholic Church and the international development organizations. Thus, by the early 1980s “social ecologism” had acquired a numerically small but intellectually significant group of followers, including such prominent figures as Enrique Leff, Víctor Manuel Toledo, and Alfonso González Martínez.

Social ecology provided Mexican intellectuals with a constructive response to the First World calls to put a limit on economic growth. The calls to limit the human pressure on the planet’s resources made by the Club of Rome and by the MIT team had a very

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30 This book is the “theoretical text” that was most often mentioned by my Mexican respondents. One activist commented that he even advised Vicente Fox (then governor of Guanajuato) to read it in preparation for his presidency: “you need to read it in order to understand what development means.” Fox responded: “I do not read.”
32 Meadows et al. (1972).
different sound in “post-scarcity societies,” where the basic needs of all were already satisfied, compared to the Third World, where the majority of the population barely had enough for survival. In the words of Enrique Leff (1988), a prominent Mexican researcher and activist, the difference of interests related to the environmental problématique between the First and Third Worlds was already evident by the 1970s. The First World talked about limits to population and economic growth, while transferring some of its environmental burdens to the Third World, while leaders of the latter argued that they should be allowed an equal chance to develop and achieve material prosperity. Bookchin’s theoretical construct provided the third way: that of profound “social, political, and institutional changes” to create an alternative model of development that would make full use of “the ecological and cultural potential of the underdeveloped regions” and satisfy the basic needs of their populations in an ecologically sustainable way. Instead of following the First World into the ecological trap, the Third World could become a laboratory for innovations in socially just and ecologically sustainable development. But this creative potential could not be unleashed without “the transformation of the international economic order and the construction of an alternative productive rationality.”

3.2.3 Eco-Anarchism in Soviet Russia

In contrast to Mexican intellectuals who could access the classic Western texts on global environmental crisis, radical ecology, social theory, and the critique of industrial-
capitalist development model shortly after their publication, few activists in Soviet Russia could get their hands on the books by Bookchin, Marcuse, Illich, and Schumacher before the late 1980s, when Gorbachev’s policy of glasnost’ and the removal of censorship limits opened the gates to a flood of “forbidden” Western publications. Ironically, the most likely intellectuals to be familiar with the “limits-to-growth” literature were the biologists and other natural scientists: these texts were permitted to circulate, because they demonstrated “the structural contradictions of capitalism,” but they were not easily accessible to the general public. By the mid-1990s, the time when the social activists of the “perestroika generation”– those who were students and young adults in the 1980s – were able to read all the key texts, their understanding and interpretations of these works were deeply colored by the experience of social mobilization (1987-91) against state socialism and by the frustration with the Russian version of “liberal democracy” and “free market” that crystallized in 1991-1993. The Mexican activists and intellectuals had about twenty years to relate the concept of social ecology to Mexican reality and to evaluate its usefulness and applicability while the PRI regime underwent a very gradual and protracted social, political, and economic transformation that led to its final demise. By contrast, their Russian colleagues were confronted with these ideas in times of a much more drastic and turbulent change and had less of a chance to figure out how and to what extent all of this could be applied in Russia.

Alexander Shubin, a long-time member of both anarchist and environmental groups, argues that anarchism and libertarian socialism were “natural ideological

34 See Weiner (1999), Larin et al. (2003).
choices” for the young environmental activists, who came of age within informal groups dedicated to the critique of state socialism and then “became disillusioned with liberal democracy” in 1991-1992. They needed a political and an economic “third way” – an ideological platform that would be an alternative both to state socialism and to liberal democracy-free market combination that came to replace it in 1991. The discussion about the nature of this alternative took place on the pages of “The Third Way” – the eco-anarchist journal created in 1988 by Sergei Fomichev, an activist from Dzerzhinsk, who by 1996 turned it into an informal, one-man publishing company. Fomichev felt a great internal need to establish what eco-anarchism and social ecology could mean in Russia, and it is largely thanks to his efforts, both as the writer-thinker and as the editor of the “Third Way,” that the Russian brand of social environmentalism has acquired a strong conceptual and theoretical base.

Fomichev’s philosophy is based on the primacy of freedom (the supreme value of anarchism) and of “life in all its diverse forms, including human society its historical evolution.” In order to ensure that both human and non-human forms of life can develop and flourish “under conditions of maximum freedom,” the actions of the environmental movement must focus on fomenting social change. The goal of this

36 Fomichev, Shubin, and other prominent Russian eco-anarchists have extensively studied the works of Bookchin, Marcuse, Illich, and Schumacher, once they became available in the early 1990s (see Fomichev, 1997; Shubin, 2005; Khaliy, 2000a). Unlike their Mexican counterparts, who placed a major emphasis on the ambivalent role of technological progress discussed in the writings of Illich and Schumacher, Russian eco-anarchists placed a greater stress on the critique of political hierarchy that is central to Bookchin’s thought. This greater focus on the state seems natural, since the Russian eco-anarchists were coming out of a totalitarian system and needed to reevaluate this experience.
38 Ibid., 97.
change and “the essence of social ecology” is to create “an alternative civil society,” which would grow in parallel to the old, hierarchical types of political and economic systems and eventually replace them altogether. This “alternative civil society” is based on the premises of self-government (“participation of community members in communal affairs”) and on “the ecological imperatives” of living in harmony with the natural environment. In order to promote the development of this new civil society, the environmental movement “must include in its agenda all socially-significant issues: human rights, social relations, the problem of unjust distribution of resources, etc.” In contrast to “the traditional revolutionary movement that aspires to liberate the working masses through class struggle,” this new civic movement relies primarily on the residential base of solidarity: “social ecologists focus their efforts not in places of production, where people come to earn money in order to live, but in the very places where people live – local communities, urban neighborhoods, etc.”

### 3.2.4 Social Ecology as a Critique of Hierarchy

Although social ecology was originally formulated as the critique of capitalism, activists who lived under “real socialism” found that they could adopt its main line of critique, which was directed against all forms of hierarchy. It did not take Russian activists long to figure out that, while the Soviet system was primarily structured around the political hierarchy (the state) and rejected the economic hierarchy (the market), both the post-Soviet and the “Western” capitalist development models ultimately had the same

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39 Ibid., 103.
40 Ibid., 111.
basis: the combination of political and economic hierarchies. Meanwhile, the central premise of social ecology (as formulated by Bookchin) was that global environmental crisis and human poverty and inequality that accompanied it were due to the exploitation of nature by humans and of humans by humans that originated from hierarchical structures. In this scheme, the relative weights of state and market within the social system made no decisive difference to the outcome: exploitation of people and nature was found in both the capitalist and the socialist “variants of the industrial society”. For Vadim Damier, one of the most prominent voices within the eco-anarchist camp of the late 1980s – early 1990s, “solving environmental problems and freeing humanity are the same thing, since the main aim of our activity is to put an end to all hegemonies.” Thus, the activists coming out of the Soviet experience and their Western counterparts had to fight the same enemy – the hierarchy, in whatever forms they encountered it in their particular societies.

The attitude towards hierarchies adopted by social environmentalists closely resembles the argument that James Scott (1998) makes in “Seeing like the state.” He shows that “large, formal systems of coordination” – be they authoritarian states or capitalist markets – have a propensity to act as “agents of heroic social and natural simplification” when they are driven by high-modernist ideology and are not properly restrained by societies upon which they act. High modernism is an ideology that Scott considers to be the “by-product of unprecedented progress in science and industry” that has taken place in the West since the Enlightenment and especially through the epoch of

42 See Fomichev (1997: 18) and Bookchin (2003).
the Industrial Revolution. He describes it as “a strong … version of the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of human needs, the mastery of nature (including human nature), and, above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws.”  

The application of this ideology through large-scale social and natural engineering projects leads to disastrous social and environmental consequences, because it neglects and suppresses “the informal processes” on which it depends and which it “can neither create nor maintain.” These “informal processes,” “practical knowledge (metis),” and “skills that underwrite any complex activity” but are impossible to codify exist at the base, among the “ordinary human actors,” whom the political and economic hierarchies claim to benefit, while depriving them of representation and decision-making power.

Just as the ideologists of social environmentalism see its main goal as the restructuring of society “so that people gain power,” Scott calls for “institutions that are powerfully shaped by metis” and by the principles of “autonomy and diversity.” However, Scott’s attitude towards “the local, the traditional, and the customary” is much more cautious than that of many proponents and practitioners of social environmentalism: “I understand that the practical knowledge I describe is often inseparable from the practices of domination, monopoly, and exclusion that offend the modern liberal

45 While Scott’s book is based on case studies of natural and social engineering projects undertaken by powerful central states, he warns that “today, the global capitalism is perhaps the most powerful force for homogenization … and heroic simplification,” because “a market necessarily reduces quality to quantity via the price mechanism and promotes standardization: in markets money talks, not people.”
sensibility.” Incidentally, this qualification with respect to all things local and grassroots can be found in Bookchin’s philosophy as well, although not all of his followers chose to heed to his warnings that “small is not always beautiful — small units can sometimes be destructive and reactionary. [Communal] autonomy is a myth … I am for interdependence among self-governing people in assemblies [and confederations of such assemblies].”

3.3 Ecology as Social Justice: Mexico Between 1968 and 1985

3.3.1 1968 – The Key Watershed

The year 1968 is perhaps the single most important date in the 20th-century history of Mexican social activism. It was the high point of the social mobilization that, for the first time “since the founding of Mexico’s post-revolutionary social pact” during the Cardenas years (1936-40), had overflowed “the boundaries of the official corporatist organizations” of the party-state, through which “most social demands were processed.”

This was the watershed year for the PRI, when it suffered the first major breach in its legitimacy, both political and economic. The Mexican model of import-substituting industrialization (ISI) that was put in place in the early 1940s and gave very high growth rates for almost 20 years, began to show signs of exhaustion by the late 1960s. Although its lifespan was extended until the early 1980s thanks to the partial economic reforms of President Echeverría (1970-76) and to the oil boom during the term of Lopez Portillo

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(1976-82), after 1968 the PRI’s signature strategy of trading economic redistribution for political quiescence was never quite as effective as before. The repression of 1968-69 and the “dirty war” against the radical Left in the 1970s had also upset the careful balance between repression and cooptation of social movements and political opposition that has been the foundation of PRI’s political success.

1968 was a moment of truth both for the state and the society. The state became aware that there were new and powerful social forces that its corporatist apparatus could no longer adequately control or incorporate. The regime’s inability to confront new social demands with anything but the disproportionate use of force had greatly damaged its social legitimacy, especially in the eyes of intellectuals. By resorting to naked violence, the PRI state has not only demonstrated that it was no longer sufficiently flexible to deal with an increasingly complex society, but also, paradoxically, has made it easier for its citizens to disengage and distance themselves from it and thus has created the necessary conditions for the growth of social autonomy and for the development of systemic critique and opposition.

For all their devastating impact on the radical Left, the events of 1968 catalyzed a very important and necessary process of critical reflection: in the wake of an overwhelming defeat at the hands of the state, the political militants were forced to question and reevaluate their fundamental beliefs, objectives, and strategies. One of the key results of this period of introspection in the 1970s was the emergence of a new, “social” Left alongside its older, political forms. Instead of focusing its efforts on the creation and maintenance of vanguard-type political parties that strove to engage
industrial workers, the social Left placed the emphasis on fomenting autonomous organizations among the rural and urban poor.\textsuperscript{50} For many members of the 1968 movement, leaving the large urban centers for urban and rural hinterlands was not only a way to escape repressions,\textsuperscript{51} but also an attempt to learn from their mistakes and to do things differently. The Maoist current, inspired by “the return to the masses” proclaimed by the Chinese Cultural Revolution, was the single most important contributor to this post-1968 effort of leading and supporting the grassroots organization of peasants and of the urban squatters.\textsuperscript{52}

The Maoist activists were part of a broader stream of urban intellectuals and professionals – doctors, teachers, engineers, architects, biologists, anthropologists, agricultural technicians, and priests – whose concern for social justice brought them in

\textsuperscript{50} Harvey (1998: 15) describes this reorientation as a “shift from workplace to community-based demands.”\textsuperscript{51} This road brought some intellectuals directly to environmental activism. Jesús Arias Chávez taught at the School of Physics and Mathematics of the National Polytechnical Institute (IPN), which was one of the main centers of the 1968 movement. When repressions began, he fled to the house that his family had in Xochicalli, in the rural zone to the southeast of the Mexico City. Forced into self-sufficiency, he transformed the family home into an ecological house, the first one in Mexico. After the wave of repressions subsided, he reconnected with the IPN and became involved with an interdisciplinary social service project that sent activist-researcher teams to the poor communities in the Valley of Mexico to work on basic services and water provision. This effort led to the formation of the Association for Appropriate Technology (ATA). Peón Escalante, 26.09.2006.\textsuperscript{52} For the history and analysis of the Mexican Maoists see Moguel (1987) and Bennett (1993). The emergence of urban popular movements (MUPs) was one of the direct consequences of the restructuring of the radical Left in the aftermath of 1968. The two groups that produced the most notable MUP leaders were the Maoist Política Popular-Línea de Masas (PP-LM) and the Organización Regional Compañero (ORC), one of the splinters from the Leninist Liga Comunista Espártaco that was itself the result of the 1958 split of the Mexican Communist Party (PCM). After the debacle of 1968, the Maoists focused their attention on organizing the peasants and the urban poor. Many of their activists were students who left the universities in order to live with the people they were organizing. The members of PP-LM were especially active in the North, where they began by organizing land invasions and have created strong organizations in Durango, Monterrey, and Zacatecas by the end of the 1970s. Unlike the Maoists, members of ORC have not participated in the events of 1968; they focused their attention on the Mexico City agglomeration. Four of these early groups came together as the Conamup network in 1980, which became a major challenge to the National Confederation of Popular Organizations (CNOP), the least effective of PRI’s corporatist pillars, designed to harness the support of the urban dwellers.
close and sustained contact with the popular sector.\(^{53}\) They initiated community-based development projects that were focused on the solution of concrete and immediate problems, such as provision of housing, basic urban services, health and education, and new agricultural technologies. Yet at the same time many of these projects had a broader political component, as they made use of direct democracy and traditional mechanisms of community decision-making and fomented the creation of grassroots organizations that strove to establish their autonomy from the state corporatist institutions and were very suspicious of electoral participation and alliances with any political parties.\(^{54}\) This focus on autonomy, community, and the solution of place-specific problems was an important precondition for the evolution of social-environmental frames for social activism.

The new forms of grassroots mobilization that emerged in the 1970s were shaped by the combined effects of the post-1968 movement of intellectual elites towards the popular sector and Echeverría’s concurrent efforts to repair the damage to PRI’s legitimacy and to strengthen its corporatist system. In his pursuit of social reconciliation, Echeverría implemented several major policies that, as an unintended consequence, have helped to create engendering environments for professional activists that gravitated towards social environmentalism and new spaces for grassroots autonomous organization.

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\(^{53}\) Sector popular is a Latin American term that describes the disenfranchised and the marginalized strata of the population. They have limited access to “state educational, employment, health care, and welfare” services and suffer disproportionately from “the arbitrary use of the state’s repressive apparatus” (Oxhorn, 1995: 301). As O’Donnell (1999 and 2007) points out, these groups are defined not so much by their low income levels or their occupations, but by the fact that their access to formal political, economic, and social institutions is inhibited or denied.

\(^{54}\) See Fox and Hernández (1992: 172-73).
Like Cárdenas, Echeverría used land distribution and rural development programs as a means to create direct links between the presidency and the popular sector and to gain their loyalty by providing them with an alternative to the local and regional clientelist networks. He reformed state rural development agencies, such as Conasupo\textsuperscript{55} and Inmecafé\textsuperscript{56} in order to break the hold of traditional intermediaries on small agricultural producers and to make them clients of the central state by providing them with price guarantees,\textsuperscript{57} cheap credit, chemical inputs, infrastructure, marketing, storage and distribution services.\textsuperscript{58} The functions and the budgets of these agencies were greatly expanded, and the number of other parastatal companies that carried out rural

\textsuperscript{55} Conasupo – Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares – was created by Cárdenas to provide “marginalized zones” with basic foodstuffs. It was a parastatal trading agency, a “state enterprise for stockpiling and storage of basic foodstuffs,” which had unlimited power for market intervention and regulation through unlimited buying of agricultural produce at guaranteed prices. Conasupo was the main buyer of corn harvests from small producers, the main provider of corn for the corn flour and nixtamal industries, and the only enterprise allowed to import and export corn. It created and administered strategic food reserves and redistributed food from production to consumption zones. After a gradual reduction of its functions and influence by Salinas, it was eliminated by Zedillo in 1999, along with the tortilla subsidies. See Lambert (1985: 85), Acuña (2003: 151), Yunes-Naude (2003), de Ita and Carlsen (2007).

\textsuperscript{56} Inmecafé – Instituto Mexicano de Café – was founded in 1958 as a center for research, experimentation, and technical assistance in the sphere of coffee production. After Echeverría’s reforms of 1973, it became a key player in the organization and funding of small-scale coffee producers, as well as provision of infrastructure for storage and export of coffee. It aimed to displace the traditional arrangement under which small-scale producers from poor regions were forced to sell fresh coffee cherries (café cereza) to local intermediaries at low price. Inmecafé organized these producers into “units of production and commercialization,” provided them with cheap credit and chemical inputs, and thus “displaced a large number of traditional intermediaries … establishing a direct relationship with the small-scale producers” in the poorest regions of the country. Aided by Inmecafé, indigenous coffee producers acquired considerably greater market power and became a counterweight to “the main power nucleus of the sector – the large enterprises that control the roasting and the instant-coffee industries.” See Hernández (1992: 81).

\textsuperscript{57} “The Mexican state played a key role in the production of basic grains through the system of guaranteed prices and the infrastructure for storage and distribution (almacenamiento y acopio). The system of price guarantees had two basic objectives: to encourage production and to ensure a minimum income level for rural producers. Between 1965 and 1971 price floors for rice, sorghum, soya, barley, sunflower and sesame seeds were introduced in addition to the already existing price floors for maize, beans, and wheat. See Acuña (2003).

\textsuperscript{58} See Moguel and Aranda (1992).
development projects increased almost ten-fold.\textsuperscript{59} The introduction of Green Revolution technologies was the central component of this effort and has later resulted in long-term spirals of environmental degradation and peasant indebtedness in the Southeastern and Central regions of the country.\textsuperscript{60} These man-made crises provided the basis for peasant and indigenous self-organization that from its very beginning took socio-environmental forms.

Land distribution was the second major aspect of Echeverría’s intervention into the countryside. He was the last PRI president to devote significant attention to the task of land distribution that had been historically seen by the Mexican peasants as the key obligation of the state.\textsuperscript{61} In addition to approving land claims filed by the peasants, Echeverría also turned a blind eye to and later legalized many rural and urban land invasions that took place at the end of his sexenio in Sonora, Sinaloa, Durango, Chihuahua, Nuevo Leon and Puebla. In some cases, he even encouraged such actions and sided with the squatters and their leaders in conflicts that arose with landlords and state officials.\textsuperscript{62} In its essence, this was a clientelist strategy: the squatter movements whose

\textsuperscript{59} The rural development program was one of the main reasons for the overall massive increase in public spending on health, housing, social welfare, education, and transport during Echeverría’s sexenio. This monetary populism, which has benefitted urban dwellers even more than the rural population, continued under López Portillo and led to the rising levels of inflation and budget deficits that contributed to the 1982 economic collapse. See Smith (1991).
\textsuperscript{61} The peasants filed land claims with their regional governors, but these decisions were then reviewed by the federal government, so that the president was the highest authority on this question. The claims often took years to go through, making the rezago agrario (unapproved requests for land) one of the chief peasant grudges against the regime (Harvey, 1998). See Díaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni (2006). These authors note that the greatest share of land distribution occurred during the presidency of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970); Cardenas occupies the second place in this list, while Echeverría comes in third. However, it must be noted that the quality of land that Díaz Ordaz and Echeverría distributed was much lower than that given by Cárdenas.
land demands were quickly granted became much more moderate and willing to negotiate with the state. However, in the case of urban land invasions, it also opened a very unique window of opportunity for the emergence of new, independent urban popular movements led by the social Left. As Haber (2006: 133) notes, the latter consciously exploited “intragovernmental elite splits [by building] working relations with federal agencies while using mass mobilizations to pressure local power holders into negotiating agreements.”

After the repressions of 1968 the Echeverría administration also took deliberate steps to make peace with the intellectuals and attempted to reincorporate them into the regime’s support base. One of the key steps in this direction was the creation of new institutions for higher education and research that became the enclaves of intellectual freedom and the engendering environments for activist-intellectuals with a deep concern for social justice and durable links to grassroots organizations. First and foremost among these new institutions were the Autonomous University of Mexico (UAM) with several campuses throughout Mexico City and a set of about twenty research institutes in different parts of the country under the aegis of the National Council for Science and Technology (Conacyt), all of them created in 1974.

The novelty of these institutions was in their mission of “grounding academic research and teaching within the social reality of the country.”

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63 Haber (2006) argues that Echeverría’s greater tolerance and occasional support meant for such groups came during the crucial early phase in the development of Urban Popular Movement, which therefore suffered relatively low levels of repression at the time when it was most vulnerable.


65 Barkin Rappoport, 05.10.2007.
separation of research and teaching practiced at the UNAM – Mexico’s flagship university – UAM required its professors to involve their students directly in their research projects. These projects also had to include a significant fieldwork component. In other words, both students and professors at the UAM were supposed to generate knowledge for the benefit of the country and its people. Many scholars took this official mission at face value and designed projects that dealt with issues of social and economic justice and development. Many of these projects were fieldwork-based and involved direct interactions with peasant and indigenous communities. This preoccupation with equitable development and social justice was reinforced by the fact that in the 1970s Mexico served as a safe haven for political exiles from all over South America. Many of the researchers and intellectuals that were forced to leave their countries after the establishment of authoritarian regimes became faculty members at the UAM campuses and researchers in the newly created Conacyt centers.

3.3.2 The Intellectuals Who Went “to the People”

The intellectuals who became involved in grassroots mobilization after 1968 came from such an impressive variety of political and professional backgrounds that it is hard to place them into mutually exclusive categories. While all of them shared the concern for the well-being of “the disadvantaged” and wanted “to serve the people,” they came to this kind of activism by very different roads and framed it in very different ways. This truly impressive diversity of professional social activists is one key reason behind the vitality and strength of the present-day social environmentalism in Mexico. This section focuses on those social activists who followed the SSE to social environmentalism by
adding a strong environmental component to their social justice concerns and becoming professional leaders and advisers of grassroots social-environmental campaigns.

The field of **applied science and technology** became one of the major sources of Mexican professional social environmentalists. These engineers, chemists, and architects all shared a fundamental belief in technology as the source of solutions to the most common causes of environmental degradation. They dedicated themselves to the search for innovations in the fields of alternative energy, water recycling, and waste minimization and put them into practice by creating ecological houses and settlements. They saw these environmentally-friendly and resource-saving technologies both as a way to confront the environmental crisis and as a means to raise people out of poverty, to make them do better with less.66 They argued (and continue to argue) that the problem of environmental degradation cannot be effectively addressed without paying attention to the small scale, to the patterns of behavior within individual households. For these **ecotécnicos**,67 pursuing technological innovations went hand in hand with educating people of all social classes, but especially the poor, about living in an environmentally conscious manner.

66 One of the most vivid current examples of such activism is the work of Carlos Padilla Massieu in Michoacán.
67 Yanitsky (1991 and 1996: 129) describes the Russian analogue of such activists and gives it a similar name (**ekotekhnologi**). In Soviet Russia, these people never formed a noticeable stream within environmental activism, because they were isolated individuals who had no possibility to form an association, that is, to engage in collective action with like-minded colleagues. In addition, their efforts were not linked to an explicit ideology of social development and poverty reduction that was so important to their Mexican counterparts. ATA’s efforts were part of a much larger context of development and philanthropic efforts undertaken by the first NGOs (supported by the Church and by US and European foundations) and also by the state (especially during the Echeverria administration). In Soviet Russia, this developmentalist context did not exist at all.
Many of these activists combined technical education with a Leftist political background: quite a few came from the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN) – the national leader in higher technical education that was one of the centers of the 1968 movement. After 1968, those of them that escaped repression initiated an interdisciplinary social service project, which sent activists to the rural zone around Mexico City to work on the provision of basic services and to give short technology courses to the peasants. Ignacio Peón, one of the members of this project, which was later formalized as the Association for Appropriate Technology (ATA), describes it as “putting technology at the service of the people” and cites Schumacher’s “Small is Beautiful” (1973) as its main ideological inspiration. He emphasizes that while many ATA members “questioned neither [government] policy nor politics,” their work was making a contribution to the task of autonomous self-organization in the communities where they worked: “we realized that the government was not going to resolve their problems, that they had to do it by themselves [with our help and] with the resources that they had.” Yet in the 1970s the ATA members saw themselves mostly as “technical experts resolving particular, local problems.” The politicization of this group took place in the mid-1980s, when it sensed that the political environment was changing and that they could have an impact beyond the local level. In 1984, some ATA members formed the Red Alternativa de E-comunicacion (RAE), which became one of the precursor networks of Pacto de Grupos Ecologistas (PGE).

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Another typical example of this current is the Environmental Studies Group (GEA), founded in 1977 by Alfonso González Martínez, who came from the anarchist self-government movement that surged at the UNAM’s School of Architecture in the late 1960s. GEA began its work at the grassroots by developing participatory urban planning strategies jointly with neighborhood organizations in Mexico City. For example, between 1979 and 1984, its founders who were then members of the autonomous studio No.5 led by Ricardo Flores Villasana – worked with housing cooperatives, small vendors, and resident associations in the Tepito neighborhood (the colony of Morelos), on an alternative urban development project formulated in response to the government’s proposal for the construction of a large complex of commercial and administrative buildings. Since mid-1980s, has GEA increasingly focused on participatory management of natural resources by rural communities. It has served as an advisor to many indigenous and peasant organizations, including the Council of the Nahua People of Alto Balsas (CPNAB) formed in 1990 in opposition to the Tetelcingo dam project in

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69 This movement caused the division of the School into two parts: the conventional part that consisted of studios governed by the rector and following a single program of study (talleres de letras), and the self-government part (Arquitectura-Autogobierno), where each studio had an independent administration and had its own program requirements (talleres de números). The faculty members and the students in the self-government division were members and sympathizers of the radical Left and focused its fieldwork on “social architecture” in low-income neighborhoods. This self-government movement was a unique experiment that did not have analogues at other UNAM departments; it gradually died out during the 1980s. Valencia Méndez, 07.11.2009.

70 It was the first attempt at multi-faceted neighborhood revitalization that took into account all the aspects of its life – housing, economic exchanges, transport, culture, green spaces, etc. While the planning stage (1979-1981) did involve an unusually diverse coalition of grassroots actors and multi-disciplinary researchers, few of the programs were actually carried out. The quality of the housing and urban infrastructure in the neighborhood remained extremely low at the time of the 1985 earthquake. This issue was subsequently addressed as part of the reconstruction effort led by Camacho Solís. Mejorada Sánchez and Álvarez Enríquez (2003: 220); Lee Nájera (2006); Valencia Méndez, 07.11.2009.

Guerrero. GEA’s members describe themselves as “professionals who want to put their knowledge and expertise to the service of society and integrity of the natural environment.”

Echeverría’s rural development program launched in 1973 created another very important engendering environment for both professional and grassroots social environmentalists. While it was supposed to strengthen the peasant loyalty to the PRI regime in general and to the presidency in particular, it fed a new wave of grassroots organizations that had a greater degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the local power structures, because they were supported by the agents of federal state. At the same time it created a new space for interactions between the rural grassroots and the educated elites by sending “thousands of social service-oriented, university-trained promoters [to work on] projects to increase productivity, broaden access to credit and inputs, and organize food distribution outlets.” The University of Chapingo as well as the autonomous universities of Puebla, Oaxaca, and Guerrero were among the key institutions that sent agricultural extension agents to the peasant communities. Many of these individuals were members or sympathizers of the radical Left and saw their efforts to reduce rural poverty as being directly related to the broader struggle for social and political justice. A notable example of such a synergy is Réné Gómez, an agronomist from Chapingo and a member of a Maoist group Unión Popular, who came to rural Chiapas in the late 1970s and saw his

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72 See Bray (1995, fn.47). The CFE postponed the construction indefinitely in February 1992, and GEA together with CPNAB initiated an alternative regional development project.


74 Fox and Hernández (1992: 177).
work in building infrastructure for coffee marketing “as a pretext for the formation of an independent peasant organization.” He and Adolfo Oribe Berlinger, the founder of another Maoist group, Política Popular, who came to Chiapas in 1977 at the invitation of Bishop Samuel Ruiz, served as catalysts for the grassroots organization of indigenous communities in the regions of Chiapas that later became the social bases for the Zapatista movement.

The field of rural and regional development attracted researchers from a wide variety of backgrounds – from biologists to anthropologists and economists. Anthropologist Patricia Moguel and ecologist Víctor Toledo, researchers at the UNAM’s Center for Ecosystems Research (Cieco) in the state of Michoacán, have been working with local coffee producer organizations in the state of Puebla, Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Veracruz since the late 1970s. The story of how they started working as advisors for the coffee cooperative of Tosepatitanisque, in the region of Sierra Norte de Puebla, is a rather typical pathway for the formation of a lasting link between academic intellectuals and the grassroots peasant organizations. In 1978 the University of Chapingo sent agronomists there to promote the green revolution – it was part of the federal government’s plan to stimulate regional development. Four of these technicians stayed within the community and, apart from the official mission of promoting agrochemicals and new cultivation techniques, spearheaded the organizing effort that culminated in the creation of a cooperative in 1979. The main motivation for the mobilization was to fight the domination of the economic middlemen – coyotes. According to Moguel, they were

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75 Quoted in Harvey (1998: 84).
76 Harvey (1998).
invited to get involved for the first time by the same technicians: “they wanted us to give them a course in sustainable development.” The role of the Cieco researchers was not that of fomenting the primary organization of the community, which already took place, but “to introduce the perspective of sustainability and [to put their local struggles into] the global context. Our role was to help them make a transition to organic coffee cultivation.” Apart from the shift to organic agriculture, this transition also involved inserting the cooperative into alternative markets.

The Center for Eco-Development (Cecodes) – one of the research centers founded by Conacyt in 1974 – played a key role in the development of social environmentalism, as it brought together an interdisciplinary team of researchers committed to sustainable and equitable development. Economist David Barkin, one of its founding members, maintains that “urban- and university-based environmentalists are less effective than the real environmentalists – the ones that work with rural and indigenous communities, which have their own, particular conceptions of what environmentalism is. This [work] is very different from that of the international-style NGOs.” The basis for creating Cecodes was “to reject the [paradigms] of traditional economics and to create ecological economics that would emphasize the redistributive question, interdisciplinary work, and methodological pluralism.” The Center brought together internationally-reputed Mexican researchers – among them were anthropologists Margarita Nolazco, Salmo Nahman, and Rodolfo Stavenhagen, biologists Alejandro Toledo and Vázquez Botello – and

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77 Moguel, 16.11.2006.
collaborated with progressive intellectuals both in Mexico and abroad – Carlos Monsiváis, Barry Commoner, Wolfgang Sachs, Christian Palois, Martínez Alier.

As Barkin explains, “we were a group of mavericks, nobody could call us to order – we took our autonomy very seriously. [What the state gave us] were the resources that we needed to travel and to publish.” Each member developed and carried out distinct projects, many of which included fieldwork in the poorest regions of the country. For example, one of Barkin’s initiatives was the critique of Plan Chontalpa – a development program that was jointly implemented by Nestle and the government of Tabasco in the Cherayá basin, where tropical forests were logged to make room for cattle pastures and rice and sugar cane plantations. The book that Barkin published on this subject was publically burned in the main square of Villahermosa, Tabasco’s capital, at the governor’s request. However, this conflict with the governor did not cost Barkin his place at Cecodes or his professional career: next year, he became the national laureate in political science. This experience is extremely significant in comparison with the Soviet situation, where the researcher would have paid much more dearly for a similar conflict with the regional party boss.

Unlike in Soviet Russia, where the intellectuals involved in the defense of human rights focused primarily on the plight of intelligentsia, Mexican human rights defenders managed to form a durable link to the grassroots. While the first human rights NGOs and networks that emerged in the late 1970s were formed mostly by urban educated

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78 Barkin, 05.10.2006.
elites, by the late 1980s human rights NGOs began to develop ties with the peasant movements that have added protests against government repression and human rights abuses to the older economic demands.\(^{81}\) Strong regional human rights centers, such as Tlachinollan, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, and the Mexican League for the Defense of Human Rights were founded in the densely populated indigenous regions of the Center and the Southeast – Guerrero, Chiapas, and Oaxaca – as well as in the Tarahumara highlands of Chihuahua. Other centers, such as Fray Francisco de Vitoria and Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez, located in Mexico City, grew out of the preoccupation with both domestic human rights issues and the treatment of refugees from Central American dictatorial regimes of the 1980s, especially Guatemala and El Salvador. Many of these centers were founded by the Catholic clergy and are examples of the extremely productive synergy between the progressive wing of the Catholic Church and the social Left.\(^{82}\)

3.3.3 The Peasant Movements Old and New

The autonomous self-organization of peasants, who have historically been one of the most solid PRI popular bases, began in the 1970s in regions which benefited least from the post-revolutionary land distribution\(^{83}\) and state-sponsored development projects.\(^{84}\) Peasant movements arose outside of state corporatist structures in the poorest

\(^{81}\) See Fox and Hernández (1992), Trejo (2004).
\(^{82}\) Lopezllera (1988).
\(^{83}\) Knight (1986: 375) describes these states as “the region where classic agrarian [revolutionary] revolt never flourished,” and where the landlords were able to use the agrarian question strategically to keep popular support and to resist the revolutionary state’s political centralization efforts.
\(^{84}\) See Trejo (2004).
rural regions of the Southeast – the states of Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla, Veracruz, Tabasco, and Chiapas – where the peasants saw large-scale oil and timber extraction and the building of dams, roads, and tourist infrastructure as an attack on their right to land and natural resources. In such contexts, the environmental degradation – deforestation, desertification, and pollution – appeared as an additional dimension of the overall disenfranchisement. Thus, it is no accident that the first major cases of peasant mobilization that have social-environmental characteristics come from this region.

By the late 1960s, the defense of *communal forests* against commercial logging became the key issue for the peasants of Guerrero and Oaxaca. Between 1968 and 1973, the inhabitants of the Sierra Juárez region of Oaxaca waged a resistance campaign against a parastatal paper factory. In an effort to restore “social peace,” the federal government responded to this conflict with a community forestry program (1975-79), which was directed by Cuauhtémoc Cardenas, the future leader of PRD, who at that time was the Undersecretary for Fauna and Forestry in the Ministry of Agriculture and Hydraulic Resources (SARH). In Guerrero, the excessive logging and the incursion of timber companies into the communal and ejidal lands gave rise to radical peasant movements in the regions of La Montaña and Costa Grande. These movements bore the brunt of state and federal repressions in 1968-1975, but also triggered a major federal development

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86 Anti-logging protests were also widespread in Chiapas and in the Tarahumara region at the border of Chihuahua and Durango. See Bray (1995), Toledo (2000).
87 See Bray (1991) for a detailed case study of this campaign.
program. In Oaxaca and Guerrero, as in many other zones of the indigenous Southeast, government-sponsored development projects of the 1970s that were aimed at restoring “social peace” and keeping the peasants within the PRI corporatist system provided the resources and the organizational foundation for the emergence of autonomous peasant associations of the 1980s and 1990s.

Resistance to large-scale hydropower projects was another major focus of rural collective action. A typical example of such confrontation is the 1972 campaign against the construction of Cerro de Oro dam on the Papaloapan River, on the border between Oaxaca and Veracruz. This campaign brought together two distinct camps: the alliance between grassroots organizations and anthropologists who were defending indigenous rights and the scientists who were defending nature. The first camp focused on the social impacts of the relocation of chinanteca indigenous communities to the headwaters of Uxpanapa River 300km away from the proposed dam site. The ecologists protested against the impact that this relocation was likely to have on the fragile high-altitude ecosystem, into which the resettled chinantecas were to be inserted. This case clearly shows that socio-environmental campaigns do not always form in response to mega-development projects: the alliance between defenders of social justice and defenders of nature can be quite problematic.

The third major source of peasant resistance was the incursion of the oil companies into Chiapas, Tabasco, and Veracruz, where major oil fields were discovered in the 1970s. The peasants saw the environmental consequences of oil prospecting and

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89 The story of peasant resistance to logging in Guerrero is told in greater detail in Section 6.2.3.
extraction as part of the “taking of the land,” and preventing the loss of the land was the focus of the resistance. The peasants’ focus on land often allowed the state and business actors to divert these protests into a clientelist channel. This is well illustrated by the case of Pacto Ribereño – a network of over 20 peasant communities that emerged in the state of Tabasco around 1974, when the state oil monopoly, Pemex, came to the region to develop the newly found oil fields that fueled Mexico’s oil boom during the administration of President Lopez Portillo (1976-1982). According to Bray (1995), the mobilization was triggered not so much by the pollution of the environment (although it was very significant), but by Pemex’s failure to pay the agreed-upon compensation for the lands that were taken. This type of demands (“keep your promises”) was the one that the PRI state has been quite successful in dealing with – the movement was partly co-opted and partly repressed, and was unable to form a durable alliance with the more radical peasant groups that demanded autonomy in local decision-making. Simon (1997) notes that this and other cases have contributed to the formation of a very peculiar mindset, whereby Pemex became scapegoat for all social ills and the provider for all basic needs, as the communities affected by its pollution saw themselves entitled to receive compensation and were ready to extract them from Pemex through protests and other forms of contentious action.

**Rural teachers** are an exceptionally important source of social activism in Mexico. Fox and Hernández (1992) call them “community-based intellectuals,” because these are rural dwellers that went to the cities to get educated and then returned to their

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places of origin. Through their SNTE membership, these teachers were one of the very few rural constituencies that were truly included into the PRI corporatist system. By the late 1970s, this classic top-down structure for popular incorporation began to serve as a base for autonomous rural mobilization in the poorest and most “indigenous” states of the country – Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero. The state chapter structure of SNTE allowed the teachers to communicate more easily among themselves and to form horizontal links between local groups. The Chiapas regional SNTE chapter (Section VII) was the first one to join its trade-union agenda to that of the peasant movement, which in this resource-rich state was acquiring strong environmental overtones in response to the incursion by oil and timber industries that began in the 1960s. The teachers, who lived with the peasants and were from peasant families themselves, decided that “in the face of natural resource destruction and extreme poverty, the teachers who were already organized … could not advance in isolation, acting solely as a trade union.” They came to see themselves as “agents acting on behalf of people’s needs” (gestores y promotores de las necesidades populares). The joint mobilization of Chiapas teachers and peasants that began in 1979 continued throughout the 1980s. In 1986-87, there was another major wave in response to the withdrawal of the state support from agriculture in the wake of the 1986 coffee crisis.

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92 The SNTE was created as a classical PRI corporatist organization; in 1956-60, its Mexico City chapter split away under the leadership of Othón Salazar. This episode marked the beginning of dissent within the SNTE on the issues of associational autonomy and internal democracy. This dissidence moved to a qualitatively new level in 1979, when the Chiapas section of SNTE went on strike which was joined by the teachers in Michoacán, Tabasco, and Guerrero and resulted in the creation of CNTE – an autonomous teacher union. See Monsiváis (1988), Moguel (1987), Harvey (1998) on Chiapas, Cook (1990) on Oaxaca.
93 Quoted in Monsiváis (1988: 190).
Echeverría’s intervention into the countryside and the ideas brought in by the radical Left caused a very important reaction within the peasant movement that moved many of its organizations closer to social environmentalism. This shift occurred in the late 1970s-early 1980s and has been termed “the appropriation of the productive process.”95 Until that point, the main peasant demand towards the Mexican state had been to secure land rights. By the end of Echeverría’s sexenio – the last period of significant land distribution in post-revolutionary Mexico – it became increasingly apparent that the majority of peasants could not raise themselves out of poverty solely by gaining the right to land.96 What they needed in addition, was to gain control over the marketing of their crops – a sphere which had been completely dominated by state structures and private intermediaries. The rural development program carried out by Echeverría did not mean to make the peasants fully independent of the state. In the words of a coffee farmer from Oaxaca, “this father [the central state] did not teach us anything [about marketing], it only controlled us and protected us a little by giving us loans and scholarships for education and buying coffee from us.”97 The need to create an alternative to the paternalist, corrupt, and ineffective state system of crop marketing and distribution pushed the peasants to create autonomous production cooperatives and associations, which began to form regional and sectoral networks in the early 1980s. The need to learn to produce, market, and distribute agricultural and forestry crops without the state became even more urgent towards the end of the 1980s, as the neoliberal reformers began to roll back agricultural

subsidies and to eliminate key agricultural support institutions and as the reform of Article 27 in 1992 and the signing of the NAFTA treaty in 1994 made the peasants feel that “the social – ejidal and communal – sector of the [agricultural] economy” was coming under threat as outdated and ineffective under the new free trade conditions.\(^98\)

### 3.4 Social Activism between Khrushchev’s Thaw and Gorbachev’s Perestroika (1956-1986)

The main purpose of this section is to contrast the Mexican macro-environment for the development of social activism with that of Soviet Russia. The Soviet system was a much less hospitable environment for the emergence of social environmentalism in several key ways. First, as the system actively suppressed all attempts of social mobilization from below, the popular discontent that began to surface during Khrushchev’s era was not allowed to develop into social movements.\(^99\) Thus, Russian population gained no experience in autonomous grassroots activism comparable to the one provided by the new Mexican peasant and urban popular movements. In addition, the space for intellectual freedom in Soviet Russia was overall much smaller, and most of it was available only to natural scientists. Therefore, not only was environmental activism carried exclusively by the intellectual elites (in the absence of grassroots activism), but these intellectual elites were also much less diverse than in Mexico. Consequently, environmental activism was mostly confined to purely biological concerns: the attempts to link environmental degradation to social problems or to the nature of the Soviet economic model were suppressed. In fact, few such attempts arose, because there were

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\(^{99}\) Kozlov (1999); Dolusty and Vorozheikina (2008: ch.10).
not enough social scientists and people of humanitarian professions among environmental activists. However, very limited spaces for autonomous action began to form outside of the environmental activism sector. These spaces provided the foundation for the emergence of eco-anarchists – social environmentalist leaders of the perestroika period.

3.4.1 Islands of Autonomy – An Unintended Consequence of Soviet Modernization

This section analyzes the types of autonomous spaces that later served as the bases for the emergence of social activists in general and professional social environmentalists in particular. After the Stalinist period, during which almost no form of autonomous collective action could survive (1929-1953), social activists slowly began to reemerge in Soviet Russia, although their strength and diversity compares very unfavorably with their Mexican analogues. During Brezhnev’s epoch, repressions became more selective and were directed specifically against intelligentsia that troubled the regime with its free thinking and networks for the distribution of forbidden literature. What explanation can be provided for how these people did the impossible – acted collectively under the shadow of an omnipotent and omnipresent state? The answer has to do as much with the qualities of individuals who refused to surrender their capacity for critical thinking and responsibility for their actions even under very unfavorable circumstances as with a number of macro-social processes that resulted from deliberate actions of the state, but brought altogether unforeseen consequences.

100 Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008, III: 207 and 227)
Although the Soviet regime was based on the negation of capitalist development model, its main ideological goal was still formulated on the basis of Western developmental objectives. The task was to show to the entire world that economic and social modernization through industrialization could be achieved and the Western living standards – surpassed without private property, markets, and exploitation that accompanied the functioning of the associated institutions. While claiming to fill the modernization process with completely new content, the Party leaders of the late 1920s acted upon the premise that became central to the postwar Western theory of economic development: the first step towards high and sustained levels of economic growth is the creation of heavy industry. The first Five Year Plan was designed with the explicit goal to match the most advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe and United States on a few indicators of industrial development that were seen as essential – extraction of metal ores and fossil fuels, production volumes in capital goods and military industries. In order to achieve these strategic objectives, the Party-state had forced and accelerated the process of urbanization through collectivization of agriculture and put a special emphasis on increasing the educational level of the population through the programs of universal primary and technical education. In other words, while economic modernization was seen

102 The focus on capital accumulation, heavy industry, and urbanization is found in the works of Gerschenkron (1962), Rostow (1960), and Nurkse (1967). Note that Mexico followed a different industrialization model: its program of import-substituting industrialization began with the creation of light and consumption-oriented industries, which was aimed at raising the levels of consumption and expanding domestic markets before the creation of heavy and capital goods industries. Since the production of capital goods requires much larger amounts and much greater concentration of capital, the role of the state at this stage of industrialization increases dramatically, which is well illustrated by the Soviet case, where the onset of industrialization had resulted in a huge imbalance of power between state and society.
as the main priority, the Soviet leaders also selectively promoted those aspects of social modernization without which the economic modernization would not have been possible.

While all these changes did not amount to the overall modernization,\textsuperscript{103} by the end of the 1960s they produced a society and an economy that were markedly more complex than 20-30 years before, which made it much harder for the state to coordinate and control them. Since the Soviet economy of the 1930s-50s was geared towards the production of a relatively limited range of outputs (with consumer and light industry goods lagging far behind heavy industrial and military equipment), the party-state was able to control it relatively well through the hierarchical system of centralized planning.\textsuperscript{104} By the late 1950s this system began to show signs of strain: as the economy grew more complex (in no small part through the continuous introduction of foreign equipment and technology\textsuperscript{105}), it became harder and harder to manage from a single center. The “reforms” of 1965 were introduced as an attempt to remedy this situation, but over time their result had been to break the monolith of state property into an ever-growing number of ministerial monopolies that competed and conflicted with each other.\textsuperscript{106} The “shadow economy” of unofficial, direct, and illegal exchanges of goods and services among these monopolies became the indispensable mechanism that kept the

\textsuperscript{103} For the overview of the scholarly debate on whether or not Soviet totalitarianism was a special variant of modernization see Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008, vol. II: 435-49). If modernization is seen as a multidimensional process of transition from traditional to modern and from closed to open society (Popper, 1945; Lerner, 1958), Soviet Russia (even in its final years) falls far short of the mark in all spheres – political, economic, and social.

\textsuperscript{104} Malia (1994: 357 and 364-65).


entire system functioning. As Vorozheikina (2001) argues, “the patron-client networks that [underlay these exchanges and] involved the majority of the population undermined the very foundations of the system built on the negation of private, personal interests.” They rendered meaningless the official ideology built around the supreme goal of building communism: it did not take a lot of hard thinking to see a yawning gap between the daily realities of “deficit” and “provisioning” and the officially proclaimed efforts in the name of “the public good.”

The roots of this “ideological distancing of the large part of the population from the state” were not exclusively economic. Since the late 1960s, while all the essential elements of the totalitarian system remained intact, “non-Soviet” cultures, ideologies, and collectivities began to emerge and evolve in parallel with “the Party line” (which, after 1956, itself began to split into various distinct streams). To say that society was

107 See Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008, ch.9) for an explanatory framework and a very detailed and colorful description of the daily life within this “real socialist economy.” An alternative framework, proposed by Naishul (1991), describes the relations between state agencies and ministries as the “bureaucratic market”; Afanasiev (1997) analyses the vast clientelistic networks that served as the base for this dual economic system. Its functioning is an excellent illustration to Scott’s (1998: 350-52) analysis of what happens to centrally planned and highly simplified social systems over time: the planners at the top of the decision-making structure confronted ever-growing levels of unpredictability and complexity that their plans and institutions were not made to deal with. As the number of elements within the system increased and its overall state became less transparent and more chaotic, the links and micro-mechanisms that kept the system connected and functioning were no longer supplied from the top of the power pyramid, but emerged spontaneously at all levels of social and economic structure.

108 As Malia (1994: 370) argues, the “indispensable informal activities” also undermined “public morality and the sense of law”: everyone who participated in the “underground economy” was engaged in illegal activities from the point of view of the Soviet laws. Thus, the vast majority of the population was continuously violating the laws, but feeling no remorse thereupon, since such behavior was needed “in order to get by.”


110 Here I refer to the definitions and analyses of Soviet totalitarianism by Cheshkov (1994) and Gudkov (2001). The question of whether or not the nature of the Soviet system had undergone a fundamental change after Stalin’s death in 1953 has long been the subject of a vivid scholarly debate. See Malia (1994) and Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008, vols. II and III) for literature reviews and evaluations. I concur with these authors’ conclusion that the Soviet system remained essentially totalitarian until 1985.
gradually liberating itself from state control would be an overstatement, but this growing complexity and the inability of the Party-state to “manage” it produced “islands of freedom,” small, isolated, but ubiquitous “spaces free from state interference.” These social spaces for critical reflection and self-organization appeared as an altogether unforeseen result of several state programs aimed at the modernization of the social sphere. The universal secondary education program and the development of higher education system created a sizeable new group – “state-serving intelligentsia” – for whom “reflection was one of the professional requirements” and who served as the main social base for all kinds of new and “unofficial” forms of collective action. Khrushchev’s housing construction program that began in 1955 gave many of them a chance to move out of communal flats into separate apartments. In a forcibly collective society, these apartments provided a private space, a haven for small gatherings of like-minded individuals that could not be easily monitored by neighbors and other “concerned outsiders.”

By the early 1960s spaces for autonomous action also began to appear in places where the intelligentsia was employed – primarily universities and research institutes – and in the corporatist organizations created for it by the state – professional unions, clubs, and other cultural and recreational institutions. As these organizations (initially created as

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111 This expression belongs to Sergei Zalygin and is also extensively used by Douglas Weiner (1999).
113 The term comes from Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008, vol. III: 237). According to the figures they cite, by the early 1980s this group, which included teachers, doctors, engineers, architects, researchers, and “people of other creative and intellectual professions,” numbered nearly 30 million people in the Soviet Union. In addition, 25 million people were holders of higher education degrees, and the number of students in universities and higher education institutes had surpassed 5 million (Ibid., 200 and 236).
“transmission belts” from the Party to the intellectuals) became more numerous and complex with time, the state grew increasingly unable to control their everyday activities in minute detail, and they began “to violate the limits of their prescribed functions.” Elements of “informality” or “self-organization” that always accompany the functioning of such institutions and that the state was able to minimize during its most repressive stages reappeared and grew into a parallel structure that was kept largely invisible to outsiders.116

Thus, while urbanization, the rising educational levels, and the growth of the service sector created the social substrate for activism, the housing reform and the growth of parallel, informal structures within official “social organizations”117 provided the spaces for new forms of collective action that were unsolicited and unsupervised by the state. Granted, there were clear limits on what could be achieved: in order to remain invisible to the state and avoid repression these spaces had to remain relatively small and isolated. Their life spans were often relatively short, although the people who inhabited them tended to migrate between them and to create new ones as the state noticed and destroyed the old.118

117 The Russian phrase obshchestvennye organizatsii is notoriously hard to translate into English because it refers to state-sponsored entities, in spite of including the adjective obshchestvennye, which comes from the noun “society” (obshchestvo). All researchers writing about this phenomenon struggle with this term, which has been translated as “mass societies” (Weiner, 1999), “state-sponsored” organizations (Malia, 1994), “official social / public organizations,” and “mass organizations” (Yanitsky, 1993). Likewise, the Mexican analogue is usually called “corporatist social organizations” (Fox and Hernandez, 1992), in spite of the fact that these organization did not arise from civil society. See further discussion of this term in Section 3.5.1.
The ideological divisions within the Party caused by Khrushchev’s speech at the XX Congress and by the events in Hungary gave people “the right to doubt”\(^{119}\) their history and the qualities of those in power. Participation in informal discussion groups that spontaneously emerged in the intellectual and student circles of the large cities in and after 1956 had become a decisive influence on many individuals who chose the paths of group activism and individual resistance during the years of stagnation (1964-85).\(^{120}\) Yanitsky singles out their professional organizations and places of employment – universities, research institutes, and professional unions as the most important “engendering environments” for environmental activism.\(^{121}\)

### 3.4.2 Environmental Activism: A Limited Spectrum

During this period, environmental activism in Soviet Russia was confined to a small circle of educated elites: natural scientists in major universities, as well as writers, journalists, and public intellectuals. This activism had no grassroots base, because there were no broad social movements and because the persecution of social and political opposition made it impossible for environmental activist-intellectuals to establish links to other activist sectors, most notably the human rights defenders. Popular “disturbances” of the Khrushchev era were not allowed to develop into social movements and did not get connected to the resistance of intellectual elites. In the absence of autonomous structures for social activism, three nationwide newspapers – *Literaturnaya Gazeta*,

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\(^{120}\) Alekseeva (1978/2006).

\(^{121}\) Yanitsky (1996: 30-32).
Komsomol’skaya Pravda, and Sel’skaya Molodezh’ – provided an extremely important organizational base for the environmental campaigns.

After 1956, there emerged two distinct streams of student environmental activism: the Nature Protection Brigades (DOP), which were successful, because they kept themselves confined to the biocentric-conservationist niche, and the Kedrograd movement, which was aborted by the regime, because it made the link between wasteful exploitation of natural resources and the model of economic development and thus came closer to systemic critique. The third stream of Soviet environmental activism consisted of public intellectuals who began to exploit internal tensions and splits that grew within the Soviet system during the stagnation period (1964-1985) in order to block environmentally disastrous megaprojects, such as the industrial development around Lake Baikal\textsuperscript{122} and the southward turning of northern rivers.\textsuperscript{123}

3.4.1.1 Nature Protection Brigades

One of the key features of the Nature Protection Brigades (DOP) movement that had long-term consequences for the development of environmental activism in Russia was its homogeneity.\textsuperscript{124} The Nature Protection Brigades operated from an extremely narrow range of university departments – biology, soil sciences, and geography.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{122} See Weiner (1999: ch.16) and Feshbach and Friendly (1992: ch.6).
\textsuperscript{123} See Goldman (1972), Weiner (1999: ch.18), Larin et al. (2003: ch.2), and Vorobiev (2006).
\textsuperscript{124} For the history and evaluations of the DOP movement see Socio-Ecological Union (1993), Yanitsky (1996), Khaliy (2000b), and Larin et al. (2003).
\textsuperscript{125} With a few notable exceptions, attempts to create DOPs in other natural science departments (chemistry, geology) and in poly-technical institutes have been largely unsuccessful. In part, this had to do with the fact that biology and geography departments had expeditions directly integrated into the curriculum; while geology departments had expeditions, their goal – mineral exploration – was more directly linked to serving the interests of the state than that of studying natural systems. The only other kind of higher
According to Yanitsky (1996: 40), the conservationist leaders of Moscow State University DOP who also constituted the top leadership of the DOP movement were of the opinion that it was best “not to let people with humanitarian training anywhere close to nature protection.” This sectarian view followed logically from the importance that the DOPs attached to their professional preparation: only those who studied nature best knew how to defend it against abuses by human society. This ideological purity was also inherent in the very process by which the DOP movement propagated itself throughout the country: individual DOP cells created at the biology and geography departments of key universities resembled each other and could be effectively integrated into a homogeneous nation-wide network.

The DOP movement maintained a delicate balance: it serviced the interests of the System (the members of its anti-poacher brigades wore the badges and fulfilled the duties of state environmental inspectors\(^{126}\) without getting altogether absorbed by it organizationally or ideologically. This balance was achieved through a very strict adherence to a set of core principles, which allowed the movement to maintain its niche within an institutional environment that had very low tolerance for autonomous initiative from below and for ideological independence.\(^{127}\) Being well aware of the high risks and costs of any strategy that the regime could interpret as systemic critique or political

\(^{126}\) Officially, they were members of “citizen inspectorates” within VOOP – the official mass-membership environmental organization – and within government agencies such as Glavokhota (Main Administration for Hunting). See Weiner (1999: 404-405).

\(^{127}\) My summary of these principles is based on the sociological studies of the DOP activists conducted by Oleg Yanitsky, who remains the most critical and thoughtful historian of the Russian environmental movement.
opposition, the DOP leadership deliberately avoided setting any kind of political goals and restricted its members the roles of professional experts and well-trained, quasi-military nature guards. As such, DOP members relied heavily on infiltration of those state structures and official social organizations that were sympathetic of their goals or were in need of their help. They set priorities for action and built their organizational structures independently from the System – their main goal was to green the System from within as much as possible without antagonizing it. Yet they were fully dependent on the System for resources and shared its outlook towards the population. Just as they distanced themselves from politics, the DOPs also had no interest in social problems: “the population” was either an object of education and control or a resource to be used for the movement’s advantage. The fact that the cells of the DOP movement lodged themselves within elite higher-education establishments reinforced the gulf between the activists and the general public.

While DOPs were organizationally autonomous from the state and departed from a different (biocentric) ideology, their activities helped the Soviet system to increase control over the population in one particular sphere – interactions with the natural environment – where its reach was relatively limited. In its essence, the DOP movement had an entirely top-down approach to nature protection, which did not clash with the System ideologically and did not threaten its key institutions. It focused its activities on the fight against poachers (violators of state laws), on the propaganda of the “right attitudes towards nature” within the population (top-down ideological work), and

128 This analysis is based on Yanitsky (1996: chapter 2) and Weiner (1999: chapter 14).
on the creation of new protected territories in remote regions, before these attracted the attention of the extractive industries.

DOPs arose at the time of Khrushchev’s thaw, when the central state for the first time acknowledged its imperfections and allowed limited social initiative in helping it overcome various defects. Thus, the foundational goals of DOPs were not those of overall critique or opposition, but of “correcting the System’s faults” – primarily the excessive bureaucratization and ineffectiveness of environmental control agencies. As Zabelin explains, the DOP members were not trying to imagine, design, and promote an alternative: as far as formal laws and institutions went, “the System appeared to be sufficient [for protecting nature], provided that we could make it work properly.” The ultimate irony of the situation was that DOP could only “make it work” by focusing on small-scale violations committed by the general public.\(^{129}\) These small-scale “corrections” did nothing to change the overall nature of the economic system that the DOPs had neither power nor willingness to challenge. As the experience of the Kedrograd student movement shows, Soviet environmental student movements were in no position to directly attack the institutional and systemic causes of environmental degradation – the extensive and wasteful nature of Soviet economic expansion led by the industrial and natural resource ministries, or the systemic corruption and overexploitation

\(^{129}\) Sviatoslav Zabelin, who joined the DOP at Moscow State University in 1967, gives a very characteristic description of this mentality: “[When we started the anti-poaching program], almost no hunter among those we met had hunting permits, so there was no room for ethical doubts: they were all violators. In about three years, we noticed that most hunters had permits, and so our function was no longer that of protecting nature from thieves, but that of a bus ticket controller. And so it was decided to move our anti-poacher raids to those places where no hunting was permitted.” (quoted in Khaliy, 2000b) The more systemic questions of how the hunters obtained the permits and whether those permits should have been issued at all were of no major concern to the DOP members. They could only catch those individuals who violated the laws on their own risk, with no institutional protection. See also Yanitsky (1996) and Weiner (1999).
in fisheries, game management, and logging. Having originated within one of the few autonomous spaces left by the Soviet system, the student environmental activists had to remain within that niche in order to survive – their biocentrism served them both as a protective shell and a very convenient blinder that allowed them not to see that the System was ultimately incompatible with any kind of large-scale and coherent program of nature protection apart from removing a certain fraction of the national territory from economic exploitation as zapovedniki.\textsuperscript{130}

3.4.2.2 Kedrograd – A Failed Step Towards Social Environmentalism

The environmental student movement that arose in the late 1950s at the Leningrad Forestry Technical Academy was very different from DOP. Its leaders – Shipunov and Parfenov – wanted “to establish a model forest plantation in the Altai Mountains” in order to harvest non-timber products from the Siberian stone pine (cedar) forests. Theirs was an experiment in sustainable ecosystem management: they wanted to maintain the long-term health of the forest by limiting timber extraction and replacing the lost revenue with sales of other forest products – pine nuts, mushrooms, berries, pelts, and game. They framed this project in completely Soviet terms: their goal was “to make Communism

\textsuperscript{130} Sergei Mukhachev from Kazan’ Chemical-Technological Institute – one of the few non-biological higher education environments that had produced a durable and productive DOP – tells that the DOP of the Biology Department at Kazan State University underwent a deep crisis as its members had gathered enough information to realize “that the actions of a social movement were utterly inadequate to adequately confront such a grandiose problem, that they only created an illusion of protecting nature” at the small scale, while nature destruction continued at much higher levels that the student movement was unable to control. Mukhachev’s brigade made a conscious decision “not to pay attention to such things” and expanded the DOP action format by creating a seminar on “Ecology and Civilization” that attracted speakers not only from academic institutes, but also from industrial enterprises, and where lectures were given about “economic problems that prevented particular enterprises from protecting nature.” (Khaliy, 2000b) While this seminar did constitute a space for free speech and discussion, the information disclosed there remained within a narrow circle, and the analysis of economic causes of industrial pollution led to no remedial action.
arrive faster by making production less wasteful and more efficient.” However, such an approach went against the very grain of the Soviet system of resource extraction both because of its wholism and because of its emphasis on efficiency. By the third year of their experiment (1962), Kedrograd members came into conflict with the regional branches of resource extraction monopolies that eventually managed to subvert it completely. Chivilikhin, who was the science editor of Komsomol’skaya Pravda, got interested in Shipunov’s initiative in late 1959. National-level support was rallied through this major national daily newspaper: scientists send letters of support in response to publications, people from all over the country sent monetary donations.131 As Weiner (1999: 337) points out, “after Chivilikhin’s first articles, a flood of letters came to Kedrograd from all over the USSR complaining of other [environmental] abuses. Among the topics most frequently brought up … was that of Lake Baikal.” In 1962 Chivilikhin wrote “The Bright Eye of Siberia” – an essay about Baikal that first raised alarm about the military nylon and cellulose mills on its shores.

Chivilikhin’s fight to save Baikal made him ask hard questions that have not occurred to him before. In 1965, drew unflattering conclusions about the entire Soviet system and wondered whether it was “incapable of organizing the truly rational use of the country’s resources. How could it happen that forests – which are the property of the whole people and the state – have now become parceled out … to republican and regional organizations and into the hands of specialized logging enterprises?”132 Two years later, he noted that Kedrograd’s difficulties had their roots in the nationwide “problem of

institutional narrowness and bureaucratism.” Thus, the battle for Kedrograd catalyzed the eventual transformation of its intellectual leaders “from Soviet patriots and Communist idealists to Russian nationalists and even embittered chauvinists.”

Chivilikhin’s evolution was typical for a new kind of Soviet-time environmentalists: public intellectuals who were not natural scientists. This “new set of social actors” included journalists, writers, foresters, and engineers who were “distinct from the lost tribe of ecologists, botanists, zoologists, and geographers who were still fighting on behalf of pristine nature.” Weiner (1999) describes this heterogeneous group as the “upwardly mobile beneficiaries of the system who had conformed but who felt disillusioned and betrayed. What pushed these otherwise average Soviet subjects into environmental activism was the sense that their environmental ‘homeland’ [Siberia] was being destroyed and that the system on its own would not stop it.” Among the most prominent members of this stream were the ‘village prose writers’ – Soloukhin, Rasputin, Astafiev, Proskurin, and Shukshin – whose works drew the parallel between the social and the environmental degradation of the Russian countryside. Under less authoritarian political conditions and with grassroots support this current might have turned into social environmentalism; in the climate of stagnation, it acquired distinctly nationalist overtones and filled the only niche available for the opposition – the space created by the inter-ministerial fight for influence within the increasingly fragmented state apparatus.

133 Ibid.
These aspects of late Soviet environmental activism became fully visible in the campaign against the southward turning of the northern rivers (1974-1986).\textsuperscript{136}

### 3.4.3 Chernobyl – The End of the Soviet Epoch

Like the September 1985 earthquakes in Mexico City,\textsuperscript{137} the explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power reactor that took place on April 26\textsuperscript{th}, 1986 was the moment of truth for the Soviet state and society. In his memoirs, Gorbachev remarked that this event “shone light on many generic illnesses of the system” and served “as one more persuasive argument in favor of radical reforms.”\textsuperscript{138} On the most immediate level, it severely tested the limits of the \textit{glasnost’} policy that was officially announced only two months before, at the XXVII Party Congress.\textsuperscript{139} It took the Soviet leaders three days to issue the first official announcement of the accident, and that announcement did nothing to acknowledge the true scale and impact of what had occurred. The fact that May 1\textsuperscript{st} parades and outdoor celebrations were allowed to happen all over the most heavily affected zone, which included Northeastern Ukraine, Belorussia, and four Russian regions, shows how deeply ingrained the custom of environmental secrecy was in the Soviet Union. Dolutsky and Vorozheikina argue that the official information policy in the

\textsuperscript{136} The early version of this project was first mentioned in the Third Program of the Party (1961) and involved the diversion of major rivers in the European North of Russia (such as Pechora and North Dvina) into the Volga River watershed, so that the level of the Caspian Sea could be raised. The second version that was formulated in mid-1970s involved channeling the flow of two major Siberian rivers – Ob’ and Irtysh – into the disappearing Aral Sea, whose major feeder rivers – Syr-Darya and Amu-Darya – had been diverted for irrigation of the cotton fields in Central Asia since the 1950s. For the history of these projects and of the campaign against them see Goldman (1972), Weiner (1999: ch.18), Larin et al. (2003: ch.2), and Vorobiev (2006); Feshbach and Friendly (1992: ch.4) give a historical overview of the Aral Sea desiccation.

\textsuperscript{137} For the discussion of 1985 Mexico City earthquakes and their impact on social activism see Section 4.2.2.


\textsuperscript{139} Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008, III: 344); Feshbach and Friendly (1992: 14).
aftermath of the accident “was not only deceitful, but also ineffective,” given both Chernobyl’s international impact and the number of Soviet citizens who were immediately affected and involved with the “liquidation of the consequences.”\textsuperscript{140} The official handling of Chernobyl constituted an enormous breach of citizen trust in the new reformist government and became one of the main engines that truly made glasnost’ work.\textsuperscript{141}

The Chernobyl accident had a profound effect on the nature of environmental activism in the former Soviet Union. It became the departure point for the anti-nuclear movement first in Ukraine, Lithuania and Armenia, and then in Russia.\textsuperscript{142} In the 1990s, protests against the construction of new nuclear power stations and expansion of the existing ones took place in Saratov, Leningrad, Voronezh, Rostov, Kostroma, and Gor’kiy (Nizhniy Novgorod) regions.\textsuperscript{143} Environmental NGOs and informal groups dedicated to the nuclear contamination issues sprung up in Briansk, Murmansk, Chelyabinsk and other regions that were affected by Chernobyl fall-out and by the

\textsuperscript{140} Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008, III: 352).
\textsuperscript{141} Mikhail Borozin, one of the prominent environmental activists of that time, argues that the universal frustration with state secrecy that arose in the aftermath of the accident made it impossible to maintain the censorship over ecological information any longer: “Once Glavlit [the main censor agency] was ordered not to [punish] those who published [sensitive] materials, the floodgates have opened. Something very critical was published, and, far from being arrested, the author did not even lose his job. The people jumped at the new information and demanded more. [This gave a signal to others] that they could go further and be bolder in their writing.” Quoted in Larin et al. (2003: 61).
\textsuperscript{142} Dolutsky and Vorozheikina (2008, III: 352) note that Chernobyl made Gorbachev understand “rather belatedly that in order to change anything in the [Soviet] system one had to tell the truth not just about the past, but also about the present.”
\textsuperscript{143} See Khaliy, ed. (1996)
nuclear accidents and waste that resulted from the operations of the military industry.\textsuperscript{144} Lev Fedorov, the head of the Union for Chemical Safety, remarks that the strength of the preoccupation with the nuclear issues might also indirectly account for the relative weakness of the anti-toxic movement in post-Soviet Russia: “we had Chernobyl, but we did not have [the equivalent of] Bhopal, and so the environmental movement rushed into defending the people against the nuclear danger [and that left] the niche of chemical pollution relatively empty.”\textsuperscript{145}

Hardly any anti-nuclear movement around the globe has remained unaffected by the Chernobyl events. In Mexico, they catalyzed a new major round of anti-nuclear activism.\textsuperscript{146} In September 1986, President de la Madrid announced the beginning of the final phase in the construction of a major nuclear power plant at Laguna Verde, Veracruz. The Mexican anti-nuclear activists responded with the creation of the Jalapa Anti-nuclear Group, which quickly made links with local grassroots associations that emerged in all major cities of central Veracruz. By 1988, these groups formed a broad network, called Conclave (National Coordination Committee against Laguna Verde), which brought together “students, housewives, cattle ranchers, peasants, priests, and urban intellectuals.” On January 27\textsuperscript{th}, 1987, at the height of this mobilization, 10 thousand people participated

\textsuperscript{144} Detailed accounts of these issues and movements have been published in Uchastie (Participation) Almanakh (Ecosociology Association, Moscow) and Ekologia i Pravo (Bellona-Saint Petersburg). \textsuperscript{145} Fedorov, 09.07.07. \textsuperscript{146} The first episode took place in 1979-1982 and was associated with the proposal for a nuclear reactor construction on the shores of Lake Pátzcuaro in Michoacán. González Martínez (1992); Árias Chávez, 11.11.2006.
in the symbolic closure of the plant. Nevertheless, Laguna Verde began to operate in 1989, as Conclave gradually weakened because of internal tensions.147

3.5 1987-1993: The First Appearance of Social Environmentalism in Russia

The first wave of social environmentalism in Russia arose from three main sources. The informal urban movement of 1987-91 was the first attempt at grassroots social environmentalism. The eco-anarchist organizations produced the first generation of professional activists and a new collective action form – ecological protest camps, which provided a space for interactions between professional social environmentalists and concerned citizens. Lev Fedorov, a Moscow chemist who converted to activism in the early 1990s, created the Union for Chemical Safety (UCS) – a nationwide network of local and regional grassroots organizations that arise in response to toxic pollution problems related to chemical weapons. While the eco-anarchists and the UCS have managed to create a long-term alliance, no link formed between them and the urban informal stream of social environmentalism, whose development was aborted in 1991-1993, but did contribute to the emergence of reform environmentalism as some of its leaders left the movement for the political sphere.

3.5.1 The Informal Movement – The First Attempt at Grassroots Environmentalism

1987 was a crucial watershed for the development of social activism in the Soviet Union, because by that time Gorbachev realized that the reforms, which he began two

147 See González Martinez (1992), Mumme (1992), and García Gorena (1999).
years earlier as a revolution from above, could not be continued without broad social support. Several actions taken by top leadership had greatly enlarged the space available for self-organization. By refusing to apply Articles 70 and 190-1 of the Penal Code that punished “the spreading of anti-Soviet propaganda” in oral and written form and by granting amnesty to those convicted on the basis of these articles the regime showed that it was no longer after “those who thought differently.” The social response was immediate and strong: “in a few months’ time the country was covered by a network of public clubs, youth associations, and cultural-educational associations with most varied hues and interests.” These new forms of collective action received the common name of “informal initiatives.”

The “informal initiatives” were the manifestation of a new and completely different kind of “social subject” that, for the first time since the 1930s, “started to feel independent from the state power structures” and “dared to act not in the traditional Russian system of coordinates – state power versus anti-state opposition – but in a completely new … logic of positive self-expression, independent action in the name of independently chosen goals.” The System was no longer uniform in its ability and willingness to repress and to ignore all and any initiatives coming from below: those who were refused support and seen with suspicion by the local authorities began to find allies and resources “high above.” Instead of working towards the grand societal goals that

149 A literal translation of the Russian word inakomyshchiane.
151 Fadin (1990: 320).
were promulgated through the “official” organizations – the Party and its “transmission belts” – people started doing what they considered necessary for themselves, and at the scale which mattered to them.

Characteristically, these groups were small (20-50 people) and almost exclusively urban.\textsuperscript{153} In contrast to Mexico, where the first wave of social environmentalism was strongly linked to the evolution of peasant and indigenous activism, the social fabric of the Soviet countryside was too thin and frayed to produce such innovations. Although state control emanated from the cities, they were also places where pockets of freedom were easier to maintain, social differentiation was much greater, and there was a critical mass of individuals for whom “reflection was an obligatory part of professional activity.”\textsuperscript{154} Yanitsky (1991: 55-56) distinguishes two important social groups that acted as sources for many leaders and participants of informal initiatives. He defines the first group as “marginal intelligentsia” – highly educated people of intellectual and creative professions who were either expelled from state and party institutions or never joined them because of ethical considerations, those who were repressed and persecuted for criticism and independent thinking. The second group consisted of the more “systemic” actors, especially “engineers and teachers” – those who left their formal employment or reduced the time dedicated to it to a minimum in order to “make their own ideas and programs come true within informal cells (that appeared within official social organizations).” This second category consisted of people who wanted to do their work

\textsuperscript{153} Yanitsky (1991: 54).
\textsuperscript{154} Yanitsky (1996: 32).
well, to be creative and innovative in their workplace, but realized that they could not do it as state employees.

The well-known case of the environmental protest in the town of Kirishi\textsuperscript{155} is a good example of the type of social environment that proved to be a fertile ground for informal organizations. The town had an unusually large proportion of “highly educated young specialists.” The Soviet regime had a habit of “concentrating” such cadres in special “research towns” and “closed cities” that were associated either with universities and research institutes of the Soviet Academy of Sciences (such as Akademgorodok in Novosibirsk or the Biological Research Center in Pushchino, near Moscow) or with the ubiquitous “construction bureaus” and production enterprises of the “military industrial complex” (as it was in the case of Kirishi). Thus, it is hardly accidental that these places gave a huge crop of highly original proposals and initiatives, once perestroika began. Novosibirsk State University was the site where the movement in defense of Baikal emerged in the 1960s, where Tatiana Zaslavskaya presented her 1983 report on the economic situation of USSR;\textsuperscript{156} during perestroika, it produced the ecological club that later become the focus of environmental activism in the part of the city where the university is located (Akademgorodok).\textsuperscript{157} The residents and researchers of Pushchino have started the “Ekopolis” movement that focused on creating urban environments with a minimal ecological footprint.\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{155} This town has been extensively studied between 1989 and 2002 by the research team headed by Olga D. Tsepilova. The case summary is based on Tsepilova (1999).
\textsuperscript{156} Zaslavskaya (2007).
\textsuperscript{157} Smeliansky (2006, interview).
\textsuperscript{158} See Yanitsky (1991 and 1993).
The rapid growth of the “informal ecological initiatives” had challenged the monopoly that the DOP movement held in the field of environmental activism both by advancing a broader vision of the environment and by giving it a wider social base. The appearance of groups that focused primarily on the issues of urban environment and industrial pollution meant that “environmental activism” was no longer limited to “the defense of pristine nature.” By focusing on places where they lived, the “informals” began defending nature in the cities, which have never been of much concern to the DOP members who, though urban dwellers themselves, regularly escaped from them through expeditions. Apart from concerns about environmental degradation, the informal groups came together around a set of social and political issues that DOP was neither willing nor able to tackle. “United by the slogans of self-government, mass participation in decision-making, just redistribution, social guarantees, and freedom of choice,” the “informals” formulated demands that were directly related to the process of social democratization. While they were not created as expressly political associations, the informal groups became involved in politics “by the logic of their struggles” and by their desire to achieve greater autonomy from the state.

This search for autonomy manifested itself even in the name that the informal activists adopted. They did not want to use the adjective obshchestvennye (social) to describe their associations, because it was already hijacked by the state for its own purposes. In the Soviet Union, the phrase “social organizations” (obshchestvennye organizatsii) that in any Western society would be taken to mean voluntary citizen

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associations that grow from below, referred to the official structures created and controlled from above and meant to serve as “transmission belts” for the Party-state in all spheres of social activity: professional unions, Komsomol-affiliated organizations, sport, cultural, recreational, and extracurricular educational clubs and organizations, etc. As Vorozheikina (2008) points out, the adjective neformal’nye (informal) was appropriated by the perestroika activists both to emphasize that their initiatives were not inspired by the state and to reflect the fact that until 1990 these associations existed outside of the formal, legal sphere: they could not be officially registered and thus had no juridical personality, could not hold bank accounts, enter into contractual relationships, etc.

According to Andrei Fadin, himself a member of the informal movement, this extra-legal status was the very reason for the “rapid politicization of the informal world.” “By keeping these civic initiatives outside of the official political structure the state deprive[d] itself of the ability to influence these groups and the processes within them”: they could not be “prohibited or dissolved precisely because [they did] not exist from the legal point of view”; the only way to eliminate them was outright repression, which the System was increasingly more reluctant to use after the onset of massive political manifestations in the spring of 1988.\footnote{Fadin (1990: 330).}

In order to emphasize that their actions were not state-inspired, the informal activists also appropriated the adjective samodeiatel’nyi (which literally translates as self-made, self-organized). This adjective had acquired a somewhat derogatory connotation during the Soviet period, because it was used by the state actors to describe initiatives and
actions that they did not explicitly solicit and direct and that, therefore, bore an imprint of being “amateur, dilettante, and unprofessional.” *Samodeiatelnost’* described activities such as amateur dancing, singing, or craft-making; in other words, something that the Soviet citizens were allowed to engage in as a hobby, in their spare time, outside of their professional and public obligations. Thus, the informal activists themselves and the scholars who wrote about them in the late 1980s – early 1990s often used the hybrid phrase *samodeiateln’ye obshchestvennye organizatsii* (self-made social organizations) to reclaim the “social” from the state both as the word and as the sphere of life. For them, this severing of links with the state did not imply any kind of amateurishness or lack of commitment; on the contrary, they felt that much more could be achieved outside of the “formal” state structures and organizations than within them. As one interviewee told Yanitsky in 1988, even if she were given only half of her current salary for it, she would most gladly dedicate all of her time to the “informal work,” because in it she found what she “grew up for” and a sense of her own place and self-fulfillment.162

In essence, the informals were trying to reintroduce the distinction between state and society that had become so blurred in the Soviet Union that even the word “social” no longer indicated the domain that was separate and distinct from the state. Yet, the crucial dilemma inherent in the very nature of “informal associations” was that, at the time of their formation in 1987-88, all their members heavily depended on the state for their material well-being. Because the work duties of many were largely meaningless, and the workplace discipline was low, dedicating most of one’s time to “informal work”

was not seen as a moral or economic problem. But, unlike the cooperative movement that emerged during the same period and whose members dedicated themselves to “productive and gainful activities,” the activities of the “informals” were rarely financially sustainable. Many wanted to do things that could not be readily sold, and even if they could be selling their “products,” most informals simply did not have the necessary skills and did not want to do it for moral reasons, since they grew up in a society where trading and money-making were stigmatized. One such activist summed this dilemma up quite clearly: “Please understand that I am not a tradesman, I am made differently, I cannot pour my entire soul into the production of some consumption good. And the thing that I can pour my soul into [the speaker was a pedagogue and a choreographer] will not in any immediate future bring us the super-profits that are necessary for [our group’s main goal –] the reconstruction of the historical environment of the city center.”

In order to make their dreams come true, informal activists needed space, equipment, and other material resources, which in the mid-1980s were still entirely controlled by the state. This forced the emerging informal groups to look for “official patrons” and to nest themselves logistically within official organizations. In 1987-91 the environmental activists found two new modes of survival – ecological clubs (eco-clubs) and ecological centers (eco-centers) – that later provided the base for more independent organizations that eventually became institutionalized as NGOs.

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163 Ibid., 217.
Eco-clubs were the “intermediate structures, transitional forms” from “old semi-official organizations” to fully independent organizations.\textsuperscript{164} Official “public organizations” – VOOP, institutes, universities, local newspapers, and komsomol (VLKSM) – provided “the roof” and the resources and saw these clubs as a safety valve, while “the club leaders hoped that they would gradually reconstruct the System from within,” “take over the official organizations.” Such were the origins of the eco-club at Novosibirsk State University.\textsuperscript{165} It was formed in 1989 and engaged in “the typical kinds of university-based civic activism”: speakers were invited, and thematic evenings were organized for students and faculty within the university. The club was given a space within a student dormitory, which the members refurbished and gradually turned into the headquarters of the organization, which reregistered itself as an NGO in 1995 under the name of Siberian Eco-center. While this organization has been able to diversify its sources of financial support, it still depends on the university for its office space within the university campus. In order to maintain it, it has to preserve the format of eco-club, which it has in many ways outgrown. This is a rather typical example of an organization that originated from within the system and is still tied to its mother institution by a umbilical cord, even though its original structure and purpose have evolved.

Eco-centers were created with the money and resources accumulated by VLKSM in regional centers. Such were, for example, the origins of Dront (Dodo) Center in

\textsuperscript{164} Yanitsky (1993: 64-69).
\textsuperscript{165} This account is based on the interview given by Ilia Smelianskiy (2006), who joined the club in the early 1990s.
Nizhniy Novgorod (Gor’kiy). 166 They were supposed to engage in commercial and consulting activities in order to generate funds for education and nature conservation ones. Environmental researchers and activists formed them in the hope of obtaining financial independence, but this symbiosis only lasted until the early 1991. Scientific teams were assembled in order to gather and analyze environmental information. Legislative and executive state agencies used them as sources of information and expertise. This was a new, much more productive, but transient form of working for the Soviet state, which provided legitimacy and weight necessary to push through conservationist initiatives. Successful eco-centers, such as Dront, managed to transition from this symbiosis with the structures of the Soviet state to an equally productive symbiotic relationship with the new, post-Soviet regional and municipal authorities.

Over time, the inability of the informal organizations to achieve financial self-sufficiency and the considerable hostility towards “the informals” on the part of many state officials have greatly weakened the grassroots stream of social environmentalism that emerged during perestroika. Considerations of expedience and resource hunger pushed some grassroots groups and their leaders to reject the “informal” label in order to be “treated seriously” by state institutions without whose cooperation (if not support) they could not achieve their objectives. Thus, as one of the leaders of Social Self-Government Committee in the Moscow district of Brateevo explained, his group “had to distinguish [itself] from the informals in some ways, [because the officials saw them] almost as extremists. [It had] to become an official organization – the one [that would be]

166 Askhat Kayumov, quoted in Yanitsky (1993).
recognized by the [state] powers – [and to find] a legal niche that would allow [them] to achieve practical results.” This eagerness to distinguish themselves from the “radical, non-constructive opposition” in order to get more done was the main psychological driver that transformed many leaders of the grassroots social environmental initiatives into reform environmentalists.

On the one hand, in 1987-1991 the state system was becoming more and more heterogeneous and permeable from below, and the informals grew very skillful in exploiting the growing fractures and conflicts between its elements to their advantage and in getting what they needed from the state while remaining outside of it. Nevertheless, many had found that “the fastest and most effective way to resolve the problem” was to send “their own people” into power. This opportunity has appeared in 1988-89, during the first competitive electoral campaigns at the all-union, republican, regional, and local levels. Many informal groups have presented their candidates in these elections; some of them entered the new power structures at different levels. In the short run, the entrance of informal activists into “big politics” had increased the influence and potential of their groups, but in the long run it has deprived the movement of some of its best leaders. Between 1991 and 1993, this loss of leadership, the onset of the economic crisis, and the growing hostility of the new political institutions towards grassroots associations has

\[169\] In the spring of 1989, practically all active informal environmental groups of the capital (around 50) joined the Moscow Ecological Federation, among whose leaders were Luibov’ Rubinchik and the eco-anarchist Vadim Damier. Members of this network were involved in the expert assessment of Moscow’s urban development plan, participated in the electoral campaigns for Moscow city government (Mossovet) and for the Supreme Council of RSFSR in the spring of the following year, and took part in Mossovet sessions. See Khaliy, ed. (1996: 183), Yanitsky (1993: 241).
aborted the development of the informal movement, whose potential was dissipated before it could be used by professional social environmentalists.

3.5.2 Professional Social Environmentalism: Eco-Anarchists and Their Protest Camps

The informal initiatives with a strong environmental component provided one necessary condition for the development of social environmentalism – a broad social base in the form of local initiatives focused on citizen participation, self-government, and social justice. Another crucial ingredient – professional activists who were familiar with Western radical social theory and consciously advocated profound institutional changes in the name of social justice and environmental quality – came from the “political stream” of perestroika mobilization. Most grassroots members of the originally apolitical informal groups proceeded from their own intuitions about the reality around them and learned about politics through action. Professional leaders, who could provide the grassroots with a social-environmental ideological base, emerged during the 1980s from student discussion clubs that originally operated in a semi-clandestine fashion and gradually developed into a network of anarchist organizations. These eco-anarchists formed part of a new generation of activists whose emergence would have been impossible without the islands of autonomy that had developed within the Soviet system since the 1960s.

The majority of Moscow’s eco-anarchists came out of “Obshchina” (Commune) – a “historical-political club” that grew out of a reading group formed by the history students of Moscow State Pedagogical University in 1982 “for the study of Marxist-
Leninist heritage.” Since 1956, this phrase was a standard code name for groups that wanted to look beyond the official version of history – an undertaking that usually included reading the “forbidden” literature and discussing the uncomfortable questions posed by the Soviet and world history of the 20th century.170 These students chose anarchism as their ideological base, because they rejected the idea of political hierarchy and of the overwhelming state, whose manifestations they saw all around them. In 1988 this Moscow-based group formed a network with the anarchists of Kuibyshev (“Perspectives”), Leningrad, and Ryazan’ (“5th of June Group”). The latter had an explicitly environmental component, since it was formed to protest the laying of the sewer mainline along the floodplain of the Oka River.171 Next year, these and other like-minded organizations joined in the Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists (KAS): its first congress was attended by around 300 people from 15 cities.

Fomichev estimated in 1997 that “nearly half” of the members in radical green organizations operating in the FSU were anarchists. In particular, anarchist organizations provided formative experiences for the founders of “Rainbow Keepers”172 and “EcoDefense!”173 – two key organizations that provide the activist core for ecological

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172 Many of the founding members of this organization (Fomichev, Kuchinskiy) came to eco-anarchism directly from KAS, which was a short-lived confederation and began to splinter soon after its creation. According to Fomichev (quoted by Kaliy, 2000a), the organization was formed during the protest camp at the Balakovo nuclear power station (Saratov region) in the summer of 1990.
173 Vladimir Sliviak, the founder of Kaliningrad-based EcoDefense!, came from the “Solidarity” anarchist movement, which was “aimed at fomenting deep changes in the post-communist society.” He founded EcoDefense! “as a green fraction within the movement” in 1990; by 1994 EcoDefense! was a fully autonomous organization that published its own journal and centered its activities around the anti-nuclear campaign. Today it is a network of regional offices and affiliated organizations located in Kaliningrad, Moscow, Voronezh, Ekaterinburg, and Ozersk (Cheliabinsk region). (EcoDefense!, 2008)
protest camps and remain at the forefront of social environmentalism in Russia.\textsuperscript{174} Khaliy (2000a) explains that these were “anarchists by conviction, by worldview,” who might have severed their formal links to anarchist organizations, but acted as “carriers of anarchist ideas and followers of its theory and ideology.” The “perestroika generation” – the individuals who came of age in the 1980s and became politically and socially active in anarchist, anarcho-syndicalist, and anti-fascist groups – were drawn towards ecological protest camps and informal initiatives, because they “saw in ecological actions the potential for implementing many of their ideas, the possibility to enter into a close relationship with the population on the non-state political level.”\textsuperscript{175}

The first protest camp took place between August 5th and September 11th of 1989 near the city of Chapayevsk (Kuibyshev\textsuperscript{176} region), around the industrial plant that was secretly built for the destruction of chemical weapons. The camp and the mass protests in the city were organized by members of democratic and anarchist organizations from Kuibyshev, Saratov, Moscow, and Leningrad.\textsuperscript{177} This was their first try at a large-scale public action that combined the goals of “resolving a specific environmental problem,” of “raising the consciousness of the local population” about “the values of self-organization and self-government,” and of applying “alternative models of social

\textsuperscript{174} Since 2002, these organizations were joined by the “Autonomous Action” network of anarcho-libertarian groups and individuals from over 20 regions of Russia (Autonomous Action, 2008). Since its creation, Autonomous Action has regularly sent activists to ecological protest camps. In the summer of 2007, one of its activists was killed during a Nazi attack on the campground near the city of Angarsk (Irkutsk region), the site of protests against nuclear waste recycling at the local chemical plant. (Ecology and Human Rights Bulletin, 22.07.2008)
\textsuperscript{175} Fomichev quoted in Khaliy (2000a).
\textsuperscript{176} Currently Samara.
\textsuperscript{177} See Khaliy, ed. (1996) and Fedorov (1995 and 2006) for detailed descriptions of this case.
relations” in the daily life within the camp community.\(^{178}\) Thus, from the very beginning, there was a clear affinity between the format of ecological protest camps and the core of eco-anarchist ideas about the simultaneous struggle for the emancipation of humans and nature.

This first camp already had the key characteristics of a new collective action form that was developed and became the trademark of the eco-anarchist campaigns. The leadership circle – the tent-camp dwellers who directed the organization of local residents and often bore the brunt of the police reprisals – was a mixture of activists from different cities. Since 1989, their numbers have fluctuated widely, while their geographical origins became more diverse; some veterans kept returning to the camps practically each summer. These outsiders cultivated an intensive relationship with the “local residents” that often lasted past the dismantling of the camp itself and stimulated the formation of local environmental groups (as it happened, for example, in Ryazan’, Rostov, Yekaterinburg, and Samara regions). Virtually all the camps focused on impending environmental and social disasters caused by large-scale projects promoted by state authorities often in violation of all existing environmental laws and regulations. These projects came in two main varieties. The first kind was related to the military and nuclear state programs: destruction of chemical weapons and construction of nuclear power stations.\(^{179}\) In other cases,\(^ {180}\) they were the products of an unholy alliance between the

\(^{178}\) Kuchinsky, quoted in Khaliy (2000a).

representatives of “political and economic hierarchies”: most industrial enterprises were either directly owned by the state or closely tied to the interests of important local and regional officials.

The eco-anarchist leaders of protest camps tend to be somewhat ambivalent about their relationship with the political sphere. Vadim Damier, a member of CAS in 1989-90, one of the co-founders of the Moscow Green Party and of the Revolutionary Anarchist Initiative (IREAN), saw his work as “political,” but what he meant by politics was “not so much participation in the structures of power as the formulation of an alternative program for the development of our society.”[181] Meanwhile, Fomichev distinguished between his participation in the “politicized Green movement” – since 1985 he was one of the main promoters of creating a green party in Russia – and in the “non-political movement” of the “Rainbow Keepers.”[182] Yet how could the protest camps that made demands against state agencies and enterprises and the negotiations with state actors that often took place as a result of the pressure applied by the camps fit within the “non-political” bounds? In a 2000 interview with Khaliy, Fomichev argued that negotiations with state officials “are [only] a tactic, while our strategy is radicalism – the drive for a radical reconstruction of society. We resolve the conflict by deepening it.” Maksim Kuchinskiy, another “Rainbow Keeper” who participated in the same conversation, specified that the conflict is “not with society, but rather with the specific power system and mechanism of its application.” These “radical ecologists” and Green Party builders

182 Quoted in ibid., 185.
were inspired by the German Greens\footnote{Fomichev spoke of the impact produced on him “by an article on the Greens in West Germany” as his main initial motivation for joining “the Green movement.” Interview with Yanitsky (1993: 185). In 1989 he was one of the founders of the “Movement for the Creation of Green Party,” which was organizationally modeled on the German Greens and theoretically based “on the works of A. Gorz, P. Kelly, M. Bookchin, Y. Ditfurth, and I. Illich.” See Fomichev (1997: 41).} – a movement party, which in its early stages stood in open conflict with the political establishment and advanced its demands primarily through social protest.

\textbf{3.5.3 The Union for Chemical Safety – A Durable Social-Environmentalist Network}

Union for Chemical Safety is a striking example of a huge difference that sustained and conscientious efforts of one individual can make in the field of environmental activism. For Lev Fedorov, “a simple physical chemist who had worked for 20 years in a research institute and had no civic position whatsoever,” “everything began in April of 1990,” when he watching news on TV about the spring flood in Ufa, the capital of Bashkiria.\footnote{The bottom sediments and the water of the Ufa River and its tributaries were saturated with toxic compounds from Ufa’s chemical plant, “Khimprom.” During the spring snowmelt, phenols and dioxins entered the municipal water system, which made the tap water unusable and led to massive environmental protests. Source: Ministry of Emergency Situations, Republic of Bashkiria. “1990 – drinking water pollution with phenol in the city of Ufa.” Online at: \url{http://www.emercomrb.bashnet.ru/ec/big/fenol.shtml}} “[I heard] the residents shouting that they were being poisoned by phenols. I looked into it and understood that it was not [so much] phenol as dioxins. So I started gathering materials and between October 1991 and October 1993 wrote a book: ‘Dioxins as an environmental danger: a retrospective and prospective view’. Back in 1984, when I was visiting Finland, the rector of Turku University asked me about the dioxin situation in the Soviet Union. I did not even know what the word meant back then. In fact, the entire country did not know what it meant, because this was a classified
That question had puzzled me much: there seemed to be a big issue behind [this one word that] we were not even aware of. So when I started writing the book, I asked professors all over the world for materials – now I have a whole bookshelf about dioxins.”

Fedorov had no access to classified materials when he wrote the book: he could not use official sources to compile a list of dioxin-contaminated places. Instead, he played chemical detective and deduced where the dioxins were likely to be an issue, based on the locations of major chemical plants in the Soviet Union and the raw materials that they used. His deductions proved right: “when they started looking in Chapayevsk, Dzerzhinsk, Chuvashia, Altai, Volgograd, Orenburg, and many other places, they found them galore.” As he became aware of the scale of the dioxin problem, Fedorov grew highly indignant: “I went over the [list of major chemical] plants mentally and understood that dioxins were a virtually ubiquitous byproduct of the Soviet industry, but that they were especially common in those plants that were oriented towards military production. [What this meant was] that thousands of people who worked there had been losing their health and lives without knowing anything, and the state acted as a chemical

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185 In a 1999 interview Fedorov explained: “At that point I did not yet know that dioxins were [seen by the Soviet military as] a future chemical weapon. Thus, all knowledge about dioxins was restricted to the military sphere, about which neither citizens, nor ‘rank-and-file’ scientists were not supposed to know at all… [In 1990] when people started protesting in Bashkiria, I understood that [the cause] was more serious than phenol. How I understood [that it was dioxins] I do not know – it was some kind of epiphany. I dug through the books and – God almighty! – found out that these chemical plants in Bashkiria were producing ‘agent orange’ – the herbicide used during the Vietnam War.” Elena Pavlova, 1999. “Chemistry and Life of Lev Fedorov” (in Russian); Znanie-Sila No.5-6 (144). Online at: http://www.znanie-sila.ru/online/issue_444.html
186 Fedorov, 09.07.2007.
187 Quoted in Pavlova (1999).
terrorist. This could not be tolerated.” In the summer of 1992 Fedorov wrote his first major newspaper article on the topic, which was read by the military officials and made him into “enemy number one of the military-chemical industry.”

The inquiry into the production of dioxins led Fedorov to consider the larger related issue of chemical weapons and the way in which the Russian military intended to conduct chemical disarmament. The paradox of the situation was that the Soviet public only found out about the existence of massive chemical weapon stockpiles when the state decided that it was time to destroy them: “The chemical weapons [issue] also materialized out of nowhere … when Gorbachev announced in Prague in 1987 that our country decided to stop producing them.” The Soviet leadership’s decision to begin the disarmament process was only part of the political issue: the harder part was to conduct it in an honest, transparent way, to break away from a long tradition of keeping everything military away from the public scrutiny. This was never achieved: as the 1989 events in Chapayevsk showed, the new leadership attempted to say good-bye to the murky military past by pretending that it did not exist: “Gorbachev and the [USSR] Supreme Council both seemed to think that the military have messed up big – created weapons that no one needed and ruined many lives in the process. But now that we were in the business of building a new society it was best to destroy it quietly and forget about it for good.”

188 Ibid.
189 This article was noticed by Vil Mirzayanov, a prominent environmental activist from Tatarstan. The article that Fedorov and Mirzayanov wrote together and published in September 1992 attracted the attention of KGB.
190 Quoted in Pavlova (1999).
In the face of massive public protests, the chemical weapon destruction plant that was secretly built in Chapayevsk in the early 1980s never began to operate, but neither did the authorities dare to inform the residents about the scale of the “chemical problem” in their city and about the toll that decades of weapon production took on their health and environment. The START-1 treaty, signed by the US and Russia in July 1991, provided an additional impetus to carry out the nuclear and chemical disarmament process speedily and quietly. With his publications, Fedorov wanted to push the high authorities to jointly address two problems related to chemical weapons: “first – to destroy them, and second – to declassify documents [related to] the environmental and health consequences of their production.”

Fedorov spent enough time in the Soviet Army and in the Party to know that he was forcing an entry into “the sphere where the state had always hid everything [from the public]” and was fully aware that such an attempt was bound to provoke desperate resistance.

The article that Fedorov and Mirzayanov published in September 1992 in “The Moscow News” exasperated “the secret division in the Ministry of Chemical Industry,” and the KGB initiated a legal case against the two scientists a month later. This was the first precedent of the state security services accusing scientists of divulging state secrets in the post-Soviet Russia. The case was dropped two years later for lack of evidence,

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191 Ibid.
192 Fedorov, 27.07.2006.
193 In 1995, a similar case was fabricated by KGB’s successor, FSB, against Alexandr Nikitin, a navy officer who shared information about the radioactive pollution of the northern Russian seas with the Norwegian NGO, Bellona Center. Nikitin’s case was the first one to be taken to trial and, though Nikitin was acquitted in 1997 thanks to the efforts of a very dedicated lawyer, had established the precedent for a long series of similar “scientist-spy” cases that followed. See Katerli and Nikitin (1997) for a detailed analysis of Nikitin’s case. On subsequent cases, see publications in Ekologia i Pravo (2001-2004, Grigoriy 231
but Fedorov sees it as a decisive watershed. He says that KGB’s actions essentially pushed him to join the environmental movement and to become a social activist: “I was forced to enter [the environmental movement] when they came to search my house in 1992. Before then, I acted as a spontaneous environmentalist: I identified hard environmental problems, analyzed them, published articles – these were individual actions of a scientist. [Since October 1992,] I have been striving to bridge scientific knowledge and social activism.” Instead of scaring Fedorov into silence, as the KGB intended to, the 1992 investigation made him realize that he was not satisfied with being a solitary scientific detective. He accepted the invitation to join Socio-Ecological Union – the broad environmental network formed in 1988\(^1\) – that came from its leader Sviatoslav Zabelin\(^2\) and began thinking about a new action strategy.

Fedorov knew that there were significant limits to what one concerned scientist in Moscow could do about the chemical weapons issue. During his investigations of the early 1990s, he had made a list of all the places in Russia where the chemical weapons had ever been produced, stored, and destroyed and decided that “local organizations had to be created in each.”\(^3\) So he got the contact information for all the local newspapers

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\(^1\) The history of SEU’s formation and evolution can be found in Section 4.2.1.

\(^2\) In those days, SEU leadership had direct access to the presidential administration, because “Zabelin was Yablokov’s assistant, and Yablokov was a presidential advisor.” Quoted in Pavlova (1999); see also Section 4.2.1.

\(^3\) Fedorov’s decision to turn to the grassroots came out of his conclusion that Russian state bureaucracy “was completely dysfunctional where the environment and human health were concerned. At first, when I met with all [those officials], I thought that they did not know [enough to act], that what I told them would be an eye-opener [that would] make them run and solve these problems. But it turned out that they did
and started sending custom-made information packets to their editors. Fedorov reasoned that if a local resident became concerned about the issue and aware that he needed expert help, making inquiries at the local newspaper would be one of his likely first steps. This strategy proved to work both directly and indirectly: sometimes the future leaders of the local group came straight to the local newspaper and were given Fedorov’s name there; in other cases, they were notified by friends and neighbors who had already come across Fedorov’s numerous publications in local and national press. Rather than traveling to all the “trouble spots” and trying to find individuals who would be concerned enough to create an organization, Fedorov waited for the residents to become aware and ready to act and to contact him first. This was a conscious tactic: he knew that local organizations dedicated to such a dangerous problem would only be viable if they sprung from an internally felt need and took the form best adapted to local conditions.197

What grew out of these efforts was a unique horizontal network of local and regional UCS chapters created with Fedorov’s help by concerned residents in places where chemical weapons are a major environmental and social risk.198 These grassroots groups are entirely problem-driven – they appear when one individual converts to activism and initiates collective action199 and are dissolved once the problem is

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197 One obvious drawback of this strategy is that local organizations do not surge in every place that has a need for them. Indeed, “UCS covers only half of the country; the other half is absent, because no crazy enough people have surged from below to tackle the ecology issue in those regions. For instance, Moscow has plenty of chemical weapons [depositories], but no problem-based UCS chapter. It is very hard [to find good local] leaders, because they are not always aware of the dangers and responsibilities [that this work entails].” Fedorov, 09.07.2007.

198 The activities of Perm and Dzerzhinsk UCS chapters are described in detail in Section 6.1.

199 This process of first-time grassroots mobilization is described in detail in Chapter 5.
resolved. In 1993, when Fedorov drew up the network’s statute, he specified “that every local organization had absolute autonomy. It all depends entirely on the capacity of the local organization. My actions are driven by their necessities – I do what they ask me to do. They must make their own decisions; if I do it for them, they will not [be motivated enough to] do anything.”

While Fedorov insists on organizational autonomy as the main principle of the UCS network, his presence and participation is absolutely indispensable to its functioning. He links individual chapters to each other when it is necessary and makes each individual experience available to all other members through his electronic newsletters, which all members receive and contribute information to. He provides expert advice when it comes to specialized chemical and technical knowledge and brings in other scientists and activists that he personally knows and trusts. He also helps his member organizations on matters of tactics and strategy, since his knowledge of military and state institutions is much deeper than that of UCS grassroots leaders. Finally, he ensures that the state security services do not interfere with the functioning of the UCS local chapters: “I provide cover for them, because I am a well-known and well-reputed person. I come in when a local FSB officer suddenly calls them to reckoning and asks why they are making noise. It is easier for me [to repel such attacks] than for people in the provinces, especially if they are not retirees and have to work somewhere.” Fedorov

200 In 1997, UCS had 12 regional and 10 local chapters; in 2001, there were 8 regional and 13 local ones. Fedorov estimates that UCS chapters currently make up about 10% of SEU member organizations, whose total number is slightly over 200.  
201 Fedorov, 27.07.2006.
acknowledges that without his coordination, “individual organizations will keep functioning, but the network as such will disappear.”

From the very beginning, Fedorov drew a sharp distinction between his network and the “mainstream” environmental activism: “I care about people – with them we can save nature, but without them it will be destroyed. Those people who come to me are facing desperate problems that Greenpeace, WWF, and other environmental NGOs cannot resolve.” These “desperate problems” are created by the state agencies “that have still not understood that they must include the whole country into the decision-making process, or else there will be no chemical disarmament.” Fedorov’s focus on the violations citizen rights by the most autocratic and secretive portions of the Russian state made him a natural ally for the eco-anarchists in their fight against hierarchies. The grassroots group that became one of the first UCS local chapters was created in Chapayevsk – the site of the first ecological protest camp. Over the years, eco-anarchists have organized protest camps to support UCS chapters in Kasimov (1998-99), Votkinsk (2001), and Perm (2004). Fedorov speaks about them with highest respect, because “they go to the cause of environmental problems by defending the people and fight valiantly in spite of police repressions.”

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202 Fedorov, 09.07.2007. Given Fedorov’s unique expertise and the network’s lack of financial resources, he cannot find a successor for the network coordinator position. He acknowledges this to be part of a larger problem, common to many informal organizations: “We solve problems, but we do not train new cadres. It is a sad thing to acknowledge, but we have no successors. There is no way I can train a new generation, because this cannot be done without money.” This inability to provide continuity of the organization past the moment when the founding figure steps down is a serious limitation, the price that has to be paid for “working without money” and keeping the organization informal.
203 Chapter 5 gives detailed analysis of the highly productive synergy that arose between the Perm UCS chapter and the local eco-anarchist organization that has ties to Rainbow Keepers, EcoDefense!, and Autonomous Action.
The perestroika-related wave of social environmentalism had a limited impact in that it left no lasting grassroots base. The momentum from the informal urban movements was largely dissipated, as the new political system quickly became inaccessible to grassroots associations and left no space for autonomous local self-government structures. In addition, the informal movement lost many of its leaders to reform environmentalism, as they were drawn into the political sphere and lost their connections with the bases that helped them into power. However, the first wave of social environmentalism did not disappear without a trace: left in its wake were the two strong networks of eco-anarchist professional activists (Rainbow Keepers and EcoDefense!) and the Union for Chemical Safety who have been regularly joining their efforts in major campaigns and made effective use of the ecological protest camps – a new collective action form introduced by the eco-anarchists. These three networks have kept the social-environmentalist current alive during the social mobilization trough that lasted for more than a decade. Their operation formed and trained the critical mass of grassroots and professional leaders whose experiences and skills became critical for the second wave of social environmentalism that has begun to develop in Russia over the past five years.

Why were the eco-anarchists and the UCS not able to make an alliance with members of the informal movement and thus prevent its potential from being dissipated? In part, it was a matter of a chronological and spatial mismatch. The informal movement was past its heyday by the time when the eco-anarchists and the UCS had come onto their own – Rainbow Keepers and EcoDefense! – were only created in the 1990s; Fedorov began putting UCS together in 1992. Moreover, most of their campaigns took place in
small towns and in rural regions that were practically untouched by the informal
movement, which was largely a big-city phenomenon. More importantly, there was a
difference of focus: although some informal environmentalists dealt with issues of local
industrial pollution, most focused on the more routine issues of urban land-use change
and green space. Meanwhile, the eco-anarchists and the UCS focused their campaigns
on the more thorny and large-scale toxic and radioactive pollution issues.

3.6 Conclusions and Comparison

The “preparatory” period that Mexican social activists underwent between 1968
and 1985 has no analogue in Soviet Russia and is of crucial importance to the superior
diversity and strength of social environmentalism in Mexico. There are two main reasons
for this. First, a much greater degree of intellectual freedom in Mexico allows for a much
more numerous and diverse social pool, from which professional activists who later
become leaders of social-environmental initiatives can emerge. Second, the growth of
autonomous social movements – peasant, indigenous, and urban – provides
mobilizational and leadership experiences for many citizens that later become involved in
grassroots social-environmental initiatives.

The socio-ecological current emerged in Mexico at least two decades earlier than
it took root in (Soviet) Russia, because of the considerable differences between the two

204 The most notable examples of this are the Kirishi campaign and the operation of Brateevsk Local Self-
Government Committee, which emerged in the neighborhoods adjacent to the Kapotnia oil-processing
205 Among these are the campaigns against the conversion of Bitsa urban forest into a zoo and the protests
against the logging of an oak grove in Tushino (“Mayak” informal group). See Khaliy, ed. (1996: 181),
countries in terms of the availability of “engendering environments” for intellectual leaders and the strength of the mass social base. These differences ultimately have to do with the much more extreme effects of the Soviet totalitarian regime on intellectual freedom, general social capacity for self-organization, and the particularly destructive impact of collectivization on peasantry.

When one compares Russian and Mexican intellectuals of the 1960s and the 1970s, it is evident that the Mexican intellectuals were much more concerned about their duties towards the poor and the disadvantaged. While Mexican intellectuals did not take the official developmentalist rhetoric and policies at face value, they recognized that the problem of poverty and development was real and applied themselves to the task of finding better solutions to it. Though the Soviet state made redistribution its primary policy goal, poverty and inequality did not disappear. While the needs for poverty eradication and social development that came to be so strongly felt in the Third World by the 1960s were declared to be irrelevant to “real socialist societies,” well-educated and critically minded individuals who traveled enough could not fail to see that these official pronouncements had little to do with reality. Yet, this awareness had not translated itself into the great diversity of social service oriented activism that became so important in the post-1968 Mexico.

The fact that the central state declared itself to be the only guarantor of social justice seems to have suppressed the feelings of solidarity and social responsibility

206 After the Cuban Revolution and Cuba’s turn towards socialism in 1961, promotion of economic development in Latin America came to be seen as the key strategy in the fight against the propagation of Communism. Thus, the US and European foundations that helped to form the first Mexican NGOs had ideological and geopolitical reasons to worry about the Mexican poor.
among the “haves” of the Soviet society towards the “have-nots.” As Yanitsky (1991) recalls, when the members of the “privileged” social groups participated in the state-mandated “work with the masses,” the “educators” and the “beneficiaries” felt that there was a “glass wall” between them: they “lived in different worlds” and could not understand each other’s concerns. Since the Soviet state took much greater care to suppress horizontal social ties than the Mexican one, the concepts of poverty and social development had little meaning for the Soviet intellectuals not because there was no reality that they could describe, but because the scarcity of spaces within which sustained interactions between different social groups could take place made poverty and inequality much more invisible than in Mexico.208

The concern greater concern of Mexican intellectuals for development and social justice had at least three macro-level bases: the Left, the Catholic Church, and the state development programs. The transformation that the radical Left underwent in the aftermath of 1968 included its reorientation towards social classes that were not considered to have great revolutionary potential by classical Marxism. The Second Vatican Council of 1962 and the 1968 Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellin have provided the theological foundation for Catholic priests and intellectuals

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207 Included into this category are the highly educated groups, which had a high social status even though many of their members did not have very high material standards of living.

208 Unfortunately, no straightforward comparison is possible between poverty and inequality levels in Soviet Russia and in Mexico. Measures such as poverty lines and Gini coefficients become all but impossible to interpret when they are based on Soviet income statistics. These official data are highly unreliable and uninformative not just because they were constantly doctored, but even more importantly because monetary income in the Soviet Union was not the main determinant of living standards. The sophisticated system of “closed distribution” of goods and services gave drastically different purchasing power to the rubles earned by a collective farm worker as compared to those of nomenklatura officials. On the issue of measuring poverty and inequality levels in the Soviet Union see Malia (1994), Vishnevsky (1998), and Krasil’nikova (2009).
who felt the need to turn towards the poor.\textsuperscript{209} The Mexican state, especially under Echeverría paid significant attention to development, even though it promoted it in its usual clientelist manner. None of these macro-level bases were available to Soviet intellectuals: much higher levels of repression and ideological control made impossible the development of social Left; the Orthodox Church did not exist as a base for autonomous social organization, and the state was not interested in its subjects either as voters or as political clients and framed its social welfare policies completely unawares of the real social needs.\textsuperscript{210}

One particularly important aspect of this difference for the evolution of social environmentalism is that the gap between the urban intellectuals and the rural dwellers had most likely deepened in Soviet Russia over the same time period, when Mexican intellectuals had made significant efforts to bridge it. In Mexico, the concern about rural poverty and agricultural crisis became quite common among intellectuals by the mid-1960s and was expressed through individual and group action, in Soviet Russia there was no widespread sense among the intelligentsia (with the notable exception of the “village prose writers”) that the problems of the rural dwellers should concern the urban dwellers. The dual disjoint between the rural and the urban society on the one hand and between the “privileged” and the “popular” groups on the other was also aggravated by the complete unsuitability of the Soviet agricultural system for the emergence of any autonomous organizational forms among peasants. These factors have made the Soviet

\textsuperscript{209} See Fox and Hernández (1992); Lopezllera (1988).

\textsuperscript{210} Yanitsky (1991: 26) recalls a scandal that arose at the Institute of Architecture in 1957, when one of the researchers attempted to conduct a population survey in order to gather information about “people’s housing needs and preferences.”
Russian setting much more inhospitable for social environmentalism in comparison with Mexico, where it emerged about two decades earlier. By the beginning of its political transition, Mexico already counted with diverse rural and urban bases for social environmentalism, while in Russia it could only begin to develop on the basis of urban mobilization that was called to life by perestroika.

The founders and members of Russian eco-anarchist networks – Rainbow Keepers and Ecodefense! – created a new stream of environmentalism whose ideology and practice closely resemble those promoted by the Mexican social ecologists (Leff, Toledo, González Martínez). This current, alone among Russian environmental activists, posited as its main goal the search for and the creation of an alternative political and economic model. Yet, when the Russian eco-anarchists emerged, there was no broad social base and no significant store of popular experiences, onto which their ideas could be grafted to create the alternative development model that would restore the harmony between the humans and the environment. Until such broad social base could be found, the eco-anarchists worked out the details of this alternative model (based on various interpretations of anarchist theory) in small alternative communities and in the protest camps.

In spite of the fact that they involved relatively small numbers of participants and dealt with geographically isolated local environmental emergencies, the eco-anarchist protest camps of the 1990s provided a very important experience. Precisely because they could be organized by a small but nationwide tightly knit and highly committed network of students and intellectuals, they became an effective form of contentious collective
action after the perestroika wave of mass mobilization had subsided, while the reactions of state and business protagonists towards environmental activism became ever more hostile. The regular convening of protest camps in different regions of Russia with acute environmental risks has allowed to preserve a niche for environmental activism with a high degree of autonomy. This autonomy came both from the initial emphasis on opposing projects that presented high risks for the local residents and from the non-compliance with development plans designed “at the top,” without even as much as consultation with the affected parties. In addition, since the organization of protest camps required relatively limited monetary and material resources, the eco-anarchists could carry them out without relying on almost any kind of sponsorship: the necessary money and equipment was supplied by the participants themselves. Internet and the possibility of rapid communications across the vast territory of Russia have been a crucial resource for this brand of environmental activism: the 1990s – the decade when the organization of protest camps was streamlined and perfected were also the time of growing access to personal computers, email, and web-based information sources among the better-educated and the younger groups in Russia.

The growth of social environmentalism in Mexico has been much more gradual and continuous than in Russia. Its onset roughly coincides with the first period of political reforms in 1976-77, the 1982 crisis and the subsequent beginning of economic reforms. It continued to grow steadily through the later stages of economic (1989-94) and
political reforms (1994-96). In Russia political and economic reforms were compressed into a much shorter period (1985-93), and this impacted the character of the social mobilization in general and of social environmentalism in particular. The impressive outburst of social-environmental mobilization in 1986-91 was followed by a rapid shrinking of its social base in 1991-93. While the eco-anarchist groups and the Union for Chemical Safety continued to operate through the 1990s, overall this current had a low profile, while preservationist and reform environmentalist NGOs proliferated and environmentalism became institutionalized. In Russia, there is a marked contrast between engendering environments for social activism that existed before and after 1987. In Mexico the bases for social activism had a much greater continuity from 1968 onwards and the background levels of social mobilization and protest grew steadily throughout the last three decades.

Vorozheikina (2008: 15) calls the Russian phenomenon “premature democratization” and argues that societies with a deeply ingrained tradition of authoritarian power cannot be effectively democratized through a short bout of rapid and radical reforms. Basing her analysis on Latin America in general and Mexico and Brazil in particular, she argues that “a slow, controlled political transformation [keeps] the social energy confined within the domain of civil society” long enough for diverse social interests to be articulated and expressed through sustainable organizational forms. Meanwhile, Russian social activists of the perestroika epoch were thrust into the maelstrom of “democratic politics” too quickly and did not have time to create stable and

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lasting social structures capable of pushing forward the process of social democratization, without which the new institutions of political democracy quickly became “hollow” and were penetrated by the old, authoritarian power relations. Russian social environmentalists were part of the “social stream of democratic mobilization” that, if given time and space to develop, could have become a source of popular legitimation of formal democratic institutions.

This chapter focuses on the drastic change of context that the professional environmental activists in Russia and Mexico confronted in the 1980s and the 1990s. I use the term “transition” to refer to this period of economic and political change that included the breakdown of the post-revolutionary political regime and the adoption of the neoliberal economic model. In Russia, its formal boundaries are the appointment of Mikhail Gorbachev to the post of KPSS General Secretary in March 1985 and the adoption of the new Russian Constitution in December 1993. While the Soviet regime officially ceased to exist in December 1991, many key political and economic changes that shaped Russia’s post-Soviet trajectory occurred within the next two years. In the economic sphere, a conscious choice was made to develop capitalism “from above,” through the conversion of power into property instead of “from below,” through the creation of favorable conditions for small- and medium-sized private property owners, who could develop their activities and gradually displace the state from the most lucrative spheres of economic activity. The choice of political strategy followed from the choice of the economic one: the existing administrative structures were to be used to achieve the economic goals of market liberalization and privatization of state property within the shortest time frame. The groups that came to power in Russia in 1991 had a very pragmatic, instrumental view of the political sphere: they saw politics solely as administration. Thus, the key questions of democratic political transformation and institutionalization never came to the fore – this task was considered secondary to the one
of building a market economy, which, the reformers thought, was the only basis from which the democratic power structure could emerge. In essence, during this period the “democratic project” was reduced to the “free market project.” This transition cannot be called “democratic,” because the task of political democratization had not been completed in Russia by 1993 and was abandoned completely in 2000, when Putin’s ascent to the presidency opened the way for the return of political authoritarianism.¹

By contrast, the Mexican transition has been a lengthy and gradual process that did lead to the establishment of political democracy. Scholars usually associate its beginning with the political reforms of 1976-77 and its end – with the displacement of the PRI from the presidency in 2000.² During this period, Mexico moved towards greater levels of political democracy on all key criteria – competitiveness and transparency of the elections, the balance of power between the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary, and quality and institutionalization of the party system – by which the current Russian regime cannot be considered democratic.³

While the two countries’ political trajectories have diverged further and further over the last twenty years, their points of departure were remarkably similar. In both cases, the process of political democratization was initiated by the forces inside the party-state. The rise of Gorbachev to power in 1985 and the emergence of the Democratic Current led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in 1986 caused a major split within their respective

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¹ See Vorozheikina (2006); Clément (2007).
³ For the analysis of the political reform stages in Mexico see Craig and Cornelius (1995) and Magaloni (2006).
parties and unleashed the forces that eventually ended their hegemony. Cárdenas challenged the PRI’s executive monopoly during the presidential elections of 1988 – the last ones in which the PRI was able to secure the victory for its candidate through electoral fraud. Gorbachev initiated a process of internal party reforms that ended in the abolition of the constitutional article about the supreme role of KPSS in March 1990.

Just as the Russian state elites, the PRI leaders had also attempted to avoid wholesale liberalization of the political system by focusing on the liberalization of the economy. According to Magaloni (2006) and Vorozheikina (2001), the goal of the Salinas administration was to combine neoliberal reforms with a controlled transition to a two-party system. While it made an alliance with PAN, whose support was needed for passing the economic reforms in Congress, the PRI leadership meant to exclude the other opposition party, PRD, from the national- and regional-level politics. However, this attempt to avoid a full-blown transition to a multi-party system did not succeed, because PAN made its support conditional on the PRI’s approval of two electoral reforms (1990 and 1993), which made it possible for both PAN and PRD to make significant electoral gains and to jointly end PRI’s electoral hegemony first in Congress (1997) and then in the presidency (2000).

In spite of Mexico’s steady progress in the building and strengthening of formal democratic institutions, the task of overcoming political and social authoritarianism in this country is by no means complete. While the contrast between the two countries’ political trajectories is evident at the national level, state-society interactions within particular regional and institutional contexts are still remarkably similar. This and the
subsequent two chapters are dedicated to the analysis of how these differences and similarities have manifested themselves in the interactions between state institutions and environmental activists since the beginning of the transition and have affected the environmentalists’ ability to contribute to the process of social democratization.

The breakdown of the old regimes created opportunities for the development of new types of power relations and for challenging the dominant authoritarian patterns. Social and political activists of that period found that the balance of power had temporarily shifted towards the people. Environmental activists participated in the making of these changes, but also made use of the new spaces and opportunities created by the social mobilization on the one hand and by the formation of new state institutions on the other. The question of how much and in what ways the environmentalists wanted to politicize their causes presented itself as strongly and urgently as never before. The emergence of reform environmentalists – a new type of environmental activists – was one of the most important reactions to these new conditions.

During the early stages of the transition, high levels of social mobilization, formation of new state institutions, and the entry of foreign donors provided environmental activists with abundant sources of power – ability to change existing social structures and attitudes – and resources. In this context, social environmentalism began to differentiate itself from the rest of the environmental movement. This parting of ways was manifested primarily in the choice of the main organizational form and of the resource types required to maintain it. While conservationists and reform environmentalists institutionalized their work by creating NGOs, social environmentalists
continued to rely mostly on informal associations and networks. They viewed grassroots mobilization and “people power” as their main resource and lever of influence. Meanwhile, conservationists and reform environmentalists used NGOs as mechanisms for obtaining financial resources from the state, the private business, and the foreign donors and focused their efforts on making environmental institutions work.

The latter strategy became increasingly ineffective as the alliance of power and property gradually undermined environmental institutions and as the foreign donors decreased their support. In Russia, this process was combined with the return of political authoritarianism and went so far that after the year 2000 it caused a true sense of crisis among conservationists and reform environmentalists and forced them to look for new strategies. In Mexico, the closing of institutional channels and the shrinking of the resource base was less pronounced, but significant enough to cause profound rifts and debates within the environmental activist community. In both countries, activists adapted to this change in three major ways. Some insisted on maintaining their links with the state, even through they could clearly see that doing so increasingly compromised their autonomy. Others turned to private business and consumers for the support and leverage that they could no longer get from the state. Yet others began incorporating elements of social environmentalism into their strategies and looking for new ways to interact with the grassroots. I consider this third strategy to be a new pathway towards social environmentalism, which has become increasingly common in Russia over the past five years. In both countries, Greenpeace provides a particularly successful example of adaptation: this organization relies on the greatest diversity of strategies.
Since they never placed such an emphasis on the interactions with the state and the foreign donors, social environmentalists were less directly affected by the dual resource and influence crisis than conservationists and reform environmentalists. Yet, since many of them obtained their financial resources and material base through symbiotic relationships with environmental NGOs, the shrinking of the NGO resource base has also affected their capacity. So long as they counted with strong grassroots support, they could still achieve many things with very little money and a minimum material base. However, professional social environmentalists had a much easier time doing this in Mexico, where social mobilization levels remained relatively high and constant, and where grassroots activism was facilitated by the existence of multiple organizational bases. In Russia, where the perestroika-related social mobilization ended abruptly in 1991-1993, social environmentalists occupied a very marginal space until the new cycle of mobilization began in 2004.

4.1 Research Design and Data Collection Procedures

I used several data sources for tracing histories of individual environmental activists and their organizations that are recounted in this and the two subsequent chapters. The in-depth interview materials come from my own field research (44 in Mexico and 66 in Russia in 2004-20074), from the publications of Russian environmental sociologists Oleg

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4 The fieldwork stays in Russia and Mexico took place between September 2004 and October 2007. I was able to conduct 110 personal interviews with environmental and social activists, researchers, and journalists. My Russian respondents came from the following regions: Moscow, St Petersburg, Nizhniy Novgorod, Samara, Ulianovsk, Perm, and Novosibirsk. In Mexico, I was able to speak with people who work in the Federal District and in the states of Mexico, Michoacán, Morelos, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Veracruz, and San Luis Potosí.
Yanitsky and Irina Khaliy (1989-2000), and from various series of environmental broadcasts made by journalists at Radio Liberty, Echo of Moscow in Russia, and Radio Educación in Mexico (2000-2008). I used my professional and personal networks to help me establish contact with a few prominent professional activists in each country, who then served as my key initial informants and the starting points for snowball sampling. I identified my grassroots respondents in two main ways: with the help of professional activists, by asking them for names of grassroots leaders with whom they worked, and on my own, by attending protest events and introducing myself to grassroots activists in attendance. My stay in Mexico in September-December 2006 coincided with a wave of social mobilization that began shortly before the July 2006 presidential elections. This gave me the opportunity to personally observe protest events as well as community forums, informal gatherings, and workshops that focused on issues of social justice, and included environmental activists as participants. In Russia, the levels of protest activity in 2006 were incomparably lower, but I was still able to observe protests that had to do with issues of urban construction, hazardous waste disposal, and human rights violations. To get a fuller picture of protest activity in Russia since 2004, I used the weekly protest event summaries published online by the Institute of Collective Action (IKD), located in Moscow and headed by Karine Clément.

Due to time and resource constraints, I was only able to visit five regions in each country: Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Nizhniy Novgorod, Samara, and Perm in Russia and the states of Mexico, Morelos, Michoacán, Veracruz, and Mexico City in Mexico. This

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choice of regions was based on three main considerations. All of them were mentioned to me by my key informants as places where there were high levels and diverse manifestations of environmental activism. On the other hand, they vary significantly with respect to the regional political context, from very authoritarian to relatively democratic. They also differ in the strength of other (non-environmental) forms of social activism, which I considered relevant for social environmentalism: peasant and urban grassroots movements and human rights.

In selecting respondents among the environmental activists (41 in Russia and 31 in Mexico), I strove to achieve a balance between the long-time participants – those individuals that became environmental activists before the beginning of political transition (1982 in Mexico and 1986 in Russia) and have remained at the core of the movement through the last 30 to 40 years and could therefore give me a long-term historical perspective – and the new entrants who emerged during transition, have managed to stay active until the present time and created organizations that were unlike those maintained by the “old-timers.” Whenever I could, I always interviewed more than one person from each organization; the main aim of doing this was to get both the older leaders and the young recruits (individuals that became professionally active in the late 1990s – early 2000s).

In addition to the environmental activists – the group that was the main focus of my interviews, I also interviewed researchers, journalists, and lawyers that worked on environmental themes. I used the information from these three respondent categories to help me get oriented in the field of environmental and social activism in each country, to
choose the regions and the particular environmental protest campaigns that I wanted to focus my fieldwork on. I included the lawyers in order to improve my knowledge of environmental law and to get information about major recent environmental controversies where the activists have extensively used the legal instruments. My questions for journalists and researchers were aimed at getting a better idea of how the field of environmental activism was structured: I asked them to speak about the main types of environmental activism that they observed, to point out the regions where environmentalists were particularly active and those where they did not observe much environmental activism at all. I also inquired about the links that they observed between environmental and other types of social activism (human rights, urban, peasant, indigenous movements).

My goal in all the interviews was two-fold: to gather narratives about particular campaigns as well as individual and organizational evolution over time and to inform myself more fully about the general context and to get names of other potential respondents. I used a set of open-ended questions to guide the interviews, which usually lasted 1-1.5 hours. I began each interview by asking the respondents to tell me about their professional backgrounds and the events that brought them into environmental activism. The rest of the questions were focused around broad topics: organizational form; resources: funding, participation in networks; evaluation of personal and organizational evolution over time – main achievements and problems; choice of allies – relationship with state officials, other NGOs, business actors, and foreign organizations; types of interaction with the general public – recruitment of due-paying members and volunteers,
structures for answering public inquiries, relationships with grassroots groups. I asked professional activists to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the environmental movement in their country and region. I also inquired about their attitudes towards getting involved into politics and towards the attempts to create green parties.

My own interviews constitute an important, but by no means the only source of primary data for this project. For each of my interviewees and their organizations, I supplemented the interview data with materials from organizational websites, electronic environmental newsletters published by the activists, articles in national, regional, and local press, and the edited volumes that were compiled by various environmental NGOs to record results of round tables, debates, conferences, and other types of discussions within the environmental activist community. I used these additional sources not only to verify the accuracy of the information that I received during the interviews, but also to place each of my respondents into the broader context.

4.2 Environmental Activists Between Social Mobilization and Institution-Building

As far as the evolution of environmental activism is concerned, the time limits of the “transition period” are somewhat different from those of the macro-scale political and economic transition. For Mexico, I take 1982 as the beginning of this period, because it marks the coming to power of the first PRI president that decided to engage environmental activists. For its endpoint, I take 2003 – the year when the critical mass of officials that were willing to work with environmental activists left the Ministry of the Environment. For Russia, “environmental” transition began with the mass protests of the
1987 and ended with the abolition of the environmental ministry in 2000. In both countries, this was the time when the forms of environmental activism became much more diverse, and this differentiation produced the three main camps currently found in the field of environmental activism – conservationists, reform environmentalists, and social environmentalists. I argue that this profound restructuring and diversification was driven by the dramatic shifts in the distribution of power among the main societal sectors – the state, the market, and the social movements.

The early stage of the political transition – the presidency of Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988) in Mexico and Mikhail Gorbachev’s perestroika (1986-1991) in Soviet Russia – constitutes a key watershed in the development of environmental activism, which greatly expanded both its social base (due to high general levels of social mobilization and to the entry of new types of activists) and its influence on state and political structures. What made this period so unique for professional environmental activists is that political opportunities came simultaneously from above and from below. On the one hand, as the state and the political sphere were undergoing a major change, the activists found that the old strategies of state infiltration and expert advising suddenly became much more effective than ever before. Meanwhile, the broad pro-democratic citizen mobilization provided them with a new set of contentious and non-institutional levers: protests and other kinds of direct action, participation in the work of grassroots associations, and the possibility to use referenda, elections, and other political and non-political forms of expressing public opinion.
Thus, during this period, the environmental activists had both the power of state institutions and the power of the people at their disposal and were not yet forced to choose between the two. This environment favored the creation of very broad and heterogeneous environmental networks – Pacto de Grupos Ecologistas in Mexico and Socio-Ecological Union in Russia – that have for a while maintained a sense of unity within the environmental activist community that was growing increasingly diverse. Environmental activists, scientists, and lawyers who were carried into positions of power by the social mobilization wave developed a new, reform-environmentalist approach, which was much more politicized than conservationism and also differed fundamentally from social environmentalism in its attitudes towards institutionalized and people power.

As the early phase of the transition drew to a close, drawing the line between reform and social environmentalism became a matter of increasing concern to activists. Faced with changes in the political opportunity structures and resource availability, activists found that they could no longer make simultaneous use of institutionalized and non-institutionalized power without taking sides. In Mexico, reform and social environmentalists began to part company in 1988, when the National Democratic Front led by the PRI dissenter Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas becomes the focus of the democratic opposition and attracts the support of a wide spectrum of social activist organizations. The electoral fraud that brought Salinas to the presidency in 1988 and his subsequent campaign against the supporters of Cárdenas⁶ have greatly raised the moral costs of

⁶ According to the international human rights agencies, the frequency of the human rights abuses in Mexico increased steadily in 1988-94, and they were more associated with elections as ever before. PRD estimated 310 deaths of its members and supporters between 1988 and 1991, of which about ¼ were the result of
collaboration with the central state for environmental activists and forced them to choose sides in the broader confrontation between social movements and the state. In Russia, the rapid decrease in social mobilization between 1991 and 1993 and the growing availability of foreign funding forced social environmentalists to the margin of environmental activism, whose mainstream became institutionalized in the form of conservationist and reform-environmentalist NGOs.

4.2.1 Russian Environmentalists in 1988-1993

The establishment of Socio-Ecological Union (SEU) in 1987-88 as the main and all-encompassing network of environmental activists was driven not by a sense of ideological unity among its members but rather by the need to pool together all forces in the face of growing uncertainty and rapid political and social changes. The internal discussions that accompanied its creation show that all three approaches – conservationist, reform-, and social-environmentalist – had supporters among the founders. The DOP movement veterans, who constituted the majority of SEU members and the core of its leadership, wanted it to be a lifeboat that would enable them to survive the disintegration of the Soviet system, to which they were so closely tied. Others hoped that it would help the environmentalists to abandon their exclusive focus on nature protection and to enter the broader movement for social and political change. “Elimination of mass ecological illiteracy,” systematic reform of “the utterly inadequate electoral conflicts at the municipal level that took place soon after 1988, mostly in Michoacán, Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero and Morelos. In Michoacán and Guerrero, at least 60 PRI opponents, mostly PRD activists, were gunned down in 1990 alone. The repressions continued under Zedillo, with some 300 PRI opponents being killed nationwide in 1994-96. See Haber (2006: 119, fn.37).
environmental laws,” “correction of state agencies’ mistakes” through activist participation “in all kinds of consultations and expert groups,” and “creation of a powerful non-state system of reliable environmental information” were all among the functions that the founders hoped SEU to perform.7

The result was “an organization without rigid ideology and specific program of action but with a markedly hierarchical structure” based on a multitude of local cells engaged in a regular exchange of information with the Moscow-based Coordination and Information Center (CIC).8 In its heydays in the mid-1990s, SEU included over 300 organizations from all over the former Soviet Union. In 2006, it had 242 member organizations in 60 Russian regions; about 30% of these have survived since SEU’s formation in 1988. The membership figures have fluctuated over time, as new organizations were born, old ones became inactive or split, and individual activists moved between organizations. According to Zabelin’s 2006 estimates, a total of 7 thousand organizations and 15 thousand individual members had passed through SEU in 1970-2002 (this includes the DOP movement phase, 1970-1988).9

From the very beginning, SEU’s structure and strategies bore a clear imprint of its DOP majority, which was “dispersed in space, professionally trained, organizationally linked to state environmental organizations, and politically neutral.”10 Yet, it also attracted a great diversity of other environmental activists by adopting the crucial role of the information clearinghouse, which was open to all and enabled activists to coordinate

their actions under rapidly changing conditions.\textsuperscript{11} As foreign grant funding for “democratization and civil society development” became increasingly available from 1992 onwards, SEU also became a major center of resource procurement and redistribution. Thanks to their professional positions and international connections, members of the Moscow-based SEU leadership circle quickly acquired the necessary knowledge of the grant system and proposal-writing skills and very effectively transmitted them to the less grant-savvy regional and local organizations through SEU’s network structure. According to Sviatoslav Zabelin, the head of CIC, there was a time when SEU members “cleaned out almost all grants that were disbursed for environmental projects in Russia.”\textsuperscript{12}

Because of these informational and resource advantages, virtually all social environmentalists and their organizations remained members of SEU at least through the 1990s, in spite of growing ideological divergence between them and the SEU leadership.\textsuperscript{13} Because of their direct involvement in political controversies and greater reliance on contentious strategies, social environmentalists were only rarely able to secure their own grants. Western charities and foundations were usually unwilling to

\textsuperscript{11} In order to facilitate this informational exchange, the Moscow-based Center for Information and Coordination provided most of its original member organizations with equipment and infrastructure for email and Internet access. This was accomplished between 1991 and 1995 with financial and logistical help from two US organizations – Institute for Soviet-American Relations (ISAR) and Sacred Earth Network. See Bereginya, January 2005.
\textsuperscript{12} Zabelin, 22.12.2005.
\textsuperscript{13} Fedorov’s UCS and all its regional and local chapters are formally SEU members; Vladimir Sliviak, the co-chair of EcoDefense has directed SEU’s anti-nuclear campaign; Sergei Fomichev, one of the founders of the Rainbow Keepers was also indirectly linked to SEU, because his Institute for Global and Social Ecology formed part of Dront Center – one of the key SEU members. Key eco-anarchist leaders were among SEU’s founding members, but soon began to criticize it sharply. Fomichev (1997) provides by far the most systematic and best-argumented of such critiques.
finance any projects with an anti-systemic taste, and the bulk of the grant funding went to conservationists and reform environmentalists who at that time were rapidly forming NGOs. Thus, the social environmentalists found that the best way for them to finance their campaigns was to form a symbiotic relationship with organizations whose ideology, missions, and strategy closely resembled (or mimicked) that of the Western donors. This was a mutually beneficial relationship: social environmentalists received the necessary resources and in return granted SEU the right to claim their campaigns and achievements as its own without bearing the costs of direct political involvement and helped it to “maintain the overall protest image of the environmental movement.”

It must be noted that, as time went on, SEU has gradually lost its importance as the main information and resource center for Russian environmental activists. By the late 1990s, literally all major environmental groups have created their own infrastructure for gathering, processing, and distributing environmental information. Many of their

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14 Schwarz (22.12.2005), Fomichev (quoted in Khaliy, 2000a). Zabelin (22.12.2005) recalls that, in the early 1990s, “new organizations sprung up like mushrooms, just so that they could colonize the grant money.” The former members of the DOP movement figure very prominently among leaders and staff members in the Russian chapters of international environmental organizations, such as Greenpeace, WWF, and IFAW, as well as domestic conservationist NGOs such as Biodiversity Conservation Center (CODP).

15 Fedorov (09.07.2007). The social environmentalists were not nearly as effective as the reformists in obtaining funding: their relationship with the state was much more confrontational, and the foreign donor agencies were reluctant to finance organizations with no clear formal structure and strong emphasis on direct action and protest. Thus, many social environmental activists formed symbiotic relationships with SEU member organizations who shared funding and other resources with them in exchange for their participation in key campaigns. Yanitsky (1996: 168) describes this tenuous and ambiguous relationship as “contractual and purely tactical.” Some social environmentalists openly acknowledged that they were “no good at fundraising” and relied on Zabelin and SEU for funding, “because there was no one else to lean on.”

16 This unofficial support of social environmentalists formed part of a broader strategy that had allowed SEU leadership “to maintain the image of benevolent neutrality” in almost any kind of political conflict. When some member organizations got involved in a conflict with state or business actors in a particular region or on a particular topic, SEU as a network continued to maintain neutrality even as its leadership tacitly supported the contentious cells.
publications and newsletters have by far surpassed those produced by CIC in quality, quantity, frequency, and degree of specialization.\textsuperscript{17} Meanwhile, SEU’s ability to secure and redistribute money has gradually decreased, as the number of environmental NGOs sky-rocketed in the 1990s and competition of funds set in. This situation was exacerbated since the early 2000s, when “democratization and civil society” grants became scarce. Some donors decided that enough had been done to jumpstart the development of civil society; others began to move away from the big cities, where the major NGOs were concentrated, in the hope to reach more local, grassroots organizations. As individual member organizations saw that they could no longer count on SEU when they needed funds, they started looking for financial support elsewhere. In the absence of mutual informational and resource dependencies that have been the essential glue holding SEU together from the very start, for many activists SEU membership has lost all substance and became purely formal.

High level of social mobilization around major environmental controversies proved to be the weakest and the most short-lived among the factors that sustained this extremely heterogeneous alliance. Since those “acting on behalf of the environment” were not specifically targeted for persecution after Stalin’s death, mass environmental protests became the first form of political protests in the Soviet Union, because they were

\textsuperscript{17} Since 1990, Dront Center has been publishing Bereginya – a monthly environmental newspaper that has nationwide circulation among environmental activists. Bellona Foundation in St Petersburg maintains a highly informative Internet site and publishes an excellent journal “Environment and Law” (Ekologia i pravo). Since 1997-1999, Fedorov has been single-handedly compiling and electronically distributing three daily compilations: Environment and Human Rights (ECO-HR), Chemistry and Life (UCS-INFO), and Chemistry and War (UCS-WAR) that include general and specialized press publications and news updates from individual environmental activists on a wide range of social, economic, and political issues with environmental repercussions. I have used all of these sources extensively in my case study analysis.
widely seen as the safest.\textsuperscript{18} 1989 was the peak year for such mobilization, with more than 1 million people coming out into the streets nationwide in February to protest the hydrological mega-projects planned by the Ministry of Hydrological Resources (Minvodkhoz),\textsuperscript{19} and another 7 thousand taking part in protests against the opening of the factory for the destruction of chemical weapons in Chapaevsk.\textsuperscript{20} 1989 also marked the beginning of mass anti-nuclear movements:\textsuperscript{21} between 1989 and 1993, referenda against the construction of new nuclear power stations were conducted in Komi and Karelia Republics, Khabarovsk, Voronezh, and Chelyabinsk regions; in 1990, 10 thousand people protested the expansion of Balakovo nuclear power plant in Saratov region; in 1991, the residents of Gorkiy (Nizhniy Novgorod) region came out against the construction of a new nuclear reactor.\textsuperscript{22} SEU members participated in these events collectively and individually in a wide variety of forms – this was the rare time when almost everyone felt good and right to be protesting in the streets.

Since then, there have been two other major exceptional moments when Russian reform environmentalists and conservationists found that what they saw as high-priority environmental issues received mass support: the organization of the national referendum against the dissolution of federal environmental agencies and imports of nuclear waste in

\textsuperscript{19} These were the remnants of the northern river diversion scheme that was cancelled by the joint decree of the Party’s Central Committee and the USSR Council of Ministers in August 1986. They included the Volga-Don II, Volga-Chogray, and Danube-Dnepr Canals. See Larin et al. (2003: 66-67) and Weiner (1999: 427).
\textsuperscript{20} For detailed descriptions of these protests, see Fedorov (1995, 2006) and Khaliy, ed. (1996).
\textsuperscript{21} The origins of these protests and of the Russian anti-nuclear movement lie in the 1986 Chernobyl accident – see Section 3.4.3.
2000 and the protest campaign against the laying of the East Siberia – Far East oil pipeline along the shore of Lake Baikal in 2005-2006. In the first case, the environmental activists were the main driving force behind the campaign, although they acted in alliance with two political parties: Yabloko and KPRF. In the fall of 2000, 2.5mln signatures were gathered by the Russian offices of Greenpeace and WWF, SEU, and the Yabloko and KPRF members, but the Central Electoral Commission was evidently instructed by the presidential administration not to let such a referendum take place. It declared almost 1 million signatures invalid for technical reasons, and the referendum initiative got aborted.²³ In the second case, just as in 1989-91, the most numerous protests that took place in Siberia in March-April 2006 (Irkutsk, Severobaikal’sk, Ulan-Ude, Tomsk, Novosibirsk) were not purely environmental. They were supported and attended by representatives of political and social movements of all hues, trade unions, and “unaffiliated citizens” and had a distinct flavor of a regional protest against the imposition of a mega-project by the federal center. The environmentalists have also acknowledged that they did not bring people out into the streets. Thus, Igor Chestin, the head of WWF-Russia, remarked that the mass mobilization was the result of social self-organization that occurred nationwide.²⁴

The events of 1989-90 created a strong, although short-lived, sense of solidarity between SEU members and the general population, which quickly became eroded after 1991. Since the conservationists and reformist within SEU had managed to get their representatives “into power” and to establish a new resource base by drawing in part on

foreign grants and in part of public funds, they could afford to ignore “the rapid decline of general living standards, savage privatization, growing unemployment and crime rates,” and other manifestations of the economic crisis that Russia underwent in 1991-1993. Thus, contrary to popular perception, the environmental activists have not mobilized the population to defend nature in 1987-91. The people mobilized around environmental issues, because they saw them as a way to defend their rights. Once the peak of the social mobilization was passed, only the social environmentalist minority thought it important to keep cultivating grassroots support by maintaining the link between environmental degradation and “everyday concerns” of those who were not interested in defending nature for its own sake.

As the first competitive electoral campaigns of 1989 and 1990 opened the way into power for social activists and the pace of political and economic reforms accelerated, SEU became a major breeding ground for reform environmentalists. Many of its members acted on the premise that they were “the [environmental] professionals whom all politicians would need.” The emergence of new state institutions, political parties, and economic actors opened a new and highly attractive niche of environmental advising and consulting, for which they had the best training and expertise available. They therefore hurried to fill this niche, aided and accompanied by another group of emergent environmentalists.

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25 Yanitsky (1996: 133) notes that between 1991 and 1994 the SEU leaders “have not organized a single mass campaign to defend the social and economic rights of the population.” He explains this behavior by the fact that SEU leaders regarded the mass phenomenon of grassroots activism in 1987-89 “as a free resource which they were quick to benefit from.” But once the peak of the grassroots movement passed and maintaining it became a matter of “resource investment whose returns were uncertain and distant,” the SEU leaders preferred to switch resource and power bases and tie their future to the state and to foreign funding agencies. (Ibid.: 125)

reform environmentalists - “scientists with international reputation who raised environmental problems.”27

Since the Soviet Union began participating in the international environmental institutions as part of the détente, many prominent scientists became part of the international scholarly community engaged in discussions of environmental issues, at the price of also being part of the official effort to improve the regime’s international reputation.28 They used the available international forums to attract attention to the problem of environmental degradation in USSR, but they had to present it as a manifestation of the global environmental crisis rather than an inevitable consequence of the Soviet development model.29 This mode of action was highly unsatisfactory for those who felt an urgent need to begin addressing the Soviet environmental crisis.30 The Soviet state held its intellectuals on a hook: the permission to communicate with foreigners (and to use state resources in doing so) was contingent on an outward show of loyalty to the regime. Thus, the scientists were torn between their desire to tell the full truth about the situation and to call for reforms and the awareness that, if they did so, they would likely lose the ability to travel abroad and to communicate with foreign colleagues.

27 Glazovsky, quoted in Larin et al. (2003: 120).
29 The regime made an even greater effort to conceal the state of the environment from its own citizens. Although many Soviet scientists conducted research on issues of environmental pollution, the results of this research and the publications on which it was based were not available to the Soviet public, since they were classified as “official use only” documents (гриф ДСП). See Larin et al. (2003: 33). Fedorov (2000) notes that this domain of environmental secrecy was not eliminated in the early 1990s, when the state declassified some of its political archives and that it has been deliberately used as a screen by state bureaucrats over the past 20 years.
30 One scientist later complained of the sense of shame that he felt during an international congress, when he was asked what was being done in the Soviet Union to confront the major environmental problems and had to limit his reply to describing and praising the zapovedniki system, because he could think of nothing that the Soviet state had done about chemical and radioactive pollution, ozone layer depletion, or any other “brown” environmental issue. Weiner (1999: 407).
The scientists who worked in research institutes of the USSR Academy of Sciences played a key role in the campaigns for the defense of Lake Baikal that began in 1958 and against the reversal of northern rivers in early 1980s. The reforms initiated by Gorbachev filled these scientists with new hope. In 1989, biologists Nikolay Vorontsov and Aleksey Yablokov took part in the first competitive elections in the Soviet history and joined the Congress of People’s Deputies. Soon afterwards, Vorontsov was named the head of the State Committee for Nature Protection, created by Gorbachev to play the role of the environmental ministry. Meanwhile, Yablokov became the deputy of the USSR Supreme Council and, as the deputy head of its environmental commission, brought in a group of prominent environmental activists that laid the groundwork for much of the environmental legislation that was later drafted by the Ecology Committee of the Russian parliament between 1993 and 1999. Sviatoslav

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31 See Weiner (1999: ch. 16); Feshbach and Friendly (1992: ch.6).
33 Yablokov’s initiation into environmental activism took place in the VOOP youth section created by Smolin in 1946 (known from 1966 onwards as the “VOOP youth circle at the Darwin museum”). Douglas Weiner (1999: 283-84) calls it “a crucible for the formation of the leading field biologists of the USSR.”
34 Altogether, these elections brought in about 40 “environmental deputies,” among which were also the leaders of some informal environmental and self-government groups. See Yanitsky (1991) and (1996: 110).
35 However, its work became increasingly difficult as the future of the Soviet Union came into question in 1991. Larin et al. (2003: 83-84) describe it as a desperate attempt to organize the system of nature protection in a disintegrating country, where the authorities of the fifteen republics increasingly refused to work with the Union ministries. After the failed coup of 1991, the work of all Union ministries was suspended, and it became apparent that the potential of the State Committee for Nature Protection to serve as the main engine of state environmental reform was exhausted.
36 The work of this Committee was directed by Tamara Zlotnikova – environmental lawyer and natural scientist from Orenburg region. Her brief biography can be found at: [http://www.yabloko.ru/Persons/zlotn.html](http://www.yabloko.ru/Persons/zlotn.html). The list of federal environmental laws adopted between 1993 and 1999 can be found in Larin et al. (2003: 95). A major contribution to the development of these laws was made by a group of environmental lawyers that came together in late 1989 at the academic Institute of State and Law and in 1991 founded the Ekoyuris Institute, an NGO “dedicated to the defense of public interests in the sphere of environmental safety, environmental protection, and natural resource use.” See Mishchenko (December 2000). Social environmentalists have also participated in the legislative process. For example, Lev Fedorov has contributed to the preparation of bills that became the federal laws “On the
Zabelin, the head of SEU, who was one of Yablokov’s staff assistants, says that although the committee never got to the actual drafting of laws, it gathered “an enormous amount of information that was later used to make legislative proposals.”

Even more spectacular opportunities opened with Yeltsin’s assent to Russian presidency in July 1991 and the subsequent period, when, in Zabelin’s words, “the entire power structure was being created from ground zero by presidential decrees.” Yablokov, who became increasingly close to Yeltsin and was made his environmental adviser, used his influence to ensure the possible maximum powers for the Russian Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources that was created in November 1991 and the appointment of a well-reputed environmental economist, Viktor Danilov-Danilian, as its head. Ten years later, Nikita Glazovsky, a prominent geography professor, recalled this period as a new beginning: “This might seem idealistic now, but then there was hope that the new country [would allow us to do] what could not be [done] in the disintegrating Soviet empire. A new state was being created, in which coherent and realistic environmental policy had to become the integral part of state policy.”

What allowed these scientists to turn themselves into state officials was their deep conviction
that Russia’s environmental needs were best served through a national environmental action program, which they could draft and implement through state agencies.

This fixation on the state, and especially on the executive, as the main weapon in the fight against environmental degradation put the scientists and other reform environmentalists into an increasingly awkward position, as the brief period of state openness and dramatic increase in transparency quickly gave way to business as usual after 1993. Some, like Glazovsky and Zabelin, soon found it impossible to continue working for the federal government; others, like Yablokov and Danilov-Danilian, found a way to stay longer.42 The environmental activists who made their way “into the corridors of power” quickly discovered that the creation of a new political system was not accompanied by the change in the political culture – “the communication and relationship style in the top tiers of power” was largely the same as in the Soviet times. Glazovsky, who spent six months within the Russian federal government as Danilov-Danilian’s deputy, described this style as “closed and illogical,” based on private relationships rather than collegial deliberations. He felt that he could not understand “the motives behind the decisions that were being made: one could only guess who made them and on what grounds; there was no predictability, no certainty, [no normal discussions].”43 Most high officials of the new Russian state were the old Party cadres, who did not know how to

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42 Yablokov renounced the position of presidential environmental adviser in the fall of 1993, in protest against Yeltsin’s dissolution of the parliament. (Yablokov, 2009) He remained the head of the Security Council’s environmental security commission until 1997; Danilov-Danilian served as environmental minister until 2000.

43 Quoted in Larin et al. (2003: 121).
work with “people from science,” much more accustomed to convincing their opponents through well-argumented discussions.

Aleksey Yablokov is an example of a reform environmentalist who felt that accepting the increasingly non-transparent and non-public nature of state decision-making was a fair price to pay for the power that one gained by working from within the system. Through his research, Yablokov had gathered an incredible amount of information about the extent of the environmental degradation in the Soviet Union and its consequences for the people and the ecosystems.\(^4^4\) His main goal has always been to do whatever possible to counteract this degradation, and he continually searched for ways to translate this concern into a language that “the state powers” could understand.\(^4^5\) In 1993, while serving as President Yeltsin’s advisor on environment and health,\(^4^6\) he founded the Center for Russian Environmental Politics, whose main objective was just such kind of science-to-politics translation.\(^4^7\) That same year, he also became the head of the interdepartmental Environmental Security Commission within the Security Council – a

\(^4^4\) Over the past 20 years, Yablokov had used every available media venue to speak about Russia’s environmental crisis. See, for example, his interviews with Lubensky (12.08.2002) and Neizhmakov (13.04.2009) and a series of interviews that he gave on the Echo of Moscow radio station in 2000-2009 (online at http://www.echo.msk.ru/guests/436).

\(^4^5\) One such commonly used way is to present the fight against environmental degradation as the fight for “environmental security,” which formed part of the broader “state security” and therefore had to be seen as a high political priority and as a matter of national interest. Borozin and Glazovsky, quoted in Larin et al. (2003: 279 and 89). After 2000, this eco-statist rhetoric has also been widely used by WWF-Russia.

\(^4^6\) Yablokov occupied this position until 1993; he resigned in protest after the shelling of the parliament building in October 1993. See Neizhmakov (13.04.2009).

\(^4^7\) According to its website, CREP “elaborates state environmental policy” (государственную экологическую политику) by conducting “high quality in-depth analysis of the most urgent environmental problems and generating policy recommendations for all levels of state administration”. Online at: http://www.ecopolicy.ru (accessed 14.10.2004).
structure within the presidential administration that was created by Yeltsin in 1992-93.\textsuperscript{48} This commission brought together representatives from all executive agencies that dealt with environment, health and safety, and natural resources; its work took place in the absence of any kind of public and media scrutiny or legislative oversight. It is very characteristic that while Yablokov began his political and environmental activism in highly public arenas, by mid-1990s, his influence on state environmental policy was exercised through increasingly non-public channels. Zabelin notes that while it was still possible for environmental activists and other “concerned outsiders” to gain access to the presidential administration through presidential advisers, no such access was possible through the Security Council.\textsuperscript{49}

Yablokov’s evolution was guided by his sense of where the real centers of political power were located and he did his best to keep close to them.\textsuperscript{50} Such behavior is typical for reform environmentalists. While it has no noticeable negative impact on the democratic process in countries where political power is more or less equitably distributed between different levels and branches, it becomes much more problematic in places such as Russia and Mexico, where the balance of political power is heavily shifted towards the executive and towards state structures that can hardly be subjected to any

\textsuperscript{48} According to Larin et al. (2003: 108), this commission was created by Yeltsin at Yablokov’s insistence and was his attempt to “institutionalize” the presence of environmental advisers within a structure that was close to the main center of political power – the presidential administration. Yablokov and several other key environmental activists lasted there until 2000, when it was reorganized by Putin.

\textsuperscript{49} Zabelin, quoted in Larin et al. (2003: 114).

\textsuperscript{50} It is worth noting that Yablokov did not choose to act through the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, whose power and resources began to decrease soon after its creation, as it typically happens to environmental ministries created amidst major political and economic reforms. According to Glazovsky, the funding cuts had already begun in 1992, due to the onset of economic crisis in the fall of 1991. Since then, the Ministry underwent numerous reorganizations, all of which resulted in losses of personnel and funds. See Larin et al. (2003).
Unlike social environmentalists, for whom public participation and democratic processes have considerable intrinsic value, reform environmentalists give first priority to the task of environmental protection and, in situations where it can be better achieved by acting through non-public channels, tend to sacrifice democratic values and principles more easily. Consequently, Russian reform environmentalists found themselves in a highly ambiguous position, when the increasingly authoritarian state gradually deprived them of access even to the non-public channels. While they still felt that they could make most impact if they could influence the presidential administration, they could no longer access it directly. Some, like WWF-Russia, decided that the best way “to make themselves heard” was by making alliances with key business actors. Yablokov took a different road and attempted to make use of the parliament just at the time, when it ceased to function as a representative institution.

4.2.2 Mexican Environmentalists in 1982-1994

The links between environmental activists and the federal state first began to form during the presidency of Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988). He was the first presidential candidate whose electoral campaign explicitly included environmental themes, for he evidently decided that environmentalists were an important enough social force to be

51 The 1993 confrontation between Yeltsin and the parliament shifted the political center of gravity away from the representative institutions and towards the executive. After Yeltsin’s reelection in 1996 and especially after Putin became president in 2000, the power was further concentrated within the executive, as the presidential administration gained force at the expense of the cabinet of ministers. This concentration of power within the executive branch that was initiated by Yeltsin was greatly exacerbated by Putin, who redistributed the power away from the regions and towards the federal center by his reform of the Council of Federation (which under Yeltsin was made up of regional governors) and abolition of regional governor elections. In Mexico the imbalance of power is less extreme, both due to the much greater autonomy of the (competitively elected) regional governors from the federal center and to the strengthening of the Congress vis-à-vis the presidency as the result of the 1993-96 electoral reforms.
canvassed for support. In the wake of the profound economic crisis and the growing dissatisfaction with the PRI, de la Madrid strove to create new ties between the state and the powerful social actors by involving them in all kinds of pacts and cooperation agreements (*convenios*). Starting in mid-1983, de la Madrid’s administration, which included Manuel Camacho Solís⁵² and Carlos Salinas,⁵³ engaged environmental activists in a variety of state-sponsored consultations and forums (*foros de consulta popular*), which culminated in the first National Environmental Congress of 1984.⁵⁴ These officials also participated in the creation of three major environmental groups: the Mexican Ecologist Movement (MEM), founded by Alfonso Ciprés Villareal in 1981; the National Ecologist Alliance (AEN), headed by Jorge González Torres, which later became the Mexican Green Ecologist Party (PVEM); and the Pact of Ecologist Groups (PGE).⁵⁶

The September 1985 earthquakes in Mexico City stand next to the social upheaval of 1968 in the list of the events that have had the most profound and durable impact on

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⁵² Camacho Solís has been the key intermediary between environmental activists and the federal executive. In 1986, he was appointed the Minister of Urban Development and Ecology (SEDUE) – the federal environmental agency created by de la Madrid in December 1982 that functioned as the precursor to Semarnat until Salinas transformed it into the Ministry of Social Development (Sedesol) in 1992. At this post, Camacho Solís was in charge of reconstruction in Mexico City after the 1985 earthquakes and left it in 1988 to lead Salinas’ presidential campaign. After he became president, Salinas named him the mayor of Mexico City, and he occupied this post until 1993. In 1994, Camacho Solís negotiated the ceasefire agreement with EZLN after its January uprising in Chiapas.

⁵³ At that time, Salinas was the Minister of Education.


⁵⁵ As I show later in this section, this adjective has no straightforward translation into English and has different meanings for different activists. Hence, I left it unchanged in the English translations of organization names.

⁵⁶ Valencia Mulkay (28.09.2006); Peón Escalante (24.09.2006). The links of the first two groups to the state were much stronger than those of the third. For the detailed account of PGE’s origins see Umlas (1996).
the character and evolution of Mexican social activism. The federal government’s failure to react in an adequate and timely fashion was taken by the citizens as yet another indication that the state was no longer willing to fulfill its obligations under the social contract on which the PRI regime was founded. This realization spurred a powerful wave of self-organization at the grassroots and showed “what Mexican citizens were capable of achieving without the involvement of their government.” This self-organization had greatly strengthened the urban popular movement, as it produced a major network – Coordinadora Única de los Damnificados (CUD), which evolved into Asamblea de los Barrios (AB) in 1987 – that became a key social movement ally of the PRD, the opposition party formed by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in 1989. Many activists and researchers point to this phenomenon as the foundation of Mexico City’s “special spirit of citizen activism,” because AB’s housing agenda was closely linked with the broader democratization demands.

For many intellectuals and professionals, the 1985 earthquakes were the moment of truth when they felt a much stronger sense of solidarity with the “have-nots” and came

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57 Until 1997, the government of Mexico City was considered the department of the federal government and its head (regente) was nominated by the president. See Sánchez Mejorada and Álvarez Enríquez (2003).
58 Valencia Mulkay (28.09.2006) recounts that “it took [Miguel de la Madrid] three days to react. And this generated a conviction that the government was of no use in the hour of crisis.”
60 AB (Neighborhood Assembly) was led by the social Left and positioned itself apart from other groups that demanded housing reconstruction from the government, because it “did not play by the old rules of cutting selective deals with state agencies” and instead insisted on its members “constitutional right to decent housing” that the state had to satisfy in a transparent, legal, and comprehensive manner. See Haber (2006: 189). Chapter 5 of Haber’s book is a thorough case study of this network.
61 On the history and evolution of PRD see Reveles Vázquez (2004). On its alliances with the urban popular movement groups see Bruhn (2008).
to reevaluate their commitment to social justice. Miguel Valencia Mulkay, the founder of Foro Ecologista de la Cuenca de Mexico, links his decision to become an activist directly to this event: “I was a chemical engineer and a small business owner. The 1985 earthquake shook me, transformed me completely. It made me see that I had not adopted a position of social solidarity, that I had to do something for the society. This personal shock coincided with the emergence of the ecologista movement [which I then joined].”  

Luis Lopezllera Méndez, for whom social activism has been the vocation since the late 1960s, speaks of 1985 as the time when he was forced to rethink the effectiveness of his actions: “at first, it was a matter of classic solidarity without any ideological component, of humanitarian assistance in the face of the disaster and the government’s inaction. My NGO received a lot of funds [for this purpose], but I already knew that palliative aid was ineffective. I wanted [to go beyond] first aid, to raise consciousness and to reorganize. So at the end of 1985 we took a tour of the affected zone and made an inventory of small businesses and cooperatives and then used the foreign grant money to set up a project for assisting micro-business.”

The post-earthquake mobilization and the effects that it produced on the intellectuals provided the impetus for the differentiation of Mexican environmental activism into nature- and people-oriented streams. The First National Encounter of Ecologista Groups that took place in Mexico City in November 1985 brought together environmental groups that had formed over the two previous decades and now saw themselves as a new, society-oriented ecologista current that was distinct from the

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64 Lopezllera Mendez, 02.10.2006.
nature-oriented conservationists (ecólogos) in that it was equally concerned about social and environmental problems and intended to look for solutions that addressed both. The activists took great care to distinguish between these terms, because they referred to two very different approaches. For them, ecólogos (ecologists) were university-based natural scientists “who studied relations among different species, did not concern themselves with social issues,” and addressed environmental problems primarily as scholars, through university-based interdisciplinary projects. By contrast, while many ecologistas were also university-affiliated intellectuals, they saw themselves primarily as social activists, because of their concern for social justice and their regular interactions with the grassroots.

It is worth noting that the groups that came to the First Encounter and that formed Pacto de Grupos Ecologistas a year later were really a mixture of reform and social environmentalists, but in 1985-86 these camps were not yet fully differentiated. What divided them (and the Pacto) were the opportunities to institutionalize their activism by becoming state officials or by creating NGOs financed by state, private business, and

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65 Enrique Leff, one of the leading Mexican environmental philosophers, includes “cultural pluralism, satisfaction of basic needs, quality of life improvements, economic decentralization and participatory management” into his list of social-environmental demands along with the more conventional goals of “biological diversity and preservation of natural resources.” Leff (1990). “Cultura ecológica y racionalidad ambiental” in Hacia una cultura ecológica, Margot Aguilar and Günther Maihold, eds., Mexico City: Friedrich Ebert Foundation; pp.39-68. Quoted in Umlas (1996: 35), fn.80. See also Leff (1988).


67 This was still the case in 1988, judging by Leff’s article published that year: he calls social-environmental movements “movimientos ecologistas o ambientalistas,” and his use of the terms ecológico (ecological), ecologista, and ambientalista is not consistent. Ignacio Peón, one of the PGE founders, seems to have sensed this ambiguity when he proposed to use the word ambientalista (environmental) instead of ecologista in the name of the network. (Peón Escalante, 24.09.2006) The subsequent use of the term ambientalista in Mexico indicates that it is not a blanket adjective that describes any kind of environmentalism. Instead, it is reserved for environmental activism that does “encompass the contradictions of society” (Leff, 1988), but occurs primarily within or in alliance with the established institutions; in other words, it means reform environmentalism.
foreign foundations. These opportunities presented themselves at the time, when the 1988 presidential campaign of the opposition candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, who was prevented from assuming the presidency through massive electoral fraud, became the focus of a broad pro-democratic mobilization that spilled well into the 1990s. The split between reform and social environmentalists (within and beyond the Pacto) took place during the presidency of Carlos Salinas (1988-1994), whose efforts to strengthen PRI’s clientelist foundation and to co-opt social activists made it much harder to combine the use of state power and resources with the support of autonomous social movements and grassroots organizations.

The story of PGE’s formation and subsequent split is a perfect illustration of the difficult balance that transition-time environmental activists are forced to maintain. PGE was formed at the time when the central state not only controlled the lion’s share of resources that environmental activists needed, but was also extremely interested in cultivating “constructive” opposition and in strengthening its ties with civil society groups that it found moderate enough not to be threatening. The political and statist pole of PGE was represented by Regina Barba and Gabriel Quadri de la Torre, leaders of the middle-class Ecological Association of Coyoacán who had well-established ties to Camacho Solís and pushed the Pact members to transform PGE into a registered environmental NGO that could make good use of the state resources. At the other
extreme, were the members of eco-technology and development-oriented groups who wanted to maintain a much greater distance from the government.68

Ignacio Peón, one of PGE’s founders, points out that it was difficult for him personally and for the PGE as a network to find an optimal position between various centers of power: “the big fight within the Pacto had always been about its autonomy and its relations with the government, the foreign foundations, and the private sector. Regina Barba wanted us to register [as an NGO] so that we could [have a bank account and] receive funds – this is what they did when they formed UGAM and separated from the Pacto. After that, they started seeing social work as employment and [that made them] abandon their principles. [On the other hand, when some of us] got closer to social movements [in the early 1990s], we saw that our ways of working were very different. They criticized the system at the national and global scale, we looked for specific solutions at the local level. We asked ourselves how we could improve the life of individuals, while [they] talked about social classes and imperialism. Our organizations were horizontal, theirs – vertical and hierarchical.”69

68 These included activists from Red Alternativa de E-Comunicación (RAE) – a network of eco-technologists (Ignacio Peón Escalante, brothers Jesús and José Árias Chávez) formed in 1984 that included ATA, Fundación de Ecodesarrollo Xochicalli, and Huehuecoyotl (ecological commune in Tepoztlan, Morelos); Promoción de Desarrollo Popular, a developmental NGO created by Luis Lopezllera Méndez; Maderas del Pueblo – an NGO with strong links to indigenous communities of Oaxaca and Chiapas, headed by Miguel Angel García Aguirre; and Asociación de Residentes y Proprietarios de la Colonia Irrigación (ARPCI) – a neighborhood group led by Susana and Tzintzún Carranza.

69 Peón Escalante, 24.09.2006 and 03.10.2006. On the other hand, some prominent social environmentalists did not join the PGE, because they saw it as too moderate and reconciliatory. González Martínez, the leader of GEA, accused it of having “sacrificed direct democracy” and bypassed the complex process of “articulating very heterogeneous citizen interests” that began at the First National Encounter of Environmentalists in 1985 by proclaiming itself the representative that was entitled to negotiate with the government on behalf of civil society. See González Martínez (1992: 42).
It must be noted that for some social environmentalists who worked in close and sustained contact with social movements even the socially-oriented wing of the Pacto was not radical enough. González Martínez referred specifically to the PGE, when he argued in 1992 that many activists who called themselves ecologistas were not committed enough to the fight for social justice (lucha social) to become true social environmentalists. In order to differentiate his organization from the Pacto, he drew an even finer distinction between ecologistas, “who base their action strategies primarily on environmental demands,” and luchadores ecologico-sociales (social environmentalists) who are engaged “in broader struggles for social justice, which include an environmental aspect.”

It is notable that the members of the Pacto have in turn criticized GEA for “being too dependent on the foreign foundations” and caring too much about maintaining itself and expanding as an NGO. Such mutual accusations of being too institutionalized, too dependent on money and formal structures and not committed enough to “working with the people” are a typical manifestation of the rift between reform and social environmentalism.

The internal fault lines within the PGE were very profound and manifested themselves most clearly every time when the network got involved in a major grassroots-initiated social environmental campaign. In 1988, PGE could not reach an agreement on how to react to the eviction of urban squatters in Ajusco. That same year, after Salinas

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72 For a detailed history of grassroots mobilization of urban squatters in Ajusco, see Pezzoli (1998). The controversy within the PGE arose when major national newspapers published an announcement declaring PGE’s support for the eviction. Those within PGE who opposed it were infuriated by the fact that the pro-
became president, he abruptly reversed his position on the construction of Laguna Verde nuclear plant,\textsuperscript{73} which placed the pro-government elements within the PGE into a very awkward position, since they saw the coming of the new administration as a major window of opportunity for increasing their influence. After Salinas named Camacho Solis the mayor of Mexico City, Regina Barba and Gabriel Quadri joined the city government – a move that their more independent-minded PGE colleagues took as the definite changing of sides.\textsuperscript{74} Nevertheless, all of these individuals still managed to work together on the campaign against the destruction of Chimalapas rainforest in 1992-1994.\textsuperscript{75} As Peón Escalante explains, both sides felt the need for each other – their actions and strategies were complementary: “Even though we did not like her stance, it was most helpful to have people like her, who were relatively close to us, [acting from within the government]. She helped to protect the more radical groups, like Maderas del Pueblo, because Miguel Angel Garcia was very inflexible and confrontational. By contrast, his partner, Luis Bustamante is a good mediator: he made links to the artists, foreign government faction publically spoke in their name without consulting them. Valencia Mulkay, 28.09.2006; Umlas, 1996.

\textsuperscript{73} On the history of the Laguna Verde nuclear power plant project in the state of Veracruz see Stevis and Mumme (1991). During his presidential campaign, Salinas declared himself on the side of the protest movement as a means of increasing voter support. It must be noted that the electoral cycles have a strong influence on the environmental “preferences” of Mexican presidents. Thus, Miguel de la Madrid campaigned on an environmental platform and acted quite strongly on it during the early part of his sexenio. As he became increasingly involved in the task of economic reforms and privatization, his environmental zeal has diminished significantly: he was the one to authorize the construction of the Laguna Verde nuclear plant in 1986. Quite logically, the environmental card then passed on to his successor, Salinas, who later followed a similar trajectory. In December 1994, Zedillo also began his presidential term with a strong pro-environmental flourish by creating Semarnat, the full-scale environmental ministry, and appointing a well-known biologist, Julia Carabias as its head. In addition, he cancelled the construction of a salt evaporation plant at Laguna San Ignacio in Baja California, in response to a vigorous protest campaign led by environmental NGOs. See Mumme (1992), Díez (2006).

\textsuperscript{74} Valencia Mulkay, 28.09.2006; Peón Escalante, 24.09.2006.

\textsuperscript{75} See Umlas (1998) for a detailed analysis.
foundations, government officials, like [Luis Donaldo] Colosio, and worked for reconciliation, while the other fought. They were an excellent combination.\textsuperscript{76}

While the members of the Pacto were debating the extent and the forms that collaboration between environmental activists and the central government could take, natural scientists concerned about the environment were making major inroads into state institutions. Biologist Julia Carabias was appointed by Zedillo in December 1994 to head the Ministry of Fisheries, which was reorganized as Semarnap at the end of the same month. Zedillo did not know her personally prior to appointing her. Díez (2006) argues that the creation of Semarnap was Zedillo’s attempt to make Mexico look good in the aftermath of Rio – signing the Rio Declaration implied a commitment to the establishment of institutions for environmental protection. Carabias was one of the co-founders of United Socialist Party of Mexico (PSUM) and the developer of its environmental platform (together with Carlos Toledo and Quadri de la Torre). She was a graduate of the Biology faculty of the UNAM and headed the National Institute of Ecology (INE) before her appointment in 1994, during which time she collaborated with Luis Donaldo Colosio. Between 1984 and 1992 she coordinated UNAM’s program for the management of natural resources, which included rural development projects in Guerrero, Oaxaca (Tuxtepec), Michoacán (Meseta Purépecha), and Durango. The main priority of these projects was halting deforestation.

Just like Yablokov and Danilov-Danilian, whose admission into key executive agencies had opened the door into power for many environmental activists, Carabias was

\textsuperscript{76} Peón Escalante, 24.09.2006.
able to use her ministerial post to increase the environmentalists’ leverage in several key ways. She staffed the new environmental agencies with people who had a deep personal and professional commitment to environmental protection. She created the Consultative Council for Sustainable Development, a body that was meant to ensure regular input of environmental NGOs and business representatives into Semarnat’s decision-making process. Finally, she did her best to include environmental activists into the consultation process that led to the reform of major environmental laws. Yet, just as in Russia, only a very small fraction of environmental activists were able to make use of these channels and to influence the national-level policy process. As a state official, Carabias found it easier to deal with those activists who could offer “technical expertise and proven track record” on a particular issue. Conservationists and environmental lawyers dominate the list of those NGOs that have developed a close relationship with Semarnat during Carabias’ tenure; social environmentalists are conspicuously absent from this list.

4.2.3 Conclusions

In both countries, the transition produced a new phenomenon of “activist-officials,” whose objective was “to catch the moment when state authorities might be interested in some kind of a pro-environmental action.” They learned to think the way authorities do, to evaluate the situation from their point of view. If they chose the moment right, they managed to advance an environmental cause important to them as

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77 Valencia Mulkay, 03.10.2006; Peón Escalante, 24.09.2006; Díez (2006).
78 The groups that came to dominate the formal channels created by Carabias are: CEMDA and AMDA – the environmental lawyers; UGAM – the reform environmentalist coalition, and conservationist NGOs, such as WWF, Cimex, Pronatura, and Naturalia. See Díez (2006).
activists and to satisfy the state authority, which rewarded them with resources or other goods. In order to achieve this, activist-officials presented environmental problems not as socio-political ones, but as organizational and technical issues, which were easier for state bureaucrats to understand. This translation made it possible for an environmental NGO to participate in state decision-making and lowered the probability of conflict with the state.

Such strategy is ultimately a “weapon of the weak”: it forces the activists to tow a very fine line between maintaining autonomy in the setting of goals and in the choice of means and accepting the rules of the game dictated by the state. In doing so, they risk becoming reactive rather than proactive in their agendas: what can be done at any particular moment is determined more by what can be achieved through the power structures and by what the activists consider necessary and urgent to do in order to halt environmental degradation. In addition, this strategy has very real and long-lasting costs for the environmental movement as a whole, because by closely collaborating with state structures driven by non-environmental agendas and participating in decision-making on the state’s terms the activists give additional legitimacy to old, authoritarian and highly unequal kinds of power relations and discredit almost any kind of contentious activism as non-constructive. As Yanitsky (1996) points out, this reformist approach was also strengthened by the fact that the foreign donors preferred to finance “constructive projects” which included elements of “cross-sectoral cooperation” between environmental NGOs, state authorities and the business sector.
The early 1990s were very favorable time for the formation of NGOs in Russia and in Mexico. In Russia, this was the period when grassroots and professional environmental activism begin to diverge. Yanitsky (1996: 133) argues that the link between grassroots activists and the reform environmentalists already began to grow weak as early as 1990-1991, and that this process greatly accelerated in 1992-1994. “The environmental movement led by conservationist leaders did not pay attention to the rapidly falling level of material well-being of the general population, the growth of crime and unemployment levels, the savage privatization [of state property], the problem of refugees.” Professional environmental activists could afford not to pay attention to these issues in part because foreign grant funding for NGOs became available around 1992.

4.3 The Dual Crisis: Decreasing Effectiveness of Formal Institutions and the Shrinking Resource Base

This section analyses the responses of environmental activists to the challenges presented by the decreasing access to state structures, the weakening of formal environmental institutions, and the shrinking of the resource base that arose in the late 1990s - early 2000s. The first part of the challenge came from the growing hostility of state and business towards environmental protection that set in once the main centers of power became institutionalized after the breakdown of the old regime. The causes of this development are found in the persistence of authoritarian power relations and in their manifestations within the economic sphere. Currently, the economic markets cannot be effectively regulated through environmental laws either in Mexico, or in Russia, because state agents double as powerful economic actors, and the rules of the economic game
depend more on their arbitrary use of state power than on laws. Thus, the task of making the markets internalize environmental externalities that is confronted by all contemporary societies is rendered particularly difficult in both countries, because the rule of law is weak and the authoritarian traditions endure. The Russian situation is worse than the Mexican one, for Russia has also been making a gradual return to political authoritarianism since 1996.

The second challenge – that of the diminishing resource base – is partly linked with the first, because, during the initial phase of the transition, many environmental activists have found ways to form alliances with state agents and agencies, who have provided them with funding and other kinds of material resources. As the state grew more hostile towards them, this resource base became more and more unreliable. The impact of this change was greatly magnified by the fact that the foreign funding agencies that had so eagerly financed environmental NGOs in the early 1990s, began to withdraw their support at the same time as the state resources became less and less accessible.

Conservationists and reform environmentalists gradually found that their mode of action was becoming less and less effective as the state structures become less open to their political participation and as the environmental laws and institutions created during the transition increasingly come to be seen by state and business actors as a hindrance to profitable economic activities. As the state became an utterly unreliable ally, some have reoriented themselves towards business. Others began to develop strategies that allowed them to move closer to the grassroots. Environmental NGOs also saw their material resource base diminish, as both the state and the foreign foundations gradually withdrew.
their support. There were two major responses to this resource crisis: campaigns to attract due-paying individual and corporate supporters were undertaken by national chapters of international environmental NGOs – Greenpeace and WWF. Other response was to diversify funding sources by moving into environmental consulting.

4.3.1 The Causes: The Persistent Unity of Power and Property

By the late 1990s, the Russian and the Mexican economies emerge from profound crises, and the environmentalists have to contend with the new threats that come from neoliberal economic reforms and from the push for deregulation that undermines the effectiveness of environmental laws and institutions created during and after the transition. The ongoing privatization program is supposed to separate the interests of the state and the business corporations, but environmentalists often find that they still act together when it comes to large-scale projects with high environmental and social risks. Activists in both countries have to contend with environmental threats that arise from the new, neoliberal ideology of the state and the economic reality that stands behind this rhetoric. The markets that they confront are not “free” – that is, competitive – but dominated by small numbers of actors that had acquired their market power through strong and often illegitimate ties with state institutions and officials. In the case of large and strategically important corporations, the unity of political and business power is so great that it is literally impossible to draw the line between the state and the business sector: same sets of individuals hold the positions of power in both.

In post-Soviet Russia, this unity between political and economic power has a more systemic character than in present-day Mexico, because in Russia the legal
guarantees of private property are routinely violated and subverted by the executive power. This phenomenon has very deep roots that go back to the clientelist and non-public nature of the imperial Russian state that arose in the 16th century. Its current version is directly linked both to the complete absence of private business as an autonomous actor during the Soviet period and to the nature of the post-1989 economic reforms. When state corporations and other types of state property were privatized in the early 1990s, few outsiders were allowed to take part in the distribution. Thus, the heads and managers of practically all leading private Russian corporations have their roots in various sectors of the Soviet establishment: they received access to private property because they already had access to the state. The notorious “loans-for-shares” scheme that was used in 1996 to bolster corporate support for Yeltsin’s reelection has further strengthened the dependence of private property on the executive power. This dependence has reached unseen levels during Putin’s presidency, when control over the main economic assets was concentrated within the presidential administration.

This situation cannot be equated with “state capture by business interests,” because this explanatory scheme assumes that political and economic elites have distinct origins to begin with: political elites gain power and are legitimized through the electoral process, while economic elites base their power on the institute of private property, which is autonomous from the state, even though it is upheld by national laws. By contrast, in Russia private property was first deliberately eliminated by the Soviet state and then carved out anew from the body of that state by its former elites, so that the executive

branch of the post-Soviet state maintained its right to suspend the guarantees of private property in cases when they were seen to interfere with the interests of those in top political leadership positions.\textsuperscript{82} The result has been called “a completely privatized state”: instead of acting in the name of the public good, the post-Soviet version of the Russian state that was constructed under Yeltsin and Putin defends private business interests and is itself a corrupt business corporation.\textsuperscript{83} State actors – executive agencies and individual bureaucrats at all levels, from federal to local – are at the same time the main and the dominant market actors, who set the rules of the game and have the power to modify them in their favor without prior warning. In key economic sectors – oil and gas, military, transport, and construction industries – it is often literally impossible to draw the line between a (formally) private business and a powerful state official who owns and controls it directly or through family members.

By contrast, in post-1940 Mexico, private property has provided a basis for power that was much more independent from the state. The PRI regime, in its most stable form that solidified under President Avila Camacho (1940-46) and endured until the presidency of Echeverría, was based on an unwritten but very carefully observed social

\textsuperscript{82} See Auzan (2006). The arrest and ongoing legal case of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the former head of the Yukos oil company and one of the key participants of the “loans-for-shares” arrangement, is the clearest, but by far not the only manifestation of the fact that demonstrating political loyalty to the executive power is an indispensable obligation for everyone who wants to remain a member of the business elite. This rule applies not just at the federal, but also at the regional and local levels, where the governors and mayors routinely place themselves above the law when property rights are concerned and are the prime movers in the making and unmaking of business elites. Khodorkovsky came to be seen as a threat by Putin’s administration precisely when he decided to assert his autonomy from the state by scrupulously following the laws. The history of the case can be found at \url{http://www.khodorkovsky.ru} and at \url{http://www.zaprava.ru/hronica}.

\textsuperscript{83} Glinski Vassiliev (November 2000); Vorozheikina, 25.10.2009. Margulev (20.02.2008) calls this construct “an imitation state”; Glinski Vassiliev (November 2000) and Mikhalych and Polukhin (08.12.2005) describe it as “Business holding ‘Russia’.”
contract: so long as the business actors knew their place when it came to political
decision-making, their right to hold private property and to enrich themselves was not
challenged by the state, which, moreover, gave priority to their interests when it came to
formulating economic policy. This special incorporation mechanism not only provided
the main engine of economic growth in the 1940s-1960s, but also laid the foundation for
the growth of political pluralism, which was manifested in the rise of the PAN – the party
created by powerful businessmen of the North. While the problem of non-transparent
alliances between businessmen and politicians remains extremely acute in Mexico, the
situation there is markedly better than in Russia insofar as Mexican political system is not
so heavily imbalanced in favor of the executive power. In particular, the gradual
strengthening of the electoral system in the aftermath of the 1994-1996 reforms provides
an extremely important counterweight to the "private" dimensions of the Mexican state
that have traditionally been very significant.

4.3.2. The Contrasting Dynamics of Political Competition in Russia and Mexico

While the persistent unity of power and property is a factor that has contributed to
the weakening of environmental institutions in both countries, the overall evolution of the
political sphere between 1988 and 2003 has created many new levers of influence for
Mexican environmentalists while their Russian colleagues confronted the gradual closing
down of the political channels as the levels of political pluralism and electoral
competition decreased after 1996. Certain aspects of political change in Russia since that

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84 See Valdes Ugalde (1997).
point can be metaphorically described as the retracing of Mexican path, but in the opposite direction. This return to the Mexican past was initiated by President Yeltsin, who had first ensured his reelection in 1996 by reducing electoral competition through the orchestration of a massive anti-Communist campaign and then transplanted the Mexican practice of *dedazo* onto Russian soil by nominating Vladimir Putin as his presidential successor on the last day of 1999.\(^{85}\) Since Putin became president in March 2000, his administration has carried out a series of reforms that have systematically and deliberately dismantled the main components of political democracy: the competitive elections, the multi-party system, and the federal organization of the Russian state.\(^{86}\)

Meanwhile, in Mexico these political institutions were strengthened. After the debacle of the 1988 presidential elections, the electoral system has been democratized through a series of reforms (1990, 1993, 1994, and 1996).\(^{87}\) Since the creation of PRD in 1989, political competition in Mexico has been based on a three-party system, where each party – PRI, PAN, and PRD – has broad social support bases and is tied to a variety of interest groups and social movements. Finally, the elections of the state governors that have been tightly controlled by the PRI have been opened for competition in 1989, when PAN was allowed by President Salinas to claim its electoral victories in Baja California and Guanajuato, and became fully competitive since 1997, when PRD won its first state-

\(^{85}\) See Vorozheikina (2007). *Dedazo* (“the pointing of the big finger”) is the term that refers to the practice of the Mexican president nominating the PRI candidate for the next presidential elections. The PRI electoral machine ensured that the individual, whom the current president “pointed out with his finger,” became the next president. See Smith (1991), Magaloni (2006).

\(^{86}\) See Vorozheikina (2007) for a succinct but comprehensive overview of these reforms.

level executive post – that of Mexico City mayor.\(^{88}\) As Magaloni (2006) points out, these changes became possible, because in 1988 the PRI lost its supermajority in Congress and with it the ability to single-handedly modify the Constitution. The electoral reforms and the recognition of PAN’s gubernatorial victories were part of the deal between the PRI and the PAN leaderships. In exchange, PAN agreed not to challenge the 1988 electoral fraud and to support the economic reform agenda advanced by Salinas.

The state of the formal political institutions has a direct bearing on social activists, because these institutions shape their political opportunity structures and influence their choices of strategies and allies.\(^{89}\) The biggest change in political opportunity structures that took place during the transition in Russia and Mexico was that the political power which has been concentrated in the party-state under the “old regime” became much more dispersed and acquired new institutional forms. The introduction of competitive elections and federal state structure made the state actors at each level (from federal to local) more autonomous in their interactions with social activists. The creation of multi-party system and the emergence of new political parties provided activists with a new, non-state channel for bringing their concerns into the political sphere. The political reforms that strengthened the legislative and the judiciary branches of government relative to the executive have made it possible for social activists to make new allies within the state and to exploit the tensions between different parts of the state structure to their advantage.

However, Mexican social and environmental activists were able to use these formal democratic institutions much better than their Russian counterparts. On the one hand, this difference was due to the fact that the electoral and federal institutions and the multi-party system had much deeper roots in Mexico than in Russia by the time when transition began. On the other hand, while the Mexican political system has continued to evolve towards greater levels of democracy over the past 20 years, giving both the political actors and the social movements a chance to accumulate experiences and to learn from past mistakes, Russian society was only given a very brief chance to experiment with and learn to use a set of institutions that was quite new and unusual for it, before these institutions began to be undermined and dismantled by the executive power.

The contrast between Russia and Mexico is particularly apparent when one looks at the relations between environmental activists and political opposition. In Mexico, professional environmental activists have played an important role in the post-1988 pro-democratic mobilization led by PRD. On the other hand, PRD and PAN politicians have often made support for grassroots environmental campaigns part of the strategy for challenging PRI’s electoral dominance at the regional and local levels. By contrast, no such coherent and durable links have formed between Russian environmentalists and KPRF – the opposition party that had the broadest social base and the highest levels of

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90 See Umlas (1996).
electoral support throughout the 1990s. While individual KPRF politicians and deputies have at times supported environmental campaigns at the regional and local levels, the party as a whole never felt the need either to include a significant environmental component into its program or to include professional and grassroots environmentalists among their constituents. Professional environmental activists have most often associated with two liberal democratic parties – Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces (SPS). These alliances were mostly used by environmentalists for lobbying and legislative purposes – Yabloko and SPS deputies helped to push environmental agendas through the federal and regional parliaments. In the absence of broad grassroots environmental movements or protests, neither of the two parties could significantly enlarge its electoral support base through systematic commitment to environmental issues. Ironically, the post-2004 interactions between political opposition and urban protest movements described in Section 6.1 indicate that a stronger link between political opposition and environmental activism might be developing at the time when the former is increasingly excluded from the electoral game.

A major additional factor that has made relations with political parties extremely difficult for Russian environmentalists was the emergence of United Russia. Formally a political party, United Russia (ER) is an instrument of executive control over the political

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92 Clément (2006a). A notable exception to this pattern is KPRF’s participation in the gathering of signatures for the 2000 national environmental referendum. See Section 4.2.1.
93 Clément (2006a) remarks that KPRF has in general been quite reluctant to expand the ranks of its supporters beyond the core of its “traditional constituents” – those who disapproved of the political and especially economic reform program and wanted to return to some updated variant of the Soviet system.
94 However, Yabloko has been paying much more attention to environmental issues since 2006, when it incorporated “Green Russia” as its environmental fraction. See Section 4.5.1 on the history of Green Russia.
sphere. It was created in December 2001 through the merger between the “Fatherland” party led by the Moscow mayor Yuriy Luzhkov and Evgeniy Primakov, the “Unity” party led by Sergei Shoigu, a long-time Minister of the Emergency Situations, and “All Russia” led by the President of Tatarstan Mintimer Shaymiev. It brought together pro-Kremlin politicians and state officials into a quasi-political party that could use state power and resources to marginalize political opposition. It eventually allowed Putin’s presidential administration to gain full control of the State Duma (the federal parliament), which thanks to its invasion “has lost both its representative and legislative functions.”95 It gained the majority of Duma seats in the parliamentary elections of 2003 and then obtained a constitutional majority in 2007. Both of these elections have been highly manipulated in its favor.96 United Russia forms part of the “power vertical” created by Vladimir Putin: it has local chapters in all Russian regions and dominates the regional parliaments; over the past five years, the majority of regional executive officials have joined United Russia to demonstrate their political loyalty to the Kremlin. Over the past decade, United Russia has become a major anti-environmental force and a major adversary for many environmental activists, since its deputies now dominate both in the federal and in the regional parliaments and have been used by the federal and regional executives for passing laws that weaken the institutions of environmental protection.

While Russian environmentalists have not been able to use the competition among political parties to the same extent as their Mexican colleagues, they did take advantage of the electoral process when elections for regional and local executives

95 Vorozheikina (2007).
96 See Pas’ko (January 2004), Oreshkin (2007).
(governors and mayors) became competitive in the mid-1990s. As Hale (2007) points out, the 1990s were the time when “highly clientelistic political machines” were created by regional governors and mayors of large cities. However, in contrast to Mexico, where electoral clientelism is channeled through the operations of the three major political parties,\(^{97}\) in Russia it takes “mostly non-party forms” and links individual mayors and governors directly to voters (and their employers), with very little institutional mediation. Nevertheless, as the case studies in Section 6.1 indicate, the 1990s were the time when Russian citizens began to learn how to hold elected executive officials accountable for their campaign promises. Even though the opportunities for such learning were drastically curtailed in 2004, when governor elections were eliminated,\(^{98}\) the regional electoral mobilizations of the late 1990s and early 2000s are a crucial experience that is not likely to be forgotten by either the citizens, or the state officials.

4.3.3 The Consequences: Weakening of Environmental Laws and Institutions

In Russia, a deliberate and systematic attack on federal environmental institutions and legislation began in 1996 and was the direct consequence of the increasingly private character of the state and of the general weakening of democratic political institutions. The overall results of this change include the elimination of the federal agency for environmental protection, the transfer of its functions to the ministry in charge of natural

\(^{97}\) Magaloni (2006).

\(^{98}\) The elimination of competitive governor elections was part of the broader administrative reform undertaken by Putin’s presidential administration and known as “the construction of the power vertical.” From 2004 onwards, all regional governors have been appointed from Moscow. See Hale (2007), Vorozheikina (2007).
resource exploitation, and the weakening of all laws that regulate environmental impact evaluation and public participation in this process.

In August 1996, the main federal agency for environmental protection lost the ministerial status. The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources was restructured and its environmental protection functions were passed to the State Committee on Environmental Protection (Goskomekologii), whose head was no longer a cabinet member, but answered to the federal government.\(^9\) Meanwhile, the jurisdiction over water and mineral resources passed to the newly created Ministry of Natural Resources (MPR).\(^1\) In May 2000, Goskomekologii was eliminated by Putin, and the MPR was given jurisdiction over the management of all natural resources (water, forests, and mineral) and also assumed the main environmental protection duties that Goskomekologii used to perform. The joining of natural resource exploitation and environmental protection in a single ministry was a clear indication that, in case of conflict, the former would take priority over the latter. The evisceration of state agencies that had the duty and the power to intervene on behalf of the environment was completed in May 2008, when the MPR acquired jurisdiction over all the major environmental control and monitoring agencies: Rosprirodnadzor,\(^1\) Rostekhnadzor,\(^1\) and Rosgidromet.\(^1\)

\(^9\) Larin et al. (2003: 105). It also lost jurisdiction over water and mineral resources which were passed to the newly created Ministry of Natural Resources.
\(^1\) Goskomekologii was thus left in charge of: air quality protection, flora and fauna (excluding forests, which were regulated by the State Committee on Forests, Goskomlesa), the management of the protected territories system, and waste issues (except radioactive waste). See Larin et al. (2003: 105).
\(^1\) Rosprirodnadzor – the Federal Control Agency in the Sphere of Natural Resource Use – was created within the Ministry of Natural Resources.
\(^1\) Rostekhnadzor – the Federal Environmental, Technological, and Atomic Control Agency – was the result of the merger between two control agencies within the Ministry of Energy and Industry and the
Between 1993 and 2000, Russian environmental activists made good use of the legal instruments to block large-scale economic projects with high environmental impacts. First and foremost among these legal instruments was the Law on environmental expert assessment (1995) that subjected virtually any economic activity as well as all forms of federal legislation to an obligatory prospective environmental evaluation by an independent expert commission. The original version of the law required a positive decision of a state environmental expert assessment commission for the construction of all buildings and structures, nuclear power installations, and infrastructure for oil and gas extraction and processing. As the Russian extractive and manufacturing industries were restructured into large corporate holdings and gathered momentum in the second half of the 1990s, strong industrial lobbies emerged and started pressuring the State Duma for modifications of this law that would render it less stringent. According to Zlotnikova, one of its authors, “the institution of expert environmental assessment had become a solid legal barrier in the way of large-scale environmentally dangerous projects [and that] forced the industrial lobbyists to addition of environmental control functions to its duties. Until May 2008, when it too passed under the jurisdiction of the MPR, it reported directly to the federal government.

103 Originally the State Committee on Hydrometeorology, between 1992 and 1998 it was alternating between being part of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources and functioning as an independent State Committee. In September 1998, it became Federal Agency for Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring overseen by the federal government. This is the main federal agency in charge of water and air quality monitoring. The critical value thresholds for industrial pollutants are set by Roszdravnadzor (formerly Gossanepidnadzor) – a sanitary-epidemiological control service within the Ministry of Health and Social Development. See Larin et al. (2003: 29-32).

106 The adoption of this law required overcoming a presidential veto: Yeltsin was not willing to have his executive orders, government and federal agencies’ decrees, and federal funding programs subjected to an evaluation by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources. See Zlotnikova, 24.10.2006.
search for ways to circumvent it.” Thus, the parliamentary environmental committee strove to reinforce its provisions by duplicating them within other relevant laws, such as the Water Code (1995), the Urban Code (1998), the Forest Code (1998), as well as the federal laws on wildlife, industrial safety, destruction of chemical weapons, and others. They also managed to include a separate chapter on environmental crimes into the 1997 Criminal Code, which listed 17 different types of environmental violations. Unfortunately, violation of the EIA legislation was not listed among them. Thus, environmental activists and NGOs were never able to hold the state officials who violated these laws personally accountable.\(^\text{107}\)

In Russia, the main legal instruments available to citizen and NGOs concerned about economic projects with high environmental and social impact are the provisions for public participation in the decision-making about economic activities that appear in the key laws that have already been mentioned above. Public participation can take four main forms: public hearings, public environmental expert assessment, citizen lawsuits, and referenda. The normative base for public hearings is laid out in the EIA Provisions (2000)\(^\text{108}\), Urban and Land Codes, and the Law on the organization of local self-government.\(^\text{109}\) Public environmental expert assessment (PEEA) is described in the Law on expert environmental assessment (1995); further discussion of this instrument can be found in Section 6.1.3. The possibility of citizen-initiated civil lawsuits on environmental

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\(^{107}\) Zlotnikova, 24.10.2006.

\(^{108}\) For an overview of the Law on environmental expert assessment and the EIA Provisions see Krasnov (July 2006).

\(^{109}\) See Dymov (March 2006). Two environmental NGOs that specialize in the organization of public hearings – Dront Center in Nizhniy Novgorod and Ekom Center in Saint Petersburg – are described in further detail in Section 4.5.3.
violations, was stipulated by the first version of the Law on environmental protection adopted in 1991. However, its 2002 reform has significantly reduced the standing provisions. Citizens and NGOs lost the rights to file criminal lawsuits against environmental violators and to demand compensation of health and material damages suffered by citizens as the result of such violations. The right to bring lawsuits demanding compensation of environmental damages (to ecosystems) has been preserved, but has not been used at all, because there is no working system for assessing environmental damage. So far, only moral damages have been successfully claimed by environmental activists.\textsuperscript{110} Finally, the organization of federal, regional, and local referenda on environmental issues is regulated by the Law on referendum passed in 1990 and reformed in 1995 and 1997. This instrument has been actively used by citizens: between 1990 and 2005, 20 regional and over 100 local environmental referendum initiatives have been registered in Russia on issues ranging from construction of nuclear power plants and facilities for the destruction of chemical weapons to the conversion of urban green zones into new residential neighborhoods. However, since the late 1990s, the electoral commissions and the regional and local executives have made it increasingly difficult for citizen groups to register and organize referenda on environmental issues.\textsuperscript{111}

The effectiveness of all legal instruments that have been actively used by environmental activists has been gradually decreasing since the mid-1990s. This process has greatly accelerated after 2004, when Putin’s presidential administration initiated a series of administrative reforms that very deliberately targeted all the laws that, while not

\textsuperscript{110} See Talevlin (June 2002); Veselov (June 2002), Zlotnikova (24.10.2006).
\textsuperscript{111} See Vorobiev (2005).
strictly part of environmental legislation, contained requirements of state environmental control of economic activities and public participation in their prospective environmental evaluation. As part of massive federal government restructuring that took place between March and May 2004, the oversight over the state environmental expert assessment process as well as environmental permitting and inspection were passed to two newly created federal environmental control agencies with highly overlapping functions – Rostekhnadzor and Rosprirodnadzor. From the very start, these agencies have been deliberately underfunded and understaffed, which has contributed to the weakening of state environmental control procedures.\textsuperscript{112} Article 49 of the new Urban Code adopted in December 2004 essentially cancelled the SEEA requirement for most building construction projects.\textsuperscript{113} In August 2004, 17 laws were modified to shift many of the federal responsibilities for environmental protection and natural resource management from federal to regional and local authorities.\textsuperscript{114}

The last blow to the institution of environmental expert assessment was delivered in December 2006, when 30 laws were modified simultaneously under the pretext of “removing administrative barriers to the construction of affordable housing.” Among these were the Forest, Land, and Urban Codes as well as the Laws on environmental protection and environmental expert assessment and many others that had nothing or little

\textsuperscript{112} Zlotnikova (24.10.2006); Krasnov (July 2006).
\textsuperscript{113} This change came into effect on 01.01.2007 and puts under great risk all environmentally sensitive zones, such as shorelines, urban forests, and other kinds of protected territories, which could have been protected from construction project with the aid of the properly conducted SEEAs (Baklagin, 2006). Zlotnikova (24.10.2006) notes that “this norm can easily be used, for example, to build a large two-story house on the very shore of the Black Sea and use it as a private hotel.”
\textsuperscript{114} This was done by issuing a new federal law (No.122-FZ), appropriately called “On the modification of some legislative acts of Russia Federation.” See Krasnov (July 2006).
to do with affordable housing.\textsuperscript{115} These modifications completed the task of rendering the SEEA requirement moot for almost any kind of proposed economic activity that is likely to have significant environmental impacts. In particular, it exempts all projects related to oil and gas industry, proposing to evaluate them according to the same construction standards as those used for urban buildings.\textsuperscript{116}

The major changes mentioned above were by far not the only ones; yet even by themselves they produce an impression of a systematic effort to remove all environmental restrictions on economic activity. Over the past decade, several major lines of attack have developed: large-scale oil and gas extraction and transportation projects,\textsuperscript{117} reactivation of Soviet-time nuclear power plant\textsuperscript{118} and hydroelectric dam projects\textsuperscript{119} that were stopped

\textsuperscript{115} This blanket change was accomplished by the federal law “On the modification of the Urban Code and other legislative acts” (No.232-FZ) See ECO-HR No. 2302, 23.11.2006; Zlotnikova (24.10.2006).
\textsuperscript{116} These changes have provoked protests of all the major Moscow-based environmental NGOs. (ECO-HR No.2302, 23.11.2006; Zimbovsky, February 2007) In 2008, the state made a small concession by reinstating the SEEA requirement for projects that directly affect protected territories. Yet, at the same time, discussion began about the possibilities of renting out parts of these territories for road and pipeline construction. According to Ivan Blokov, the campaign director of Greenpeace Russia, “while in the early 1990s it was decided that zapovedniki and national parks would be forever off-limits to economic uses, now no such possibility is even being considered.” See Chizhova, 30.12.2008.
\textsuperscript{117} These included the building of oil and gas terminals on the shores of the Baltic Sea (Leningrad and Kaliningrad regions) and the laying of new gas pipelines under its waters in order to export of Russian oil and gas to Western Europe while bypassing the existing pipeline infrastructure that goes through Ukraine and Eastern Europe. On the other hand, large-scale pipeline projects have been undertaken to bring Russian oil and gas to China and to other countries of the Pacific Rim. These included the Taishet-Nakhodka pipeline project, which was began but not completed by Yukos, the East Siberia – Pacific Ocean (VSTO) oil pipeline currently constructed by Transneft, and the “Altai” gas pipeline project jointly undertaken by Gazprom and the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC). Major controversies have also recently arisen around the off-shore oil drilling projects undertaken by Lukoil in the Baltic Sea (Kaliningrad region) and by Sakhalin Energy in the Sea of Okhotsk.
\textsuperscript{118} In 2007, the Russian Atomic Agency (Rosatom) has submitted the so-called “roadmap for new nuclear power plant construction” to the federal government. This plan has triggered a wave of anti-nuclear protests in 13 affected regions, which include Kaliningrad, Nizhniy Novgorod, Vladimir, Rostov-on-Don, Murmansk, Arkhangelsk, Tatarstan, Saratov, Perm, Cheliabinsk, and Irkutsk. See Bellona (2007 and 2009), Novaya Gazeta, 11.09.2009.
\textsuperscript{119} The recent controversies include the Katun dam in the Altai Republic, Kankunskaya dam in South Yakutia (Sakha Republic), and a series of dams on lower Angara and the Lower Tunguska Rivers in Krasnoyarsk region (which includes the Evenkiyskiy ethnic district) – Boguchanskaya, Motyinskaya,
through popular protests in the late 1980s, tourist and recreational development within protected areas,\textsuperscript{120} conversion of forested lands to other land-uses, and residential development of the greenbelts around major cities.\textsuperscript{121}

Different legal instruments are available to citizens and NGOs in Russia and in Mexico in cases of conflicts around activities or projects that carry high environmental and social risks. Mexico has no analogue to the kind of detailed enabling legislation that the Russian Law on environmental expert assessment and Environmental impact assessment provisions provide for public participation in the preliminary environmental review of state and business activities. The relevant procedures are referred to in several articles of the General Law of Ecological Equilibrium and Environmental Protection (LGEEPA), but they do not amount to the same level of stringency as in Russia. On the other hand, the Mexican law provides citizens with many more ways to hold public officials accountable for their actions. In particular, the \textit{amparo} process is often used by social activists to stop or at least suspend activities that they consider to be violating their constitutional rights. In the particular case of rural (ejido and community) lands, Article 27 of the Constitution has long acted as a brake on the ability of state and business agents to expropriate agricultural and forested lands for development projects. However, this

\textsuperscript{120} The latest such controversy has been the construction of roads and facilities for the 2012 Olympic games in Sochi in the protected areas of Northern Caucasus.

\textsuperscript{121} See Yanitsky (2007).
protective buffer was much eroded by the 1992 constitutional reform, which specified the procedure for the division of communal and ejido lands into individual parcels that could subsequently be sold or rented out. However, the Agrarian Law also specifies the procedures for obtaining community consent to rural land expropriation, and grassroots activists have appealed to these provisions in the landmark cases of large hydroelectric projects, such as La Parota. In principle, the Federal Law on Transparency and Access to Public Information (2002) enables citizens and activists to receive information about impending development projects from the state agencies in a more timely manner. However, it appears that social activists have not been very successful so far in using this law: state officials in Mexico routinely violate its provisions, and there is not enough court action to make them accountable for it.

In Mexico, the state effort to dismantle environmental laws and institutions has been nowhere as far-reaching and deliberate as in Russia. Between 1994, when a separate environmental ministry (Semarnat) was created, and 2003, the attitude of the federal executive towards state environmental institutions varied from supportive to neutral. A major shift took place in September 2003, when Víctor Lichtinger, the head of Semarnat since 2000, was forced to resign by president Fox after his attempt to publicize and tackle the issue of beach pollution had greatly antagonized the National Hotel Chamber, the Ministry of Tourism, and several state governors. Lichtinger’s departure caused a major exodus of environmental professionals from the ministry, which has since been gradually drifting closer to business interests and becoming more reluctant to oppose large-scale
development projects proposed by the oil and tourist sectors. A small group of reformist NGOs, most notably the Union of Environmentalist Groups (UGAM) and the Mexican Center for Environmental Law (CEMDA), that have managed to maintain a close relationship with Semarnat ever since its creation in 1994, lost much of their footing after 2003. Yet, in Mexico the watering-down of environmental protection system seems to be primarily driven by the economic interests of the federal and state politicians. By contrast, in Russia, the impetus to dismantle the system not just economic, but also political and came from both the presidential administration, which is prone to declare any kind of activist effort to ensure citizen participation in decision-making as a threat to Russian national interests, and from the regional governors that are not accountable to the citizens and see environmental regulations as an encumbrance on profitable business activities.

4.3.4 The Growing Resource Scarcity: Losing Access to Foreign Grants and State Funds

Foreign donors had entered the stage more or less at the same time in Russia and in Mexico – between 1990 and 1992. This was the time of heightened interest on the part of European, US, and Canadian NGOs, government and private foundations in developing Russian “civil society,” in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union. In Mexico this process was directly related to NAFTA negotiations (1990-1993) and the preparations for the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (1992). NAFTA negotiations served as a major focusing event for the US and Canadian activists, many of whom “discovered”

that Mexican environmental NGOs did exist when they started looking into the effects of
the proposed treaty. In the words of Ignacio Peón, the US and Canadian NGOs forced
the Mexican activists to pay greater attention to the TNCs: “[they gave us] a very critical
vision of the TNCs, because the treaty [negotiations] involved both the governments and
the big entrepreneurs, and the large companies were telling the governments what to
do.”

Both in Mexico and in Russia, the 1990s were the time when social activists
quickly learned the skills necessary to compete for foreign grant money. Many activists
recall that at the beginning there was more money than organizations ready to apply for
it. Mexico displayed a similar pattern: the main recipients of grants were larger urban-
Based NGOs and networks; local grassroots organizations depended on their urban and
academic “connections” to gain access to “foreign money.”

Until 1991-92, Russian environmental activists mostly obtained money and other
resources from the state through a variety of indirect ways. After that time, foreign grants
became the second major source of funding, which lasted until the early 2000s. In regions
where activists had good relations with local and regional nature protection agencies,
they kept getting state money and resources as well. In 2000s, as the foreign grants

have hardly dealt with Mexico … and had few contacts with Mexican NGOs.” In 1990-1993, because of
Rio and NAFTA negotiations, “there was an unprecedented increase in international funding for Mexican
Wildlife Fund, Action Canada Network. Access to financial resources from these international
organizations greatly contributed to the formation of Mexican NGOs as well as to the establishment of their
offices in Mexico.”
125 Ignacio Peón Escalante (24.09.2006).
126 Bustamante (08.10.2006) Arias Chávez (11.11.2006); Kayumov (01.09.2006), Kolpakova (01.09.2006).
127 Peón Escalante (24.09.2006), Bustamante (08.10.2006).
become increasingly scarce, many organizations found themselves forced, once again, to make contacts with the state, even though their leaders sense that the officials manipulate them and use them in bad faith. Yet, the situation has changed qualitatively with respect to the late 1980s, and state money is no longer the only way to go for an organization that requires considerable funding.

According to Yanitsky, until about 1991 the Russian environmental groups “operated under the conditions of resource abundance; afterwards – of their acute deficit and harsh competition for access to them.” By the early 2000s “democratization and civil society” grants become scarce. Some donors decided that enough had been done to jumpstart the development of civil society; others began to move away from the big cities, where the major NGOs were concentrated, in the hope to reach more local, grassroots organizations. As the competition for grants got harsher, the possibilities of working within the state (and getting paid for it) also became greatly reduced.

A survey of the current situation with respect to funding sources reveals two main strategies to ensure some degree of financial security. First, the organizations that have a reasonably secure financial footing are the chapters of well-known international NGOs (WWF, GP, IFAW). They still receives considerable funding from the central office, but are also increasingly relying on “paying member” contributions. The recruitment of these “paying members” – “сторонники” or “supporters” in Russia and “socios” or “partners”

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in Mexico – has become one of the major development strategies for these organizations.\textsuperscript{129}

The second, more creative type of response has been to diversify sources of financial support and to rely on some combination of paid consultant work (for business, state agencies, and citizen groups), research grants, and state money. This is the model used, most notably by Dront and Ekom Center in Russia.\textsuperscript{130} These organizations are not fully “autonomous” in the sense of being completely independent, but at least they do not depend wholly on a single donor or type of donor. There are, obviously, organizations that chose to work for a particular state or business client, but this comes at a high price.

4.4 \textit{Russia in 1991-2009: Coming out of a Long Mobilization Trough}

This section deals with the macro-level factor that underlies the development of social environmentalism in the post-transition period – the overall levels of social mobilization. Since the early 1980s, the levels of social protest and mobilization in Mexico have been both higher and more sustained than in Russia. The wave of social mobilization that crested in 1985-1988 has been building up gradually since the 1970s.\textsuperscript{131} By contrast, in Russia extremely low mobilization levels of the late Soviet period were followed by an unprecedented and very sudden surge in 1987-1991, after which there was a long and profound trough, which lasted until 2004. Thus, while in Mexico social

\textsuperscript{129} Malysheva (14.09.2006), Schwarz (27.07.2006); Navarro González (05.12.2006).
\textsuperscript{130} Kayumov (01.09.2006), Agakhanants (08.08.2006).
environmentalism could gradually grow in strength over the past forty years as it drew on relatively high and constant levels of social mobilization, two separate waves of social environmentalism can be distinguished in Russia, and they are closely associated with the two waves of general social mobilization.

In Russia, the strong surge of pro-democratic mobilization of 1987-1991 was followed by a profound trough that lasted from 1993 to 2004 and was directly related to the rapid deterioration of the newly created democratic institutions. It began with the conscious decision of the new state elites to close the political sphere to any kind of autonomous participation from below. As Clément (2006a: 3) argues, after August 1991, “the Yeltsin administration and the intellectual elites” adopted the view that “politics should be left to professionals,” that collective action by citizens destabilized the situation and was no longer needed. Thus, the main democratic institutions – elections, the Constitution, the party system, the mass media – created by the Yeltsin’s administration in 1991-1993 became established in a sphere that was political, but “not public,”132 because it was not based on the “principle of universal access.”133 Vorozheikina (2006) sees the root cause of this phenomenon in the political leaders’ choice “to defend democracy by defending the executive power [emphasis added] in its confrontation with an opposition-dominated parliament” in the summer and fall of 1993. She argues that “this choice, especially under the conditions of widespread economic crisis, made the mass disillusionment with democratic institutions inevitable – the people

132 Clément (2006a: 3).
133 According to Habermas (1962: 84), the public sphere must be in principle accessible to all citizens, even if very few actually choose to become active in it.
did not see the representative institutions as a way to defend their vital interests.” The growing imbalance between the executive and the legislative branches of power, the establishment of political power as the main lever for access to private property, and the use of “unreformed repressive apparatus” by democratically elected state leaders caused “the degradation of democratic institutions in the second half of the 1990s” and prepared the ground for “their complete emasculation from 2000 onwards.”

The Russian population rapidly became disillusioned with the institutions of political democracy, because they proved of little use to the majority of the population as mechanisms of interest representation. This lack of responsiveness became especially evident during the economic crises of 1991-93 and 1998. Those who protested against the wage arrears found that, while they could obtain piecemeal satisfaction of their particular demands, there was no political mechanism that could transform these protests into a social movement capable of influencing the course of economic reforms. Thus, while there has been a major spike in social protest in 1997-1999, it did not end the mobilization trough, because it did not result in the formation of any lasting networks or social movement organizations. By the early 2000s, Russian population suffered from an acute deficit of representation and institutionalized mechanisms to address grievances in all spheres of political, economic, and social life and responded to this deficit largely

135 Robertson (2004). Robertson’s analysis is based on the daily nationwide police reports about protests in 1997-2000. According to this data, it was a predominantly workplace-based mobilization: workers constituted 70% of the participants, and in 74% of protest events demands were related to wage arrears. For reasons outlined in Section 4.2.1, professional environmental activists could not have made much use of this mobilization: environmental protests constituted only 1-2% of the 8,500 protest events.
by turning to informal clientelist networks\(^\text{136}\) while the levels of protest remained very low\(^\text{137}\).

The long mobilization trough finally came to an end in December 2004, when protests erupted all over the country in response to the adoption of Federal Law No.122, which deprived the numerous “disadvantaged categories” of the Russian population – retirees, single parents, disabled persons, war veterans, students, victims of political repressions, and many others – of their rights to state-subsidized goods and services. This law caused such a strong reaction, because it clearly indicated the state’s intention to withdraw the social welfare rights and guarantees that constituted a vital source of support for the broad and diverse social groups located in the bottom tiers of income distribution in a society where inequality and poverty levels have risen dramatically since the breakdown of the Soviet regime\(^\text{138}\). As Clément argues, Law No.122 has symbolically opened a new, anti-social stage of economic reforms, during which the Russian state began to shed all the major social obligations inherited from the Soviet system in the areas of housing, health care, social welfare, transportation, and education\(^\text{139}\). Whereas before the people could retreat from the state into the sphere of informal networks, now they finally came face to face with it in all spheres of everyday life. This confrontation has opened the way for grassroots mobilization, because the state that had for so long resorted to paternalist rhetoric now showed its true colors, and the large number of its former welfare clients felt that it no longer owned it any allegiance.

\(^{136}\) Rose (1999), Gudkov and Dubin (2002).
\(^{138}\) Clément (2006a).
\(^{139}\) Clément (2006a)
Since 2005, these people started coming together around many important social issues, including housing and urban land-use change. In contrast to Mexico, where the disenfranchised urban dwellers have been a considerable social force at least since the 1970s, this social category is only now becoming a mobilization base in Russia. The main reason for this difference is that its emergence requires significant socio-economic differentiation of the kind that was suppressed in the Soviet Union. Over the past two decades, socio-economic inequality in Russia increased rapidly and sharply, reaching levels that are quite comparable to or even exceed those in Mexico.\textsuperscript{140} The Russian variant of neoliberal economic transformation, which combined the dismantling of the Soviet welfare system throughout the 1990s and an extremely unequal distribution of oil export earnings, has left a large share of the population in the state of vulnerability, if not outright poverty. This vulnerability, according to Clément (2006b), is manifested as the state “in which any kind of major event – birth of a child, loss of employment, loss of property due to theft or fire, sickness, or family death, as well as increases in prices of basic commodities and services – can cause the household to slide rapidly into chronic

\textsuperscript{140} Levada (2000), Vorozheikina (2007, 2008). In Mexico, the inequality levels began to grow during the 1980s, after more than two decades of continuous decrease. The top 10% increased their share from 33% of total national income in 1984 to 38% in 1992. In According to Soviet income inequality statistics, which are very unreliable and cannot be directly compared with those supplied by the international development agencies, the income of the richest decile was 6 times that of the poorest in the early 1980s. According to Levada Center (formerly VCIOM) estimates, by the early 1990s, the richest already had 15 times more than the poorest (Krasil’nikova, 2007). In 2002, World Bank gave the same estimate of this gap for Russia (the bottom decile had 2% and the top – 31% of total national income); the corresponding figures for Mexico are 2% and 39% (WDI, 2002). Mercer’s worldwide Cost of Living survey published in March 2009 ranked Moscow as the third most expensive city in the world (it held the first place from 2006 to 2008), while the income share of its richest 10% was 42 times that of the poorest (the nation-wide equivalent of this gap is 15). Meanwhile, Mexico City (Federal District) did not make it even into the list of 50 most expensive cities in the world. In 2004, the income of its richest decile was 20 times that of the poorest (40.4% and 2% correspondingly), which corresponds to the Gini coefficient of 0.477 (the national value was 0.445). Source: INEGI, 2004.
poverty,” because it has no sufficient financial or property resources to buffer this change. By 2005, when the state made it clear that the costs of welfare sector reform would be borne by the users, most of the “lower” and “middle” strata of the Russian population suddenly and quite unexpectedly found themselves in that “vulnerable” category.¹⁴¹

When it is seen in conjunction with the degradation of formal democratic institutions, this process amounts to the near-universal disenfranchisement of the population, because it reinforces political marginalization with the socio-economic one. It also has direct bearing on the development of social environmentalism, because over the last five years the State Duma has passed several laws that “radically restructure the legal relationship between the resident and his vital environment. These laws introduce changes into the spheres of housing and utility service provision, property rights to land and forests, urban construction and, in the spirit of [economic liberalism], defend first and foremost the rights of large property owners, not those of ordinary citizens.”¹⁴² These legal ‘reforms’ have cleared the way for sweeping land-use changes that have almost always and everywhere occurred in violation of the existing building codes, land-use regulations, environmental and sanitary norms, and, finally, without due consultations with the residents.

¹⁴¹ According to Gontmakher (2007), one of the leading Russian specialists in social development, in 2007 half of the Russian population fell into this “socially vulnerable” category: “they have no savings, and any major shock – loss of housing, food and utility price hikes – can push them into poverty. They have no money for private medical care, and no time to sit in lines at state clinics, which leaves them essentially with no access to adequate health care.” Meanwhile, only about 10% of the population (“20% being too generous an estimate”) has living standards comparable to those of the US and Western European “middle class.”
¹⁴² Yanitsky (2007).
The Russian population has begun to respond to this multi-faceted attack on its rights with a great diversity of protest movements. New independent labor unions, associations of retiree and disabled persons, groups focused on housing rights, land-use changes, and other urban issues have proliferated across the country and have started to merge into thematic networks and to form alliances with political opposition. Early studies of this phenomenon conducted by the Moscow-based “Collective Action” Institute (IKD) show that “an ever greater proportion of the population is getting ready for collective action” and point to the great variety of “underlying motivations.”\(^{143}\) While this grassroots mobilization takes place “at the micro-sociological scale” and “within the macro socio-political context that is very hostile to any kind of collective action,” IKD’s weekly counts of protest events since early 2005 show that this phenomenon, although still marginal, shows no signs of subsiding over the past five years and deserves sociological attention. This new wave of grassroots mobilization produces new grassroots environmentalists who become part of social-environmental mobilizations as they make links with professional activists and integrate themselves into broader social networks. It also provides a major opportunity for all types of professional environmental activists, because it gives them a chance to form diverse, strong, and durable links between social justice and environmental concerns and thus acquire a broad social base.

\(^{143}\) Clément (2006a and 2006b).
4.5 How Did the Environmentalists React to These Changes of Context?

Yanitsky argues that Russian environmental activists were fully aware of the steps taken by the federal executive to reduce the political weight of state environmental agencies and to exclude them from decision-making on the key social and economic policy issues. Yet, they did not take it as a sign that they needed to turn away from the state altogether, struggling to maintain their presence in an ever-shrinking space that the state environmental agencies provided.\textsuperscript{144} At the same time, reform environmentalists who had been in regular contact and collaborative relationships with state environmental officials found that they have fewer and fewer officials to work with: those committed to environmental protection begin to leave the state agencies after the massive personnel cuts and restructuring, and their successors simply do not want to work with activists any more. The formal and informal channels of access to state environmental agencies became blocked. This was primarily manifested at the federal level: the major Moscow-based organizations who had close contacts with the Duma, the presidential administration, and the Ministry of Natural resources (MPR), increasingly found that the doors into the government had closed for them.\textsuperscript{145} The same process also began to take place at the regional level, as the governors built their personal “political machines” by making alliances with big business.\textsuperscript{146} After the administrative reforms of 2004, this

\textsuperscript{144} Yanitsky (2002: 390).
\textsuperscript{145} Larin et al. (2003); Yablokov (14.10.2004); Zabelin (22.12.2005); Schwarz (22.12.2005).
\textsuperscript{146} Quote from Hale (2007). See also Zubarevich (2002), Golosov (2000).
process has accelerated in those regions that have transitioned from elected to Moscow-appointed governors.\textsuperscript{147}

Over the past decade, Russian environmental activists have reacted to this closing of the state in several main ways. Many have continued interacting with the state in the hope of preserving their niche, however small, within the state structures and the political sphere. Some, like WWF-Russia, have switched their attention from state to business as the main target of influence. Others, like the EKOM Center in St Petersburg and several of Dront Center’s “structural subdivisions” in Nizhniy Novgorod, began turning towards grassroots citizen groups and framing their projects to better serve the needs of citizens who find their environmental rights violated by state and business actors. This switch of attention from state and business to the citizens is more noticeable in Russia than in Mexico, because in Russia there have been until recently very few environmental organizations with a strong grassroots base.

4.5.1 Keeping a Foot in the Doors of Power: the Fate of “Green” Parties in Russia and Mexico

This section describes one of the ways in which Russian activists tried to retain their access to the political institutions as the state bureaucracies lost interest in

\textsuperscript{147} Nizhniy Novgorod is the prime example of such evolution: its first elected governor, Boris Nemtsov, entered politics on the wave of environmental protest campaigns of the late 1980s. His successor, Gennadiy Khodyrev (1997-2005), was supported by “Rusal” business holding that in those days was co-owned by Oleg Deripaska and Roman Abramovich – the oligarchs that had direct access to the presidential administration. He already placed an emphasis on forging links with nation-scale business holdings that could help him to have good relations with Moscow rather than focusing on alliances with regional enterprises. Yet, the coming of Shantsev and his team from Moscow has qualitatively changed the situation: Shantsev’s administration has resulted in a virtually complete take-over of Nizhniy’s main industries by Moscow-based companies. Kayumov (01.09.2006); Zubarevich (21.07.2006); Demenev (2007).
environmental issues. It compares Russia and Mexico with respect to the fate of the green party-building strategy as a way to politicize environmental activism and “enter the state.” While Russian environmental activists made repeated attempts to build a green party, their Mexican colleagues did not pay this issue quite as much attention. The main reasons for this appear to be twofold. First, the “green party” that was created in Mexico very early on during the transition period proved to be so hollow and opportunistic that the entire idea got strongly discredited. The second and likely more important reason is that Mexico has experienced gradual strengthening of its party system since 1988, and environmental activists were able to access the political sphere by making alliances with the two major opposition parties – PAN and PRD. By contrast, the Russian party system of the 1990s did not present environmentalists with a major political party that would be willing to work with them, and the situation was further exacerbated over the last decade by the exclusion of the political opposition from the electoral field and the deliberate weakening of the party system from above.

4.5.1.1 Green Russia: Sticking to Electoral Politics When it no Longer Works

In Russia, attempts to create a green party have begun early in the transition period – the first small green parties were formed by the eco-anarchists in the foyer of SEU’s first congress in 1989. Yet, none of these parties were able to obtain enough electoral support to compete in legislative elections on their own. After 1993,

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148 Another strategy frequently used by environmental activists for retaining their presence within state structures which is not considered here is the participation in the consultative councils that have been created by many state agencies in Russia and in Mexico over the past two decades.
environmental activists temporarily abandoned serious attempts to form a political party with a strong environmental agenda. Instead, the emphasis was shifted to pressuring all registered political parties to add environmental components to their programs. The party that proved most amenable to this pressure was Yabloko United Democratic Party. In particular, it played a key role in the preparations for the 2000 national environmental referendum and took the environmentalists’ side in the political controversy that surrounded the reform of the Forest Code (2004-2006). Thus, it is not an accident that the last major attempt to build an independent green party ended in the first truly political alliance between a fraction of professional environmental activists and an oppositional political party. Unfortunately, this alliance was made just at the time when the political opposition in Russia was fast losing access to the electoral field, so that the environmentalists’ original goal of using this alliance for entering the parliament has so far not been realized. Nevertheless, this alliance is a very important experience for environmental activists, because it gives them an opportunity to learn to use a new organizational form.

150 The name of this party means “apple” and was made up from the names of its three founders: Yavlinsky, Boldyrev, and Lukin. It was founded in 1993 and has functioned as one of the main liberal democratic parties and the main political ally of the environmentalists within the State Duma throughout the 1990s. Its main bases of social support were among the more-educated, higher-income groups in large cities. Its presidential candidate, Yavlinsky, obtained 7% of the national vote in the 1996 elections; its maximum vote share in legislative elections hovered around 10-12% (in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, its two main support bases). Beginning with the 2003 elections, it has been excluded from the national parliament through a combination of vote rigging and electoral law changes that made the entrance barrier too high for small parties. The negotiations between Yabloko and environmental NGOs about the possibility of creating an environmental fraction within the party began in 2004.


151 See Section 4.2.1.

152 See Katys (04.10.2004); Yaroshenko (18.12.2007); Yaroshenko, Komarova, and Kreindlin (2009).
The “Green Russia” political party project (2004-2006) has been Yablokov’s latest attempt to break into the highest circles of power. As he found that the national executive “no longer heard” environmental activists after 2000, he decided that the best way to regain access to key decision-makers was through the parliament.\footnote{Union of Russian Greens, 04.03.2004; Yablokov (14.10.2004); Krotov (15.10.2004).} He was not daunted by the fact that after the political counter-reforms that Putin’s administration began in 2001 and especially after the 2003 elections the State Duma was no longer functioning as a mechanism for political interest representation.\footnote{Vorozheikina (2007).} In December 2004, while Yablokov was in the middle of a nationwide member recruitment campaign, the electoral law was changed, and the minimum membership requirement for political party registration was raised to 50,000 members. By the time of its formation in June 2005, the party only had 17,000 members, and Yablokov celebrated this as an impressive achievement “under the current conditions.”\footnote{Bereginya (June 2005). The documents from the Party’s first congress can be found at: \url{http://sovet.environment.ru}.}

Yablokov’s party-building initiative had provoked very heated discussions among professional environmental activists and brought into sharp focus many key long-term internal divisions within the environmental activist community.\footnote{Neprikosnovennyi Zapas, one of the best socio-political journals currently published in Russia, dedicated and entire issue (No.2 (46), 2006) to the discussion of the “Green Russia” initiative (online at \url{http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2006/2/}). Additional public forums were provided by Bereginya (online at \url{http://www.seu.ru/members/bereginya/}) and EcoLogos – the journal of the Moscow ISAR office (\url{http://www.isarmos.ru}), see in particular its April-May 2005 issue (No.21), dedicated to “Green party-building.”} Many felt that the party needed to expand its social support base beyond professional environmental activists, but this would require it to make its agenda relevant to “the general public” by
including all the main socio-economic problems among its concerns. Yet, there was no agreement on how to balance this social justice aspect with the key goal of environmental protection. Since the creation of SEU, the majority of environmental activists were accustomed to coordinating their actions and supporting each other’s campaigns through network structures. However, beneath this apparent unity and solidarity were deep political and ideological divisions, which could not be reconciled when it came to the formulation of a coherent political platform. By the end of 2005, disagreements on these and other substantive, organizational, and strategic issues reached such levels that Yablokov announced the dissolution of the party. The majority of the membership that remained loyal to him has continued its work in the form of the “public association” (общественное объединение), which is the legal form that the precursor of a political party can take before it acquires the necessary membership to be registered. Meanwhile, the leadership undertook the second round of party-building, which ended in June 2006 with the incorporation of Green Russia as a fraction into Yabloko.

However, Yabloko could not help Yablokov and his colleagues into parliament: the December 2007 electoral campaign has been the most manipulated and the least competitive of all that Russia has had so far, and none of the opposition parties were

157 Rootes (2004: 619) notes that this is a very typical situation: members of social movements interact through network structures, which are flexible enough to allow cooperation between proponents of very diverse approaches and ideologies. But the ideological differences come to the fore when a social movement or a broad activist network attempts to restructure itself as a political party with a coherent program.

158 See Yablokov (30.08.2006). According to Nikitin (09.08.2006) and Tsepilova (08.08.2006), Green Russia currently exists in two forms – that of the environmental fraction within Yabloko and that of the public association, which “allows to retain those members who did not feel comfortable about joining Yabloko.”
allowed to gather enough votes to pass the entrance barrier.\footnote{Tsepilova (11.02.2008).} Although Green Russia and Yabloko have been developing joint projects and participating together in recent environmental protest campaigns,\footnote{The most notable ones include the post-2007 anti-nuclear mobilization, the defense of Lake Baikal against the laying of the East Siberia – Pacific Ocean oil pipeline (2005-2006), and the fight against the attack on the protected territories of North Caucasus associated with the preparations for the 2014 winter Olympics in Sochi. See Tsepilova (2008).} they function more as a social movement than as a political party. The deliberate policy of the presidential administration has blocked their access to the electoral sphere not only by raising the parliament entry barriers and the party registration requirements, but also by essentially cutting off the political opposition’s access to the national mass media (especially the television and the major newspapers) and to both public and private campaign financing. Private business became increasingly reluctant to finance political opposition after the arrest of Khodorkovsky, who made contributions to practically all opposition parties in the wake of the 2003 parliamentary elections. As the independent journalistic investigation conducted by Natalia Morar’ showed, during the 2007 parliamentary campaign all the political parties were obliged by the Kremlin to keep their campaign finances in accounts that were overseen and managed by Vneshekonombank – the bank that manages Russian foreign debt and services the presidential administration.\footnote{See Morar’ (2007). The author paid for her audacity: in December 2007, she was denied entry to Russia by the FSB under the pretext that her activities constituted a threat to state security. Morar’s story has been followed by New Times – the journal where she worked as a correspondent between 2002 and 2007. See http://www.newtimes.ru.} Under these conditions, Yabloko’s and Green Russia’s fight to preserve their political niche has grown increasingly difficult.
4.5.1.2 Partido Verde Ecologista de México: Political Opportunism at its Best

While in Russia the difficulties of green party building have so far been related primarily to the degeneration of formal political institutions and to the inability of distinct environmental streams to agree on a single political platform, in Mexico the idea of the green party has become discredited because of its founders’ strong ties with the PRI and highly opportunistic political behavior. This party was founded in 1986 by Jorge González Torres, a politician who was also the founder of National Ecologista Alliance and first became active as the leader of a neighborhood association in Coyoacán, Mexico City.\(^{162}\) González Torres had personal links to important PRI officials, and both the AEN and the PVM\(^ {163}\) have received state funding and support as they were getting off the ground. The party began its federal-level career by joining the National Democratic Front and supporting its leader, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, in the 1988 presidential elections. In 1991, it participated in the legislative elections on its own, under the name of Partido Ecologista de México. In 1993, it reregistered under its current name, Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM). In the 2000 presidential elections, it has contributed to the victory of Vicente Fox by forming an alliance with PAN. Finally, in 2003, it completed the circle and made an electoral alliance with the PRI, which it has maintained ever since.

In contrast to the Russian situation, where many reform environmental activists and conservationists have either joined Green Russia or seriously considered doing so in

\(^{162}\) The official version of the party’s origins can be found at its website:

\(^{163}\) Partido Verde Mexicano (PVM) was the first version of the party’s name.
2005, most Mexican environmentalists had stayed aloof from PVEM from the very beginning. Its ties with the PRI must have seemed excessively close even for the state-oriented wing of PGE, which chose its allies among the more “progressive” elements within the ruling party. PVEM has further discredited itself in the eyes of the environmental activists by making an alliance with PAN – the party that has been built around the needs of private business. According to Miguel Valencia, its overall effect has been to completely discredit the words “green” and “ecologista.”¹⁶⁴ A sizeable fraction of Russian environmental activists (with most social environmentalists among them) has made similar statements about the impact of Yablokov’s party building efforts. While PVEM has been much more opportunist and unprincipled in its approach than Green Russia, the latter has so far not been able to operate as a green (rather than environmental) party, even though it has been accepted into the Federation of European Greens. It seems hardly accidental that neither Russia nor Mexico have so far been able to produce a political force that could combine environmental and social-democratic agendas. I would argue that the main reason for it is the absence of a political force analogous to the New Left that has traditionally constituted the base for green parties in Europe.¹⁶⁵

4.5.2 Engaging Private Business and the New “Middle” Class: WWF-Russia

The Russian office of WWF was created in 1994, during the golden time for the establishment of environmental NGOs. The majority of its original staff members came

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¹⁶⁵ See Kitschelt (1988).
from the Biology and Geography departments of Moscow State University; its leaders were DOP veterans. As Igor Chestin, WWF’s current director, explained ten years later, in its early years, when the funding from the international headquarters was plentiful, the organization focused on establishing and developing conservationist projects – protection of rare species and valuable ecosystems. The need to change orientation and to find a way to turn “a country office of an international NGO” into “part of Russian civil society” arose in the year 2000, when “it became clear that the federal powers were losing interest in nature protection.” The first major occasion when WWF staff members had to turn towards the people was the signature-gathering campaign for the 2000 environmental referendum. For them it was “a very unusual kind of activity, a big change from classic [conservationist] fieldwork – to go into the streets … and persuade the population that [the nuclear waste imports and the elimination of federal environmental agencies] were truly important problems.”

In 2000, the WWF leadership understood that the state was shedding its environmental control obligations and that they needed “social support” in order to get their work done. As Yevgeniy Schwarz, WFF’s campaign director, explained in 2002, “the authorities begin to take interest in an NGO’s opinion when that NGO begins to work with the population in earnest and at a large scale and thereby receives the right to speak in its name.” It is evident from this explanation that the main goal remains to be

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167 EcoLogos (2002).
heard by the state.\textsuperscript{168} Since this can no longer be achieved through working with environmental officials, the conservationist NGOs had to change their approach. WWF leaders became convinced that “Putin’s government had no political functions, [but] was a team of economists that were hired to earn money for the federal budget.” Meanwhile, “all the political functions [were] concentrated within the presidential administration,” which as the activists rightly sensed, was not going “to share their power with anyone.” Therefore, they decided to use the language of economics, seeing economic interests to be the main base of state power.

Although WWF claimed that their goal was now to make WWF’s work “intelligible for the majority of the population,” its post-2000 efforts have been focused on cultivating an alliance with private business and expanding the numbers of due-paying supporters. The relevant portion of “the population” is what WWF calls “the middle class” – “people with enough education and income to care about their environmental footprint.” As far as business is concerned, WWF sees as its major achievement that it “made the private companies understand that environmentalists defended them, that fulfilling [their] demands would make them more competitive in Western markets. We are fighting for transparency and an even playing field for all. Private companies can trust us, but they cannot trust the government officials.”\textsuperscript{169} Thus, “working with the population” is not an end in itself, but a means to achieve two goals: to make business

\textsuperscript{168} In 2002, Chestin remarked that “different branches of power have different interests: the government wants money in the budget, the [Duma] deputies – money in their pockets, the [presidential administration] – international recognition and power in their pockets. The conservationist movement must exploit this heterogeneity of interests that exists at the federal level.” EcoLogos (2002).

and state pay attention to the conservationist NGOs; and to “raise an ecologically conscious consumer” and thus decrease the pressure on the environment. In this scheme, “the people” are relevant as consumers, not as citizens: they can affect the environment through their economic, not political actions.\textsuperscript{170}

WWF wants “the right to speak in people’s name,” but, unlike the aggregation of interests from below through a social movement or a socially-rooted political party, this kind of “representation” assumes that “the people” need to be converted to the NGO’s cause. WWF does not seem to believe in non-institutional sources of power: citizens, grassroots associations, social movements, and political parties are absent from its picture of society, in which it sees “five main sectors – government bureaucrats, NGOs, researchers and educators, mass media and business.”\textsuperscript{171} The main problem with the “economic representation” approach, which assumes that the strength of WWF’s social base can be expressed through the number of its due-paying supporters, is that the “middle class” that WWF appeals to is an extremely narrow portion of the Russian population.\textsuperscript{172} As Schwarz acknowledges, “we are supported by 12\% of the population who have sufficient levels of income and education to care about the environment.”\textsuperscript{173}

While WWF has made significant advances in pushing export-oriented Russian businesses towards greater levels of environmental responsibility, the majority of other

\textsuperscript{170} Chestin in EcoLogos (2002). He gives the following explanation for how this mechanism of economic representation works: “Our supporters vote with their money and thereby confirm that what we do matters to them. This changes our stance vis-à-vis state and business representatives, who see that WWF is not just a handful of its staff members, but a network of supporters – individuals and corporations, who give us the right to represent public (social) interests in the sphere of environmental protection.”

\textsuperscript{171} Glazovsky, quoted in Katys, 07.12.2004.

\textsuperscript{172} See footnote 141 to this chapter for the income inequality data.

\textsuperscript{173} EcoLogos (2002).
environmental NGO leaders find that it has gone “too far over to the other side” by putting so much effort into translating the conservationist causes into the language of economics. In part, such extreme opinions on both sides have to do with the fact that Russian environmental activists are still learning to deal with private business: they discovered that it could be an important ally much later than their Mexican colleagues. While the first interactions between Mexican environmentalists and business date back to the 1950s, the nature of the Soviet economy made such an encounter impossible in Russia until the mid-1990s. The “turn towards business” that the major conservationist and reform environmentalist NGOs have been making in Russia since 2001-2002 is such a prominent feature in the evolution of Russian environmental activism precisely because relations with business were an altogether new field for the activists to master.

4.5.3 Moving Closer to the Grassroots: Examples of Organizational Evolution Towards Social Environmentalism

In Russia, the evolution of reform environmentalists towards social environmentalism was contingent on three factors: the closing of the state and of the political sphere since the late 1990s, the resource crisis that began more or less at the same time, and the initiation of the new social mobilization cycle in 2004. In Russia, this evolution has so far been more pronounced than in Mexico, because in Mexico the state structures and the political sphere have remained more open to activists due to much higher levels of political democratization; and, since 1982, the social mobilization levels have remained higher and varied much less drastically than in Russia.
The ambiguous reaction of reform environmentalists towards this gradual closing of the state is well illustrated by the experience of Askhat Kayumov, a DOP activist from Nizhniy Novgorod. In 1989, he created the Dront (Dodo) Center – an umbrella structure that brought together practically all environmental activists of note in the region.\textsuperscript{174} In 1993, Boris Nemtsov – the region’s progressive governor and one of the most notable national-level democratic politicians, put him in charge of organizing the main regional state environmental agency, the department of nature protection and natural resource use. Kayumov became the first head of this agency and for the next five years continued his environmental work both as an activist and as a state official.\textsuperscript{175} After he left the Department in 1998, he preserved professional and personal connections with state officials in practically all agencies that were relevant to environmental decision-making. In a 2006 interview, he noted that the gradual closing of the state environmental agencies to the influence of environmental activists and their loss of competence and interest in environmental protection had been happening since the late 1990s. The closing of Goskomekologii and Goskomlesa in 2000 by Putin was the first serious warning that the federal state was shedding its environmental obligations. This change made Kayumov think about the need to make alliances with other types of social activists: “We are dealing … with a conscious policy that leads to an authoritarian regime. [From now on,]

\textsuperscript{174} The Center currently includes about 20 “structural subdivisions” – each is a specialized NGO with its own projects and agenda and does its own fundraising. The Center provides them all with accounting and bookkeeping services, office space, equipment, information databases, and other resources. This “umbrella” structure allows to minimize organization maintenance costs for each of the participants. See Kayumov (2003).
\textsuperscript{175} Kayumov’s brief biography can be found at Dodo Center’s website: \url{http://www.dront.ru/ludi/ashat.html}.  

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our allies are not state [environmental] officials, but the general population. Thus, we have to unite our efforts with those of the soldiers’ mothers movement, human rights, and other similar organizations, lest [the central state] strangulates us all one by one. We have to go to the people and bring them information.”

Kayumov did attempt such an alliance at the regional level, when in 2001 he became the co-founder of the Nizhniy Novgorod Human Rights Agency. The qualitative change at the regional level occurred in 2005, when Nizhniy Novgorod received a new governor, Valeriy Shantsev who was appointed from Moscow by the president.

While the majority of Dront’s active divisions are conservationist in their missions and reform-environmentalist in their political strategies, two new divisions that appeared in the late 1990s have been moving closer to the social-environmentalist mode of work. Environmental Expertise Agency has been working with the urban grassroots groups and facilitating their participation in the evaluation of urban construction projects through the mechanisms of public hearings mandated by the 2000 EIA provisions. In addition, Dront’s only lawyer, Olga Chebotareva, gives legal consultations to the public on issues related to environmental law and to the defense of human rights. As the secretary of the Nizhniy Novgorod Human Rights Agency, she also maintains links with regional and national human rights NGOs.

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176 Quoted in Yanitsky (2002: 397).
177 Chebotareva, 01.09.2006.
178 Kayumov, 01.09.2006.
179 Krasnov, 04.09.2006.
180 Chebotareva, 01.09.2006.
Yanitsky (2007) identifies a new NGO action strategy – organization of public hearings and social environmental expert assessments. He calls this “NGO business” and sees it as a reaction to the resource crisis, a means of self-financing by providing environmental services for the population, state, and private companies. I think that this phenomenon has important consequences for SE. First, there seems to be a very clear division between NGOs that consult residents and those that consult developers – individual organizations tend to choose their sides consistently: those who work with the residents do not work for the developers and vice versa.\footnote{Since the EIA regulation mandates that public hearings be organized by local government structures, these NGOs formally act as subcontractors of the municipal councils and in theory get paid by them. However, well-reputed NGOs usually do not consider themselves to be beholden to the municipal authorities, if those support the developers: their focus on due process during the organization of hearings effectively tilts the balance toward the residents. According to Ekom staff members, the municipal councils often delay payments for the organization of public hearings of even do not pay for them at all.} Those who focus on the residents (Environmental Expertise Agency within Dront Center in Nizhniy Novgorod, Ekom Center in Saint Petersburg) perform a very important role: they make the most out of the most effective legal tools for ensuring citizen participation in environmental decision-making – the Law on environmental expert assessment and the EIA regulation. Teaching the residents how to use these tools effectively forms part of the struggle to uphold the rule of law and at the same time forges a link between professional environmental NGOs and first-time grassroots activists.

The growing ineffectiveness of environmental laws is common to both countries, but has taken different forms and has gone farther in Russia than in Mexico. The common activist reaction to this process has been that of framing resistance more around the issues of citizen rights and civic freedoms than around purely environmental violations. When it
becomes impossible to challenge an undesirable project on purely environmental grounds, activists shift their focus to violations of due process – citizen rights to be informed about the projects and to participate in the decision-making stipulated by environmental and non-environmental laws that are still working somewhat better. As Fedorov points out, the environmental activists are forcing the state “to observe its own laws” and fundamental constitutional guarantees.\textsuperscript{182} This effort is focused on the laws that guarantee public participation in decision-making that affects land-use change and development projects.

\textbf{4.5.4 Greenpeace in Russia and in Mexico: a Hybrid Strategy}

Greenpeace occupies a unique position within Russian and Mexican environmental activist communities, because it combines the characteristics of a classical environmental NGO with elements of social environmentalism. Although Greenpeace has a strong conservationist agenda based on global priorities, it does not focus exclusively on protection of rare animals and natural territories: the social component of its work in Russia and in Mexico has grown steadily more important over the past two decades.

In both countries, many people consider Greenpeace to be a radical environmental organization because of its targeted use of direct action and protests to attract media attention. Yet, Greenpeace-style direct action is very different from that of the social-environmental protest campaigns, where the majority of the protesters are residents faced with a threat to their immediate environment. Greenpeace staff members stage protest actions based on their professional sense of what is urgent and necessary for the cause of

\textsuperscript{182} Fedorov, 09.07.2007.
environmental protection. Unlike the protest camps organized by radical ecologists, which provide a format for sustained interactions between professional and grassroots activists and for many different kinds of collective action forms involving the general population, the actions organized by Greenpeace are usually too short to serve this purpose and involve predominantly professional activists. As Fomichev (1997) points out, Greenpeace’s radicalism is tactical rather than strategic, because it exerts its main influence through institutional channels – media, lobbying, consulting, information gathering and analysis. Ivan Blokov, the campaigns director of Greenpeace-Russia, is fully aware of this inherent ambiguity between Greenpeace’s radical past and its much more institutionalized present: “Greenpeace has a certain romantic aura, which we neither strive to cultivate, nor deliberately try to get rid of. It gives us certain advantages, but our work is mostly bureaucratic: results are mostly achieved through paperwork, not through romantic actions on a [protest] boat.”\(^{183}\)

Both national offices began to move “closer to the general population” about a decade ago. This movement has taken two main forms: the creation of a wide network of due-paying supporters and the development of sustained interactions with grassroots organizations. The first move was greatly encouraged by Greenpeace International that has a general strategy of gradually making its country offices financially self-sustaining. In the first years after a new office is created, the funding for its operations comes from Greenpeace International that redistributes the excess money donated by its supporters in

\(^{183}\) Blokov, 14.09.2006.
rich countries to the offices that have not yet developed their own supporter network.\textsuperscript{184}

No other environmental NGO in either Russia or Mexico currently has more due-paying members than Greenpeace: in 2006, it had over 18,000 supporters in Russia and 22,000 in Mexico.\textsuperscript{185}

As to the links with grassroots organizations, Greenpeace-Russia leans in the direction of the urban groups, while Greenpeace-Mexico works mostly with peasant and indigenous associations. This is not surprising, given the current availability and strength of grassroots bases for social environmentalism in each country. Greenpeace-Mexico has a more explicit emphasis on poverty and social justice in its mission. As its press department director points out, Mexico’s environmental problems “are linked to [issues of] inequality, quality of life, and poverty.”\textsuperscript{186} Its work with peasant organizations has two major aspects: the campaign against \textit{genetically modified corn} and the protection of \textit{forests}, 80\% of which are located on communal lands.

By contrast, Greenpeace-Russia is just about the only one among the offices of international environmental NGOs that pays significant attention to city-specific problems of Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Greenpeace Mexico does not seem to dedicate quite as much time to Mexico City and other large urban centers. The major contribution made by Greenpeace-Russia to urban environmentalism are the campaign against the construction of garbage incinerators in Moscow and the waste separation projects in Saint Petersburg. During both of these campaigns, Greenpeace staff members

\textsuperscript{184} Petrov, 14.09.2006.
\textsuperscript{186} Navarro González, 05.12.2006.
engage with grassroots urban associations and conduct themselves as professional social environmentalists.

The Saint Petersburg office of Greenpeace-Russia is a rather unique phenomenon, because Greenpeace usually does not open regional offices. It appeared in 2001, because there was a group of unusually committed Greenpeace supporters, who “were not content to receive materials by mail and wanted to do things themselves.” For three years prior to 2001, this group pressured the Moscow office to recognize them not just as “supporters,” but as an organization that had its own work agenda and human resources to push it through. This group wanted to work on issues specifically related to St Petersburg, but, rather than to remain an independent grassroots group, they wanted to be incorporated into Greenpeace – the most widely known environmental NGO in Russia. Their reasons for doing so seemed to be two-fold: they liked Greenpeace’s philosophy and general approach and knew that becoming an official part of Greenpeace would open access to significantly greater resources. The three core members of the original group are now employed full-time. In Russia, the creation of the SPb “local” office shows that GP national chapters can be flexible and autonomous enough to incorporate “bottom-up” initiatives, which bring it closer to grassroots. Greenpeace SPb is Ekom’s main partner in their work with urban land-use groups.

Depending on the availability of broad social movements, the generic campaigns handed down to country offices by Greenpeace International can acquire very unique, country-specific shapes and meanings. The GMO campaign in Mexico and in Russia is

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187 Timofeev, 10.08.2006.
the case in point. The Mexican office of Greenpeace placed its GMO campaign within a broader context of peasant and anti-globalist reaction to NAFTA. In Russia, the GMO campaign is framed as a classic Western appeal to the middle-class consumer and has no broad social grounding in society.

The Russian office of Greenpeace started its GMO campaign around 2002. Its main goal was to inform the general population about a completely new and unknown risk of GMOs in food. Polina Malysheva, the director of GP-Russia press department, explains that “Greenpeace popularizes the data that the state [health and consumer safety] agencies hide from the general public. They say: ‘Why should the general public worry about it? They do not understand genetics!’ What we argue is that genetics has already come to everyone’s dinner table and that each mother has the right to know what she gives her child to eat.” Over the past five years, Greenpeace-Russia has solicited food samples from major companies, analyzed them in its own laboratory for GMO content and published the results as color-coded lists of companies (green for GMO-free, yellow for those who refused to supply samples, and red for those that use GMOs in their products). A special effort has been made to obtain a comprehensive picture of the baby food market and to inform young mothers.

Given the general tendency of the Russian state to keep environmental information secret, Greenpeace GMO campaign makes a very important contribution to the general struggle for improving citizen access to information: it pushes people not to accept blindly what they are being offered as consumers. However, the social reach of

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Greenpeace is limited: face-to-face information campaigns only take place in Moscow where the country office is located; residents of other cities are informed through the Internet site. The target audience is the very small section of the Russian population (around 10%) that has a lifestyle similar to that of the Western middle classes – those who own computers and have Internet access, buy food in supermarket chains and major shopping malls, and generally have the financial freedom to discriminate between “healthy” and “unhealthy” food products. More than half of the Russian population that lives below or at the poverty line is unlikely to see GMOs as their major worry.

Greenpeace-Mexico initiated its GMO campaign in 1998 in reaction to the growing GMO corn imports into Mexico from United States under the NAFTA agreement and to the high-level political and academic discussions about the possibility of planting GMO corn in Mexico. After a series of forums, the Mexican government declared a moratorium on GMO corn plantings in 2002. The calls for a government moratorium were prompted by the discovery of GMO-contaminated corn plantings in Sierra Norte de Oaxaca in June 2000 by two UC-Berkeley researchers. In 2002, Greenpeace-Mexico joined the indigenous organizations from Oaxaca in presenting a demand to the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (NAFTA’s environmental dispute resolution body) to study the environmental impact of this contamination. The process of gathering information for this environmental impact statement has permitted

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189 Ampugnani, 05.12.2006.
the indigenous organizations to formulate their stance on the issue and to emphasize the social and cultural importance of corn in Mexico.\textsuperscript{190}

Greenpeace is one of the many professional activist groups that are currently involved in the corn-related mobilization in Mexico. In the recent years, its GMO campaign has merged with the much broader movement against the liberalization of corn and bean markets under NAFTA. This movement came together in 2007 under the name \textit{Sin maíz no hay país} (There is no country without corn). Since then, Greenpeace has been adding anti-globalist rhetoric to its biological arguments about the risks of GMOs. It has joined the consumer-oriented campaign that calls for “Mexican corn only.” The main argument of this campaign is that corn imported from the US comes at a higher price and brings with it the GMO-associated risks. Greenpeace has made public denunciations against three largest Mexican flour distributors who promised not to use GMO corn, but have been doing it nonetheless. It argues that “Mexican consumers suffer from high corn prices” that are the result of “speculative behavior by transnational companies and intermediaries.”\textsuperscript{191}

\subsection*{4.6 Conclusions}

As I studied social and environmental activism in Russia and in Mexico during the transition period, I became aware that this was the time, when the field of activism and social movements was being reshaped according to a certain set of standard expectations. These expectations are based on the evolution of social and environmental

\textsuperscript{190} Stabinsky and Covantes, June 2004.
\textsuperscript{191} Greenpeace-Mexico, February 2007.
activism in the West, in the First World, and they affect all actors in Russia and in Mexico – researchers, state officials, politicians, businessmen – all those who deal with the activists as well as the activists themselves. The activists are affected by them not only because they study ideologies and strategies of their Western colleagues and adapt them to their needs, but also because many of them apply for foreign funding and have to frame and describe their activism in ways that would be understandable to donors and likely to get their projects approved. In the particular case of social environmentalism, Mexican and Russian activists began with Western ideas (social ecology and other kinds of radical environmentalism) and proceeded to reinterpret them and to adapt them to their social contexts. After the transition was over, environmental activists continued to question their ideologies and strategies in the light of the first-world experiences: they feel themselves and their circumstances to be different, but nevertheless keep referring to these standards.

Attitudes towards grassroots activism form part of this standard set of expectations. In this and the subsequent chapters, my analysis of how grassroots activism is seen by researchers, state officials, and, most importantly, professional environmental activists became a matter of navigating between two extreme views. One is that any kind of activism that arises from below and challenges the authoritarian structures and attitudes is by definition a pro-democratic force. The other is that ordinary people do not know anything about democracy, do not understand what it is, do not care about it, and do not value it. What they care about is the satisfaction of their immediate needs and,

192 Henderson (2002) makes a very insightful argument about the ways in which this catering to the donors’ needs affects social activists in Russia.
since their activism is not based on the kinds of general, broad solidarities that a pro-democratic movement requires, it contributes nothing to democratization. The first assumption is very commonly found in scholarly work that deals with grassroots activism and social movements in Mexico.\textsuperscript{193} The second one is widespread among Russian intellectuals, politicians, NGO leaders who call themselves liberals. In this work, I have tried to steer some kind of middle course between these two extremes and I mean to continue doing so in the future.

As a researcher from Russia who feels the need to say something about the profound gap that exists between its intellectual elites and its people, I too turned to Mexico as a source of hope, when I realized what tremendous diversity and capacity for innovation existed there at the grassroots level. I have to warn myself continually against becoming too romantic about it, to push myself to see the full complexity of the mixture that includes clientelism, cooptation by the state and the political parties, as well as inherently non-democratic characteristics of traditional and indigenous institutions of local self-government and autonomous organization. However, I am also bearing in mind that the Soviet experience has made Russian intellectuals practically immune to any kind of collectivism, any kind of initiatives coming “from below.” Soviet collectivism was compulsory, ineffective, and disingenuous, and so the educated elites and the people in general took it to mean that collective action was not worth it. It is notable that over the course of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century a capitalist country like Mexico produced a much greater crop of intellectuals that were truly concerned about the have-nots and ready to work with

\textsuperscript{193} See, for example, Fox (1994), Harvey (1998).
them than the society that was built on the ideas of equality, solidarity, and collectivism.\textsuperscript{194}

While so much attention has been given to the creation of NGOs as a way “to build civil society and to promote democratization” in Russia and in Mexico, I found that environmental NGOs can be an obstacle to social democratization, while the grassroots associations, often despised for their parochialism and narrow solidarities, can promote it. Neither of these two mechanisms works uniformly and automatically: environmental NGOs can evolve in ways that link them with social movements and become more democratically oriented; grassroots initiatives are available for many different types of political mobilization – their demands can be framed in very different ways, depending on the nature of their allies among the educated elites, the political parties, and the government officials. This is why it is important neither to dismiss grassroots environmentalism as useless for the democratic cause nor to think that it will automatically fall into the democratic camp, if left to its own devices. It is to the analysis of the different forms that grassroots environmentalism can take that I turn in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{194} I thank Tatiana Vorozheikina for this insight.
Chapter 5: Grassroots Mobilization Mechanisms and Visions of the State: Russia and Mexico Compared

This chapter explains how the macro-level differences are translated into distinct mechanisms through which grassroots environmental activists emerge in Russia and in Mexico. In both countries, their emergence involves individual and collective refusal to accept the traditional authoritarian patterns of power relations. In Russia, the state domination over the population and the subordination of individual and group interests to those of the state have been traditionally much more extreme than in Mexico, where the psychological distance between the authoritarian state and its subjects has been much greater, especially in rural and indigenous zones. This makes the barriers for first-time mobilization much higher in Russia than in Mexico. On the one hand, the absence of strong autonomous organizational bases in present-day Russia contrasts with two kinds of associational traditions in Mexico – the communal/indigenous traditions of local self-government and the post-1968 evolution of grassroots associations with significant levels of autonomy vis-à-vis the state. On the other hand, the electoral clientelism that was one of the main foundations of social and political stability under the PRI regime¹ has provided and continues to provide an additional impetus for self-organization in Mexico that has no analogue in post-Soviet Russia, where the state has not used grassroots

¹ Magaloni (2006) gives a detailed theoretical and empirical explanation of how electoral clientelism works.
associations for either clientelistic or electoral purposes and the forces of political opposition have only recently began to engage them.

The capacity for grassroots mobilization and the forms that it takes are closely related to the traditional attitudes towards the state, which are the product of the dominant pattern of state-society relations. Under the post-revolutionary regimes, both the Russians and the Mexicans saw the state as the main provider of goods and services to its people. In both countries, significant portions of the population still felt that they were “entitled” to receive much of what they needed from the state even as the state embarked on neoliberal economic reforms and began to reduce its social obligations. Yet, in Russia this paternalistic vision of the state is combined with the atrophy of self-organizational capacity, while in Mexico the people have traditionally felt that they could make better use of the state if they were organized. Russians and Mexicans whose stories are analyzed in this chapter view the state differently, because the nature of the state that they face is different – authoritarian power relations are much more pervasive in Russia than in Mexico – and because the Mexicans feel more powerful vis-à-vis the state.

The major reason for these differences is the distinct nature of the social contract that each revolutionary regime was based on. In Mexico, the PRI regime’s foundational legitimacy and its right to demand recognition from the population were based on the extensive set of social obligations that the state assumed towards its citizens and that

2 Russian state officials tend to see the citizens as “population,” an undifferentiated and unstructured mass incapable of organizing itself and formulating demands based on group interests: “What is population? 140 million people. Who are its representatives? Where do I get the list of names of those with whom am I supposed to interact? Must I speak with every granny?” Federal government official quoted in Clément (2006a).
were enshrined in the Constitution. These obligations were fulfilled both through the corporatist structures of the central state and through the local and regional patron-client networks that the central state did not pretend to fully control. In Soviet Russia, while the people also expected the state to provide them with a certain “social minimum” – employment, housing, education, health care, etc. – the social contract was much more asymmetric than in Mexico. In return for taking care of their basic necessities, the Soviet state made the citizens completely renounce their right to autonomous collective action. It demanded complete identification with its goals and (especially before 1956) constant sacrifices in their name. In Mexico, the state tolerated grassroots organization around socio-economic demands – reivindicaciones – and strove to control it through corporatist and clientelist mechanisms. It only grew repressive when it felt that the grassroots mobilization was beginning to spill into the political and the electoral spheres.\(^3\) By contrast, the Soviet system recognized virtually no legitimate spheres for autonomous collective action\(^4\) and suppressed all attempts at self-organization at the grassroots. While the late Soviet system (1970s-1980s) kept functioning largely thanks to elaborate clientelist networks,\(^5\) this clientelism was different from the Mexican variant in that Soviet citizens could not collectively bargain with the state actors: the clientelist networks involved atomized individuals rather than groups.\(^6\)

The main purpose of this chapter is to show how grassroots mobilization in response to social-environmental threats takes place within two drastically different

\(^4\) With the notable exception of student environmental movement (DOP) described in Section 3.4.2.1.
\(^5\) See Sections 3.4.1 and 4.3.1.
\(^6\) See Naishul (1991) and Afanasiev (1997)
social contexts. The Russian cases come from company towns and large industrial centers, while the Mexican story takes place in an indigenous town located in a productive agricultural zone. Mexican grassroots activists described in this chapter rely on the tradition of autonomous self-organizing that predates the revolutionary state. Russian activists emerge from an environment where there is no collective experience of self-organization of any kind. Their resistance against social and political authoritarianism has different points of reference: Mexicans depart from clientelistic premises; Russians – from the relations of domination and subordination. While clientelism is widely seen in Mexico as a significant impediment to social democratization, the Russian experience shows that it is by far not the worst place to start if one wants to begin overcoming authoritarian power relations. Yet, even in the absence of clientelist experience and of social networks that facilitate mobilization, there is a mechanism that allows select individuals in Russia to break away from the vicious circle of domination and subordination. I use personal histories of two first-time grassroots activists from Perm region to show how they have managed to make the transition from an individual rebellion against the state to collective action in the name of social-environmental goals. I then contrast these experiences with those of the activists that operate from the solid base of communal self-government in Xoxocotla, Morelos.

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7 See, for example, Adler Hellman (1994), Olvera (2003), Gómez-Tagle (2007).
5.1 Pollution Acceptance Syndrome: Why is it so Difficult to Rise up in Russia?

The main barrier to first-time social-environmental mobilization in Russia is the *pollution acceptance syndrome*. The city of Dzerzhinsk in the Nizhniy Novgorod region of Russia provides a perfect illustration of this ensemble of psychological and socio-economic mechanisms that make the majority of people living in highly polluted areas of Russia extremely unwilling to engage in any kind of collective action in the name of social justice and against environmental degradation. This syndrome provides a very complete illustration of how everyday lives of Russian people are affected by their dependence on the state and by the ubiquitous social dyad of domination and subordination. In particular, it produces the lack of grassroots involvement that poses a very difficult dilemma for professional activists who operate in such places. Dmitriy Levashov, a key environmental activist from Dzerzhinsk, has spent more than ten years trying to mobilize Dzerzhinsk residents around the issue of past and present toxic pollution from chemical industry. He feels extremely frustrated by the lack of response, which he can explain, but so far cannot successfully overcome. The roots of Dzerzhinsk’s current environmental crisis and of its residents’ and authorities’ inability and unwillingness to deal with it go deep into its Soviet past.

Dzerzhinsk acquired its present shape in the 1930s-40s as “the capital of Soviet chemistry” and continues to be a mono-industrial city: its life revolves around its 40 chemical enterprises. Of its 260 thousand inhabitants, 110 thousand have worked or are still working at the seven largest chemical plants. The rest, apart from children and
elderly “chemical veterans” provides services and transportation for the “chemists.” The residents still feel a strong corporate solidarity with “their” plants and the chemical industry as a whole. This solidarity was first forged during the Second World War, when production of armaments and chemical weapons was seen as the sacred task and the matter of national survival. In his memoirs, Kotliar (2000) describes an entire generation of workers, who were sent to Dzerzhinsk to work by the central state and were required to “sacrifice themselves” much in the same way as if they were soldiers at the front. The aura of secrecy that was created around all matters related to military production was also extended to its human costs: occupational hazard statistics were kept to a minimum, accidents were hushed. It was a routine occurrence for workers to spend equal times at work and in hospital, receiving treatments for all kinds of toxic exposures. The expected standard of behavior was that, whatever happened at the plant, you were still expected to give your best effort to the state (which was at once the source of employment, social and medical services) and keep quiet about what you knew outside of the circle of family, friends, and colleagues.

This syndrome is by no means unique to Dzerzhinsk – it operates in any Russian industrial city or town. As an activist from Perm region points out, “one only [turns to activism] when one sees direct personal danger, it has to be a very personal threat.” But in order to perceive that threat clearly, to become conscious of it, the future activist needs two things: a minimum of information about the danger and both material and

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9 Rozhina, 29.08.2006.
psychological independence from its source. “Take the Kirov factory workers [in Perm]: they are completely tied [to the pollution source], they have been completely brainwashed.”

To at least three generations of workers the factory gave much more than money: their entire lives, from cradle to grave were spent within its “social infrastructure” – kindergartens, hospitals, clinics, and sanatoriums, leisure clubs, recreational facilities, pensions and in-kind benefits were all provided through the Kirov factory to “its people.” Under these conditions, the psychological attachment, the sense of self-identification with one’s place of work is unusually strong, and to challenge one’s employer for environmental violations comes to be seen as the betrayal of one’s caregiver.

This dual attitude of “not biting the hand that feeds you” and condemning anyone who publically discloses negative information about the industry dominates to this day both among the residents and among the city officials. In 1996, environmental activists from Dzerzhinsk, Nizhniy Novgorod and Moscow attempted to lobby the federal and regional authorities for the city to be declared an environmental disaster zone. This status would have given Dzerzhinsk access to federal funds that could then be used to address the public health crisis and to begin remediation of industrial wastelands that surround the city. The campaign failed, because Dzerzhinsk authorities saw it as an attempt to “spoil the city’s image and scare away potential investors.”

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10 Rozhina, 29.08.2006.
11 Such a program has been implemented in Chapayevsk, which was declared an environmental disaster zone in the early 1990s. See Levashov (2002)
12 Levashov, 03.09.2006. He also point out that since those days “Greenpeace” became a swearword in Dzerzhinsk because of its active involvement in this campaign.
reaction followed Dzerzhinsk’s inclusion into the Guinness Book of Records as the world’s most polluted small city in 1997 and its ranking among “ten most polluted places on the planet” by the Blacksmith Institute in 2006. The city officials have consistently denied the true extent of Dzerzhinsk’s environmental problems and blame all inquiries in this direction on foreign-funded conspiracies that aim “to undermine the international competitiveness of Dzerzhinsk’s chemical enterprises.” This attitude is successfully passed on to the population through the mass media that are controlled by the same conglomerate of state and business interests and present the alarm calls made by environmental activists as “the work of US mercenaries.”

The psychological defense complex that makes an individual put the state’s and the employer’s interests above his personal ones, even if it causes him obvious harm, acts as a blinder. People who work at Dzerzhinsk chemical enterprises have enough knowledge and experience to realize what the risks are. But “these negative consequences might hit at some future time – you are not sure when and whether you and your children will be affected. So, until then, you live as usual.”13 When a journalist asked some people fishing in ponds near one of Dzerzhinsk’s toxic waste dump whether they were not afraid to eat the fish, he received the following reply: “What is there to be afraid of? We have already been poisoned anyhow – we have worked at a chemical factory for 15 years.”14

The average life expectancy in the Dzerzhinsk district is 47 years for women and 42 – for

13 Levashov, 03.09.2006.
These figures are comparable to those of the poorest and war-torn countries in Africa; they are way below Russian and Mexican national averages.\textsuperscript{16}

There are no forests left around Igumnovo, and for decades the residents have been using discarded graphite rods\textsuperscript{17} as fuel for cooking and heating stoves. This "innovation" was introduced by one of the town residents fifty years ago, as a temporary measure until the town would be connected to the gas line. It occurred to no one around Dzerzhinsk that the burning rods emitted dioxins and a host of other harmful substances. As the gas line failed to materialize, the temporary measure became a permanent institution. "During the Soviet times one could get [graphite] directly from the factory. Now they truck it to the waste dump, but some drivers sell it to residents for 1000 rubles a truckload – it is about six times cheaper than using coal or natural gas. The harmful gases emitted during graphite burning have no noticeable color or smell, and the residents attribute lung diseases ‘to bad life in general’. All village residents have worked in the chemical industry, each has some professional illness or disability."\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{15} Savos’kina, 30.11.2007.
\textsuperscript{16} In 2005, life expectancy in Mexico stood at 73 years for men and 78 for women. The Russian figures are 59 years for men and 72 for women; these figures have been stable since 2000 (World Bank, 2006). Aleksey Yablokov argues that environmental degradation and military-industrial pollution are among the main causes of such low life expectancy (Neizhmakov, 13.04.2009). Other factors include very high rates of workplace accidents (especially for men) and alcoholism. See Feshbach and Friendly (1992) and Vishnevskiy (1998). Environmental journalist Raisa Mamatova (30.08.2006) reports that in the Perm region, which has been one of the main military-industrial centers in Russia, about 40% of illnesses can be related to environmental causes; the global average for this measure, estimated by the World Health Organization is at 20% (ECO-HR No.2606, 23.09.2007; Civic Chamber Hearings).
\textsuperscript{17} Graphite rods are used as catalysts and electrode material in many chemical reactions. They eventually become saturated with toxic reaction byproducts that can contain lead, chloride, sulphur. Savos’kina, "Novaya Gazeta," 30.11.2007.
This fatalistic attitude towards environmental and occupational risks is also reinforced by the lack of other options: it is hard to move out of Dzerzhinsk (or of any other mono-industrial Russian city), because its dismal environmental reputation and sluggish economic situation greatly depress the housing prices. In the absence of a well-developed mortgage system, the proceeds from housing sale are the main resource for anyone who moves in Russia, and the residents of Dzerzhinsk are at a great disadvantage. What they could get for their houses is unlikely to allow them to move into a better place. In this situation, the most common choice is to stay put and not think about the consequences, since there is nothing that can be done about them.

Levashov links the residents’ lack of response to environmental risks directly to the overall patterns of submission to government authority: “People have simply gotten accustomed, during decades of Soviet life, to be treated as guinea pigs by all kinds of authorities.” Over the course of the Soviet history, the Soviet state had been continuously and very aggressively claiming this right to treat its subjects as disposable material for its experiments. Lev Fedorov, the head of the Union for Chemical Safety network, sees the same pattern in the region of Perm – another major center of military and industrial production. However, his analysis of Perm’s recent resistance against the federal program of missile destruction also indicates that there is a way out of this dead-end: “Under the Soviet regime, while it was a matter of fatherland security and hostile capitalist encirclement, the residents of Zakamsk tolerated [the emissions from missile testing]. Then it was all over, and they were told that the missiles they produced were no longer needed and had to be destroyed at the production site. Now that is what people did not
understand: first, the country built military defense systems at their health’s expense and now it wants to disarm, again at their expense? That is why the protests arose now.” The collapse of the Soviet state and the separation that appeared between the state as employer and the state as the main welfare agent, as well as the slow weathering of the Cold War ideology, have made it possible for some individuals to disengage themselves from the state in ways that are an indispensable first step towards autonomous grassroots mobilization and other aspects of social democratization.

5.2 Grassroots Mobilization in Perm: What it Takes to Challenge the State for the First Time

This section is dedicated to all the exceptional individuals who manage to find a way out of the pollution acceptance syndrome in Russia as they disengage themselves from the state that harms them and begin to challenge it publically. This process begins with the outrage that they feel in the face of blatant misinformation and violations of laws and due process by state and corporate forces acting in tandem. Before they can acquire capacity for self-organization, these people, who have been conditioned to obey the state, to identify with it, and to see its interests as their own, need to separate themselves from the state, to feel that their interests and those of the state are no longer aligned, that they no longer owe allegiance to the state authorities or state enterprises. Once this “personal rebellion” takes place, the new activists need to figure out how to transition from individual resistance to some form of collective action. They usually have no previous experience of litigation or protests, but their sense of indignation and urgency pushes them to search for more experienced allies. After many false steps, they find professional
activists that can advise and support them, and the social-environmentalist alliance begins to form.

First-time grassroots activists pass through a series of profound psychological changes. As they become aware of the magnitude of the impact or of the impending risk, they first try to engage the relevant state authorities, to get them to act – to inform the affected residents and to take measures to minimize the impact/risk. They quickly realize that the state control agencies are reluctant to fulfill their duties, because they are under pressure from executive authorities at various levels that have vested interests in the risky project. The indignation and rage that they feel, when they realize that the state officials whose duty it is to protect residents side with those that harm them, make it possible for them to disengage themselves from the state. This process of disengagement is very difficult and painful. Many of these activists are older people who have spent their entire working lives as employees of state enterprises. They were formed within a value system where the state was the source of all the damages, but also of all the benefits. In the post-Soviet context, as the state and the enterprises deliberately shed their social responsibilities, this psychological unity is broken: the perpetrators of environmental risks and damages are no longer the main providers of vital necessities. Thus, it becomes possible to break out of the vicious circles of state dependence and to make the indispensable first step to overcoming authoritarian power relations and to creating the kind of broad social bases for self-organization that Russia lacks in comparison to Mexico.

\[19\] Vorozheikina, 17.09.2009.
5.2.1 Svetlana Rozhina

Before she became an environmental activist, Svetlana Rozhina worked as a school teacher in Yugo-Kamsk.

In 2001, her fellow teachers told her about the district administration’s plans to turn an abandoned missile warehouse next to the nearby Taezhnyi settlement into a toxic waste dump for the entire Perm region. As an ecology teacher and a geographer by training, Rozhina had enough knowledge to understand the risks of locating such a “temporary storage facility” next to a river and found herself leading the effort to stop this project. This campaign was an invaluable learning experience for Rozhina not only because of its successful conclusion but also because it introduced Rozhina to the main obstacles that a grassroots activist typically confronts when opposing an environmentally risky project in which state authorities have a vested interest. It also brought her in contact with several individuals from the city of Perm that over the years have become the key allies of grassroots environmentalists: the journalists Roman Yushkov and Raisa Mamatova, and the researchers from Perm State University – Georgiy Voronov and Vladimir Sretensky. With the help of the PSU researchers, Rozhina’s informal group was able to use the Law on environmental expertise in order to achieve the cancellation of the project. The sympathetic journalists helped them to

20 Unless otherwise noted, all direct quotes in this section are from Rozhina’s personal interview that took place in Perm, on 29.08.2006.
21 This campaign also brought Rozhina in contact with Lev Fedorov, the head of the Union for Chemical Safety network. He came to Taezhnyi from Moscow on Rozhina’s invitation and gave the first negative evaluation of the project at a press conference. As Rozhina explains, at that point she “realized that we could not turn the situation around without the help of some key figure.”
22 For the first time in Perm region, Rozhina and her allies initiated the public environmental expert assessment (PEEA) process. The PEEA team produced a negative evaluation of the project, which was taken into account by the state environmental expert assessment (SEEA) commission that ordered the cancellation of the project. Although SEEA commissions are supposed to be made of independent experts,
break through the informational blockade in the media, which mostly took the side of the Perm district administration, the main promoter of the project. The latter used the media to discredit Rozhina and Yushkov, the most vocal critics of the project, and accused them of “selling out to foreigners” – a standard accusation leveled by state officials and business corporations against activists whose criticism becomes too bothersome. Rozhina lost her first lawsuit, trying to defend her reputation against these accusations in front of a judge who refused to hear the witnesses in her favor. She recalls this episode “[the district administration] must have put pressure on the judge – it was the first time I confronted such a thing.” For the first time in her life, Rozhina realized just how loaded the dice were against “a resident who wants to defend his rights and prevent environmental harm.”

The April 2002 diesel spill in Yugo-Kamsk became Rozhina’s fire trial, for this time the “environmental harm” hit her right at home. She was spurred into action first and foremost by the preoccupation for the health of her daughter, which was already poor. Four years later, she recalled her first reaction with a sense of amusement at her own innocence and naïveté about the functioning of the Russian state. In Taezhnyi, she had already confronted the fact that the local executive power – the district administration – supported an ill-designed project promoted by the military base, because both parties

their members often have links to the proponents of environmentally untenable projects and often uphold them in spite of clear legal violations. Evidently, this time the proponents of the project had no strong allies in Moscow, where the SEEA process took place. It is worth noting that although the environmental expert assessment process in this case has functioned exactly as it should according to the law, this is more of an exception than a rule. Nevertheless, based on this experience and on that of three subsequent and less successful campaigns, Rozhina concluded that “the Law on environmental expert assessment is the only one that works for the benefit of the population, if it is used early enough, at the project planning stages.”
stood to enrich themselves through it. Now she was in for a much more disheartening revelation: state environmental and public health agencies that were supposedly there to protect the residents against environmental disasters sided with the perpetrator and brazenly refused both to acknowledge the full impact of the accident and to fulfill their duties in dealing with its consequences. As she discovered the wall of silence and misinformation deliberately constructed by state authorities of all levels and hues, Rozhina was drawn further and further into action by the sense of surprise and shock:

“First, people from the plant management told us privately that there was an accident but, as always [asked us not to make this information public]. So I went to ask the town mayor about it. He confirmed that the accident did happen. I then asked: ‘Why are you not taking any measures? People are still drinking tap water – do you not know that this is dangerous?’ His reply was: ‘Don’t waste your breath on it; we will figure it out without you.’ It was very strange: the water gave a horrible stench, but they kept using it in kindergartens and schools [until mid-May]… I went around and pleaded with them not to poison the children. I also went to the district sanitary inspection, and they told me that there was no excess of oil products in the tap water according to their tests. That seemed very strange to me also, since we could all smell, see and feel the oil in the water.”

In her subsequent fight to establish the truth about the consequences of the spill, Rozhina lost not only her trust in the state authorities, but also fear and submissiveness that the Russian citizens are supposed to feel when coming into contact with the state. The climax of this process was Rozhina’s meeting with Alexander Sboev, the chief sanitary physician or Perm region. Rozhina came to challenge him on the incompleteness
of the water quality tests that his agency had conducted soon after the spill: “I asked him why they tested for such a limited range of oil products, given that this was not crude oil, but diesel fuel with all kinds of additives. He retorted that it was none of my business. I exploded: ‘How come?! You are letting my child drink this water, poisoning the entire town with it!’ I threw the paper with the test results to him and shouted: ‘This is a lie, a falsification!’ His reply was: ‘Are you insinuating that our experts work under outside pressure?’” Rozhina’s ability to confront a high state official in this manner was clearly the result of the despair that she felt as a mother who could not ensure safe drinking water for her child. This despair allowed her to make the psychological jump from knowing that “the state cheats on us all the time” but feeling that nothing can be done about it23 to personally and directly challenging a particular state official. Although Rozhina had no way of knowing it at the time, Sboev had no right to claim high moral ground: he was personally responsible for permitting the construction of the pipeline within the sanitary zone of the pond and had financial ties with Lukoil.24

One month after the accident, Lukoil declared through the media that all the spill damage had been remediated, although the residents saw no improvements in the quality of the water. Having no reason to trust Lukoil’s assurances, Rozhina put together a group to inspect the pond. This inspection proved to be the last drop, and Rozhina’s shock turned to burning rage: “when we saw what was going on there, I was in complete shock, in hysterics. I saw frogs bloated like balloons by the chemicals they ingested who sat with their mouths opened and shrieked, dying in front of our eyes. And I thought to myself:

23 This psychological complex is well described by Levada (2000).
'These bastards have the nerve to give this water to the children to drink and to tell us that all is well!’” Shortly afterwards, Rozhina and her group went to give the pictures from the pond and the results of water tests conducted by the PSU scientists to the city mayor. There they found the regional ombudsman who came to Yugo-Kamsk specifically to deal with the “social tensions resulting from the spill” and had already instructed the head of the city hospital to stop raising noise about negative health impacts. The ombudsman asked Rozhina what authority she had for interfering into the investigation of the spill and reminded her that she “was already shown her place” when she lost her lawsuit at Taezhnyi. This attack was meant to scare Rozhina back into submission, but it had just the opposite effect on her: she “went straight to the (Perm Regional) Human Rights Center,” filed a complaint against this “human rights defender,” and succeeded in stopping him from trying to intimidate the activists any further. She also sent the pond pictures and the test results to the Ministries of Natural Resources and of Emergency Situations – an action that prompted the investigation by a special federal commission in June 2002. What made Rozhina capable of such counterattack was the realization that she could not count on any state agency to defend her interests: with the help of her professional activist allies, she was ready and able to act independently in order to defend herself and advance her cause.

In spite of this dearly-won psychological disengagement from the state, Rozhina kept receiving painful reminders that she could not achieve one of her main goals – to obtain medical treatment for the affected children – while the public health agencies kept denying the gravity of the situation. In August, when Lukoil claimed to have completed
the remediation activities, the town kindergartens were reopened for the fall and a second epidemic of gastrointestinal illnesses among children immediately followed. Rozhina went to the State Sanitary inspection and requested that all children be examined. She was told that the regional Institute of Child Ecological Pathology already did an epidemiological study in June, after the first epidemic, and found no links to water quality. The head physician of the town hospital was under such pressure by that time that he ordered both kindergarten nurses to keep quiet about the epidemic. “When the parents brought sick children to the health clinic and asked for them to be tested, the doctors would tell them to come back in three days. Now, when a child has strong diarrhea and is vomiting, in three days there will be no traces left of whatever caused the illness. I was in a state of complete shock: I could prove nothing, no matter where I turned. For the first time in my life I confronted the fact that there was no way to prove health damage in our country: the doctors simply gave any explanations whatsoever [to avoid saying the truth]. The most common formula was that ‘the children ate something bad at home.’ They said the same thing in Pavlovo: “this is a socially disadvantaged (poor) region – we have no control over what the parents feed their children.” For all her disillusionment, Rozhina could never reconcile herself to the fact that doctors, who all

The story of Pavlovo, a village in the Ordynskiy district of Perm region, is another key case of oil pollution for which Lukoil is directly responsible. The village is located in the middle of Kokuyskoe oil field exploited by Lukoil; since 1997, soil, water, and air have been polluted with oil products and additives used during oil extraction. The public health situation in the village that prior to oil exploration was known for its environmental quality has become so disastrous that by 2007 the regional government finally agreed to begin the relocation of the residents. Rozhina got involved into this controversy in March 2003, when a delegation from Pavlovo was invited by Roman Yushkov to speak at an informational meeting at the PSU Geography department. See Periscop, 18.03.2003; Katys, 02.08.2004; Nikitina, 02.07.2007.
gave the Hippocratic oath, could compromise themselves professionally and ethically in such a manner.

Rozhina acknowledges that she has not yet found the way to completely separate her interests from those of the state and that it limits her scope for activism. As she changed employers in the wake of her conversion to activism, her personal network and loyalties became inextricably linked with the Yugo-Kamsk machine-building factory – a former state town-forming enterprise and the main employer in Yugo-Kamsk. She managed to get hired at this factory after she had to leave her teaching job, because the director of her school became increasingly uncomfortable with her activism. Rozhina was able to keep her position at the factory, although she was spending most of her daytime on the activist campaigns. She feels that she owes allegiance to the factory director who did not fire her, even though she was rarely present at her workplace. For some time, the director screened her from the attacks by the district administration, which called the factory, asking for Rozhina’s whereabouts. She also owes allegiance to her colleagues who were at the same time her neighbors and gave her donations when she was organizing an independent scientific expertise of the water quality after the diesel fuel spill.

At the same time, Rozhina is fully aware that the factory is itself a major source of environmental risks: “I know that it emits colossal amounts of pollutants, they have been poisoning people for years. But there is something at the subconscious level – some kind of fool’s patriotism or I don’t know what else – that does not allow me to attack them. I am just not ready to do it yet. See, the factory is in such a difficult state that I
simply feel pity for it. It is almost 260 years old and it is so run-down… [If I were to challenge them on their emissions,] they would have to pay fines, and that means that the workers’ salaries would be cut. How can I bring this down on people who have been helping me for years?” Rozhina’s dilemma is typical: in most cases it is literally impossible to separate “the good fellows” that work at the factory and help you from “the bad system” that makes them earn money in ways that poison them and destroy their environment at the same time. Finding a way out of such conflicting loyalties is an unavoidable part of becoming a grassroots social environmentalist in Russia.

5.2.2 Lidia Popova

A native of the Kirov region, Popova spent most of her adult life in Perm, where she studied and worked for 30 years at the Proton-PM military plant in Novye Liady. She became an environmental activist in 1999, when she retired and came back to her home town of Mirnyi to take care of the family home. Quite unexpectedly, she found herself in the middle of the controversy surrounding the impending construction of a chemical weapons disposal facility at the nearby Maradykovo military base. Through this campaign, she met with Lev Fedorov, whose Union for Chemical Safety (UCS) – a country-wide network of local grassroots organizations engaged in the fight against toxic pollution from military production – gave Popova an organizational structure and a solid base of support for years to come. Popova’s description of how she found herself spearheading the creation of a UCS chapter in Mirnyi is an excellent illustration of the psychological process that engenders an activist by necessity:
“In Kotel’nich [a town in the Kirov region], there was already a chapter of UCS, headed by Taranov Andrei Ivanovich – it is largely thanks to him that we got involved. He told me something that I could never forget: ‘The short-term gains from this plant are incomparable [to its long-term impacts]. What will our descendants tell us [if we allow it to be built]?’ [Later on,] Fedorov came to Mirnyi on Taranov’s invitation. I met him in the morning of the day when the meeting between residents and the projects proponents was scheduled. He told me that it would be good if I encouraged the residents to create a local chapter of UCS during the meeting. I replied that I did not know how to speak in public at all, and he said: ‘All right, we will just see what happens.’ So, at the meeting, when I realized what was going on [and heard the] lies that the military and the [district] administration were telling, I quite spontaneously asked them to give me the floor, came [to the front of the room] and said that this plant was very dangerous, that it would cost us our lives and health, and proposed to create a UCS chapter: ‘Those who would like to join can come and see me after the meeting.’ So ten people came up, my sister and I recorded their names, handwrote the report [of this constituent meeting], elected the chairman and his deputy right away – they both dealt with chemical weapons before. The chairman was a disabled worker, an elderly man; the deputy – a forester. And I became the secretary, because I was only living there temporarily, but still I did most of the everyday work, they only signed [documents].’

Every activist can recall the moment when they felt an impulse akin to the one that pushed Popova out of her seat and to the front of the crowd. It is a force that acts almost outside of one’s will and seems to result from the combination of receiving
enough information about something that should not be happening and feeling personally responsible for stopping it. Popova gives further evidence for the working of this mechanism when she recalls the individual who gave the first impetus for the self-organization in Mirnyi: “The initiative came from Lidia Bagaeva, a woman in her seventies who had worked as a nurse in that arsenal. She knew everyone in Mirnyi – she kept lists of people that worked at the arsenal and lived around it. When she retired, she started gathering information [on everyone that] worked there, on those that died. Most of her data had to do with cancer. She knew the danger first-hand: God only knows how many soldiers she buried with her own hands. There was a very high turn-over in officer corps: they were supposed to serve seven-year terms, but nobody lasted longer than three years. How many deaths there were at the military unit, no one really knew. We once saw a whole truck of dead soldiers buried at our village cemetery.” What propelled Popova into activism was the process of putting together Bagaeva’s stories and her own experiences on the one hand and confronting an obvious and brazen attempt by the state authorities to behave as if none of this mattered.

Over the following two years, Popova ran into all the main kinds of problems and risks inherent in grassroots activism. She learned how to organize a local referendum only to find out that it could easily be cancelled by the plenipotentiary representative of the President, who paid a special visit to Mirnyi in the summer of 2001. She also

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26 The institute of plenipotentiary presidential representatives in the regions of Russian Federation was originally created by Yeltsin. Putin transformed it into a special lever, through which the presidential administration could exercise significant control at the regional level. While during Yeltsin’s presidency the plenipotentiary representatives had no material or administrative base of their own and were completely subordinated to the regional governors, under Putin they have acquired significant power as heads of a new
realized that while some local politicians and businessmen were clearly sympathetic to her cause, they did not dare to support her openly for fear of the district and regional executives. The district administration tried to co-opt the UCS members by offering them paid work at the military information center. When this proved unsuccessful, the UCS members were accused in the press of “receiving money from the US Department of State” – a standard and time-honored way in which the Russian state attacks bothersome social activists. Popova reacted to this with a mixture of bemusement and indignation: “They simply cannot understand that people can [act collectively] out of self-defense, with no thought of personal gain and even spend their own money on activism.” Some residents fell into this trap and started asking us how much we were paid. Meanwhile, my sister and I lived on my pension and had to sell mushrooms and berries to make ends meet. So people gradually became aware of that and started collecting money for us – it was not much, but enough to pay for phone calls, Xerox, and trips to Kirov.”

The Maradykovo campaign taught Popova two main lessons: that there was hardly any state institution on which she could count to defend her personal or wider public interests and that the pressure that the state applied to grassroots activists was a significant deterrent, making most people unwilling to resist abuses. “All members of our initiative group were very strongly pressured: employers suspended their salaries, administrative division – the seven federal districts, created in 2000. The boundaries of these districts correspond to those of the military districts, and this new administrative division is constitutionally questionable, since it exists in parallel to the regional level of government. See Stoner-Weiss (2004).

27 Explaining social protests away as “people who are being paid by someone to make trouble” is not a uniquely Russian strategy. Tlachinollan Human Rights Center in Guerrero, Mexico reports almost identical accusations levied against COCEP – the grassroots organization opposed to the La Parota dam. See Section 6.2.3.
threatened to fire them. Those who filed lawsuits were the main targets – one woman lost her job at the Children’s art center. In the end, most members were so intimidated that they [dared to do very little].” Popova understood that while many people were “willing to help occasionally,” most were not suited to be regular UCS members: “one needs a special suite of character traits for this: courage, self-denial, patience, endurance, insistence, ability to face defeat, harassment, even detention – one must not fear these things.”

When Popova returned to Perm in the early 2002 and became aware of the impending ICBM destruction program, she found herself facing the same enemy – the military-industrial complex – but in a much stronger position, because of the strong support that the military plant managers had at the regional, federal, and international level. By September 9th, 2003, the date of the first anti-missile protest, Popova had made links to all the main professional activists – Yushkov and AES, Averkiev and PGP – and had registered a local chapter of UCS with the help of a few friends and relatives. She was well aware of how limited the activists’ resources were, compared to those of the program proponents, but she nevertheless felt the need to start the campaign: “It was raining hard, and only about 100 people came to our meeting. The rain was so strong that we could not even get our papers out, so we just read out the resolution, which was then sent to ten different agencies: the federal government, Roskosmos, State Duma, and others, all the way down to the city administration and parliament. There was no reaction of any kind from anyone, so we organized more protests, started a newsletter, began

28 This program is described in detail in Section 6.1.2.
distributing more information. [And after that] the regional government began its counter-attack: they [launched a media campaign] calling us ‘a handful of extremists and terrorist accomplices’.”

During the anti-missiles campaign, Popova came upon a very typical hurdle in the work of a first-time activist: she was not able to achieve broad mobilization of Perm residents. “The military and the regional authorities used all the media power to explain that this program was absolutely safe and would generate employment and social infrastructure projects. They presented it all in such a way that Perm residents who knew nothing about this problem before believed them. It was very hard for us [to overcome their apathy].” The most active grassroots supporters of the campaign turned out to be the former workers of Zakamsk military enterprises. Their support was anything but accidental, since they had first-hand knowledge and experience of the industrial processes that cause grave public health and environmental damage, but, being retirees, they also had greater autonomy for action than the current workers, because they no longer depend on the polluting enterprises for employment. As Valentina Ogloblina, herself an activist from Zakamsk, points out, the polluting enterprise (or other state organizations) can easily fire workers who engage in environmental activism; meanwhile, nobody has the

29 Popova, 28.08.2006. The head of NII PM later explained in court that the program opponents were terrorist accomplices, because their vocal opposition campaign “could attract the attention of terrorists” to the places where the missiles were burned.

30 A 2004 population survey found that the respondents living in Zakamsk (70% of them being current or former military factory workers) had much more accurate information about the missile destruction program and the public health risks that it involved than the residents of Perm’s other districts. See Miriasova (2004).

31 One typical story runs as follows: “[The activist] is a school teacher, and her director begins to pressure her: ‘Who asked you to meddle into this??’ Meanwhile, the head of the military factory that is going to
power to deprive a retired person of his or her state pension. Fedorov notes the same pattern across all the local UCS chapters: “some of our members are employed by state organizations [not just state enterprises, but also public schools, kindergartens, libraries, clubs, etc.], and it is hard to work with them, because they depend on their superiors. It is much easier to work with retirees – they do not depend on anyone and just defend their rights.”32

Yet, first-time mobilization is very difficult even for the best-informed and the most-affected: “the former workers proved quite helpless in the face of the mighty state machine of missile production and testing. The syndrome of fear and secrecy [emphasis added] is lodged very firmly within them. We [the missile industry workers] were constantly told that it was safe. People simply do not dare to resist, because they are afraid that they themselves will be investigated instead of the emissions cases.”33 When asked what helps them overcome this syndrome, people like Popova and Rozhina point to their “previous activist experience and knowledge of the laws.” This “previous activist experience” is especially helpful, if it is acquired in campaigns from which the first-time activists can keep at least some personal distance: Rozhina was less psychologically affected by the threat that she felt from the chemical depository at the neighboring Taezhnyi than by the oil-contaminated tap water in her Yugo-Kamsk home. Popova initiated her first campaign at her home town, where she no longer lived, and then

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32 Fedorov, interview, 09.07.2007.
33 Popova, 20.10.2009.
proceeded to tackle much more complex issues that hit much closer to her current residence in Novye Liady, a worker settlement near Perm.

Nine years of activism gave Popova the necessary experience and preparation for tackling the most difficult kind of grassroots campaign – a challenge against “one’s own enterprise.” From 1966 to 1999, Popova has worked as a chemical engineer and a technologist at the Proton-PM factory, which produces and tests space carrier rocket engines that run on heptyl – highly toxic liquid fuel. She tells that she felt the need to do something about the factory’s emissions while she was still its employee: “I knew perfectly well what kinds of emissions and discharges went from it into the environment and what impact it had on the people in Novye Liady. I myself have been suffering from the consequences of long-term heptyl exposure.” Looking back at those years, Popova feels that she could not have possibly begun an activist campaign then, because she “would not have known where and how to start” and was also dependent on the factory for her income. However, after she retired from the plant and acquired activist experience in Mirnyi and in the Perm campaigns, she finally felt ready to do what she had long considered necessary. “[Those who run] this testing ground have been poisoning people for years in the most brazen fashion and with complete impunity. I feel no fear, [because I am driven by the sense of] responsibility for the people, for future generations. I have been working on it on and off since February 2002, when we had a very bad air emission episode in Novye Liady. But while the solid-fuel missile campaign was going on, our social environmentalists [professional activists] held me back from opening the second front. They said that we did not have enough strength to carry on two missile-related
campaigns at once. So it was only in 2008 that I began the heptyl campaign in earnest and practically on my own.”

In 2008, after the first stage of the missile burning program was completed in Perm in spite of all activist efforts, Popova switched her attention from solid to liquid missile fuel and began to draw attention to the problem of heptyl pollution from space carrier rocket engines that are produced at Proton-PM and tested on its proving ground. Popova is drawing attention to the health impacts that this production and testing process has on the factory’s workers, to the environmental degradation of the territory around the factory, and to the risks that emissions from heptyl combustion present for the city of Perm and the towns of Sylva and Novye Liady that take turns receiving the emission clouds depending on the direction of the wind. As part of her campaign, Popova organized a population survey of Novye Liady residents, 2/3 of the respondents being either current or former Proton-PM workers. She says that those residents who are openly against her campaign are not numerous: “they believe the management’s story that without missile [production] the factory will go bankrupt and the settlement will die. No one [among the authorities] says anything about the fact that Proton has been poisoning people for years.”

5.2.3 How Unique is the Russian Predicament?

The passive acceptance of pollution and the mechanism of personal rebellion through which it can be overcome are not unique to Russia. McKean’s (1981) study of

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34 Popova, 20.10.2009.
35 Popova, 23.10.2009.
grassroots anti-pollution movements in Japan conducted in the early 1970s confirms the existence of similar phenomena in another 2nd tier country whose citizens have also been raised to accept state interests as their own. McKean shows that the early resident efforts to obtain compensation for pollution-related damage met with “complete lack of solidarity” and understanding within their own communities, among those who were not affected by “pollution diseases.” The early risers had to overcome “the traditional belief that individuals [did] not have the right to protect their own interests” and “the tremendous community pressure to endure in silence” the consequences of the economic development model that was officially declared to be beneficial for all.\(^{36}\) Reich (1982) cites similar evidence for the case of the 1960s dioxin contamination in Seveso, Italy.

The psychological mechanism that made it possible for the first-time Japanese citizen activists to break out of this vicious circle is quite similar to the one that operates in Perm. As McKean explains, many of these individuals “have benefitted from the post-war economic growth” and, until the pollution threat arose, saw no need to challenge the authorities. Yet, when they discovered that the local state structures were completely deaf to their concerns, “they underwent an emotional crisis that transformed them into outraged protesters.”\(^{37}\) Another variant of this process was experienced by citizen activists who came “from the socially disadvantaged sectors [and did not have a large share] in the post-war prosperity.” These individuals “had endured [their hardships] silently,” because they felt that they had no power to change their situation. But when “pollution arrived as an awesome and final threat to their well-being [and even] life,”

they abandoned “the silence [which] threatened to be fatal … and started to protest.”

The first-time activists from Perm seem to combine the characteristics of these two groups: they saw themselves simultaneously as the beneficiaries and the victims of the Soviet system, and their prolonged silence was due at once to the feeling that “they could do nothing effective” and to the perception that there was no way to obtain the benefits they received from the state without paying the environmental and health costs.

These similarities notwithstanding, the Russian citizens who initiate grassroots anti-pollution campaigns are currently operating in a more hostile environment than the Japanese citizen activists of the 1970s. First of all, the Japanese first-time activists could count on the kinds of pre-existing associational networks that are practically absent in present-day Russia. McKean (1981: 127) notes that 79% of the activists in her sample had been previously involved in at least two other non-political groups. This situation fits the classic pattern referred to by the scholars who focus on social networks as the engendering environments for activism: the future activists are likely to be found at the major nodes of networks that form around neighborhood associations, religious institutions, leisure clubs, etc. In other words, these future activists are “more sociable than the general population,” and this character trait leads them to get involved into non-political activism and helps them to overcome general social atomization and passivity.

According to Clément, Russian grassroots activists of the post-2004 wave are “people with very diverse biographies that do not fit any straightforward scheme; what

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38 Ibid., 130.
unites them can be described as non-conformism.” Clément argues that their conversion to activism is the result of strong personality types and a particular worldview – “heightened sensitivity to injustice, curiosity and intellectual openness, critical spirit and social mobility.” These personal characteristics are activated through “particular life experiences and key meetings” with other strong individuals. Yet, in Russia many first-time grassroots activists do not count with networks through which they could easily meet other like-minded individuals. They are generally more atomized and isolated than their Japanese (or Mexican) counterparts: they do have family, friends, colleagues and neighbors, but when it comes to activism, they feel very much on their own. Thus, their challenge is not only to make the individual transition to activism but also to construct the kinds of social networks that would make it easier for others to mobilize in the future. In Mexico, these networks have been present for a long time; in Russia, they are much more scarce and recent. The greater social atomization in Russia is the result of deliberate state action: the Soviet state meant to do this to society and it succeeded – now society has to compensate for this very destructive work.

Another crucial difference between the Japanese and the Russian grassroots environmentalists is that the former were able to transfer their activism to the electoral arena and to link the issue of industrial pollution with that of democratizing municipal

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41 See Clément (2006b, 2007a) for preliminary findings from a 2005 study of 50 grassroots leaders from 15 Russian regions.
42 This is the case for the grassroots activists that I have interviewed in Perm, Moscow, Nizhniy Novgorod, and Saint Petersburg.
43 Clément (2007a) points to new autonomous labor unions, associations of disabled persons, and urban protest groups as the most promising networks of this kind that have begun to form and grow over the last five years.
politics.\textsuperscript{44} Although the development of formal democratic institutions in 20\textsuperscript{th} century Japan was interrupted in the late 1920s by the rise of ultra-nationalism and militarism, and their reestablishment took place under the military occupation of 1945-1952,\textsuperscript{45} the members of anti-pollution movements evidently had enough experience with the electoral institutions and were able to use them for putting pressure on politicians and business leaders. In Russia, the grassroots activists frequently make alliances with local deputies and opposition politicians, but have not yet reached the stage where they can field their own candidates in the municipal elections or make environmental and urban issues central to the electoral campaigns.

The extreme hostility of the circumstances under which Russian grassroots activists emerge and work acts as a very rigorous selection mechanism: only very few dare to do it, but they are willing to go to the very end. As Valentina Ogloblina, another grassroots activist from Perm, remarked, there is literally no way for the authorities to

\textsuperscript{44} See McKean (1981: 30-32).

\textsuperscript{45} Japanese formal democratic institutions actually go back to the 1870s, and may have been quite compatible with the traditional rural institutions found in communitarian villages, where dissenters used boycotts of group labor and group taxation as levers of political influence. In the 1890s-1930s, Japan went through a period of social democratization during which political parties have acquired the experience of being in opposition to the government and voters learned how to make political demands. Some of the major changes of this period are summarized in the concept of “Taisho democracy” which includes the development of parliamentary cabinets in the 1920s and the adoption of universal male suffrage in 1925. This process resumed after the militaristic rule was ended by the Allies in 1945. The Allied administration began with the jailing of right-wing militaries and politicians and the liberation of Socialist and Communist political prisoners who where advocating free speech during the war. Even though the Allied administration changed its policy within the next two years, these initial changes proved irreversible, because they were also accompanied by mass mobilization: within one month of defeat, the labor movement had brought millions of protesters into the streets. Thus, the post-war political settlement in Japan was not a transplant of political democracy into the society that had no democratic experience; rather, it was heavily influenced by the nature of the democratization process that began in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Margaret McKean, personal communication, 07.12.2009.
stop such people, short of killing or imprisoning them. They can make do with very limited quantities of material and financial resources and do not expect to be paid for their activist work. The small size of the groups that they are able to create is not necessarily a sign of their weakness: a few highly committed individuals are often able to achieve more than a larger, but less motivated group. As Oliver (1984: 602) argued, even under democratic conditions “successful community organizations do not require mass participation.” In other words, 10-15 active members can maintain an association that is both “viewed as a legitimate representative body by the majority of residents” and can effectively accomplish the tasks at hand. If the small size and informal nature of such groups are not a rarity even in well-established democracies, there is no a priori reason to dismiss them as ineffective and weak under much more hostile political and social conditions that currently dominate in Russia.

5.3 Mexico: Resisting the State and Learning to Use It

The difference between popular attitudes toward the state in present-day Russia and Mexico cannot be explained solely by the fact that Mexico has a much longer and stronger tradition grassroots resistance to state encroachment. An equally important factor is the greater ability of Mexican citizens under the PRI regime to interact with the state collectively and strategically. This does not mean that the Soviet citizens did not know how to use state structures for private purposes – life under “mature socialism”

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46 Oglobalina, 30.08.2006.
47 In particular, these are common characteristics of the groups that form part of the US environmental justice movement. See Cable and Benson (1993), Cole and Foster (2001).
honied that skill to perfection. Rather, the experience that they lacked was using state channels for satisfying *group interests*. In other words, since Soviet citizens had very limited possibility for autonomous self-organization, they made use of the state mostly as individuals, through informal and non-public channels.

Meanwhile, the Mexican citizens were able to *bargain* with the state in a much more public and collective fashion. As Magaloni argues, elections in PRI Mexico were “not simply mass rituals [of acclamation], devoid of significance,”48 but served very specific and important needs of both the state and the grassroots actors. On the one hand, the party-state used them “as a key instrument for obtaining information about the extent of [its] mass support.” On the other hand, grassroots associations made use of PRI’s electoral needs for keeping their patrons – all the way from the president to the local party bosses – accountable for their promises. As the PRI’s electoral-clientelist machine became less effective in the 1980s due to the economic crisis and to the penetration of the opposition parties into the countryside, many of its clients were able to find ways to defect from it as voters while still benefitting from it as clients. The resulting popular attitude towards the state was that of detachment: people felt less and less beholden to the state as its ability to distribute goods diminished. A similar distancing from the state also took place in post-Soviet Russia, and for similar reasons. However, what is lacking in Russia is the greater sense of power vis-à-vis the state that comes from previous experiences of grassroots mobilization. The section that follows illustrates these differences in state-society relations through the story of a grassroots association that has

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48 Magaloni (2006: 8).
made successful use of the pre-existing organizational base both to extract benefits from the state and to resist violence and electoral fraud.

**5.3.1 The Drinking Water Commission in Xoxocotla, Morelos**

Xoxocotla is an indigenous town of approximately 19,000 inhabitants located in the state of Morelos, about 25 km south of the state capital, Cuernavaca. Self-organization in Xoxocotla is a classic Mexican example of synergy between traditions of communal and indigenous autonomy and the post-revolutionary variant of clientelist power relations. The history of the “Drinking Water Commission” began in 1934, “when Lázaro Cárdenas was running for president and came [to Morelos] on a campaign trip.” The community blocked the road on which he traveled and asked him to visit the town and “see the poverty and the ignorance in which the people lived.” He was made to promise that, once he was elected, he would send an engineer who would help to build a water system. Cárdenas proved true to his word, and when the engineer came “the people told him: ‘we do the work and you bring the pipes.’ And then they dug a channel to bring the water over the mountains, from a spring that was 13 kilometers away, and it was shared among six towns. The water itself was free, and the pipelines were maintained through communal labor (*faena*). [This was possible because we have] a tradition of communal work here. Those who do not contribute [to projects which the general assembly chooses] are imprisoned and fined.” Xoxocotla is an old indigenous

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49 Unless otherwise noted, all direct quotes in this section are from the personal interview given by one of the Commission members, Armando Soriano Giménez in Tetlama, Morelos on 19.11.2009.
community, and the communal work tradition that Soriano mentions continues to be used in a much more modern context.

The way in which Soriano tells the story makes it very clear that the residents of Xoxocotla and the neighboring towns based its relationship with the federal government on an unwritten pact: if they were to recognize this regime (and its presidents) as theirs, the government had to help them out in the provision of basic necessities. This became especially clear by the mid-1970s, when the original water system could not longer satisfy the water needs of the local population that had grown considerably since the 1930s. As disputes about water access intensified among the seven towns that shared the pipeline, the most active residents found a rather ingenious way to dispel the growing tension: “we called a general meeting of all the towns and explained that our dispute was not with each other, but with the government. Since the government has an obligation to give us water [emphasis added], it must give us materials and engineers to bring it [to all the towns] in sufficient quantities.” This possibility of a switch from the inter-communal dispute for a scarce public resource to a reivindicación – a demand placed on the state and based on a sense of entitlement – was one of the major sources of social and political stability of the PRI regime. By finding themselves a state patron, groups at the bottom of the power hierarchy could get what they needed, while the state got social peace and political support in return.

This second time, the communities used essentially the same strategy to obtain what they needed from the state: they made use of the visit by the head of the Ministry of Hydraulic Resources. “A radical youth group” that was the local product of the 1968
social mobilization captured the unsuspecting federal official who was on his way to a
special meal organized by the local elites in honor of his visit and held him for a few
hours, until he agreed to look into the issue: “We told him that our need was great and
that the issue was urgent. The conversation was not very amiable, but he understood us,
made a commitment to resolve the problem, and later kept his promise.” Through the
same arrangement – state engineers directing communal labor and providing materials – a
higher capacity pipeline was installed to replace the old one. However, this time the state-
provided water came with some strings attached: it was no longer free. “The government
now decided to bring the water into each house\textsuperscript{50} so that families could be charged for
water use. This was a more complex system, and, since we had no experience of building
and maintaining it, the government brought outside specialists, and so we lost control of
our water.”

The communities let the state manage their water systems until about 1985, when
the water became scarce once more. This was the epoch when the Mexican state began a
general retreat from its social obligations. When activists from Xoxocotla and the
neighboring six towns demanded that the government intervened once more, the Morelos
governor, Lauro Ortega Martinez, made an unexpected move: he turned the water system
administration over to the communities, saying that if they did not like the way the
government managed the water, they could now try to do it on their own. While this
looked like democratic devolution of power from the state to local self-government

\textsuperscript{50} The original arrangement involved installing street-corner water pumps.
structures,\textsuperscript{51} in reality the state government was simply divesting itself of the responsibility for a difficult issue: “Once they turned it over to us, we realized that it was a trap: the real problem was not bad management, but water scarcity which they did not know how to resolve.” Needless to say, the state government did not accompany this transfer of responsibility by the transfer of resources that the communities would need to take over the task of water management.

The community activists found a way out of this dual predicament. They used the General Water Law, which gives the highest priority to domestic water use, to force a nearby sugar refinery, a major industrial water user, to give up some of its water allotment. Once the water scarcity issue was thus resolved, each of the seven towns set up “drinking water commissions” to manage the water distribution and the system maintenance. Although the communities had no experience in managing a complex water system when the government turned it over to them, they were able to learn how to do it on their own, because they could count with a very strong underlying structure of communal decision-making through general assemblies and street- and block-level units that have been in charge of public tasks such as safety patrols. Even though there is currently no normative basis for the traditional forms of voluntary and unpaid work, the water commissions count with a very effective way to make the residents contribute their fair share of labor: “we can always cut off their water until they pay the fine and participate in the faena. In fact, we were able to collect enough money in fines to buy a piece of land for a kindergarten and a primary school.”

\textsuperscript{51} The governor was well-known for his populist overtures: “he used to travel around the state, visiting small towns and giving presents – tractors and mules to work the land, seeds for planting.”
The provision of drinking water was but one of the many tasks that Xoxocotla residents managed to accomplish through their communal self-organization structures. They have also used them during land invasions, protection of forests from logging, and campaigns for the provision of better public education and health care services. These multi-purpose organizational structures are suitable both for direct action – road blockades and building occupations – to attract the government’s attention to the community needs as well as for self-help purposes – doing things without the state. In 2006, members of Xoxocotla Drinking Water Commission joined the mobilization campaign against the Tetlama dump, which they believe to be a major source of water pollution in their region.

While the base for grassroots activism in Xoxocotla is in the communal institutions that are much older than the PRI, this autonomous organization base has been effectively used for clientelistic exchanges. This case clearly shows that when one encounters a grassroots association that is autonomous from the state in its origins, one should not assume that it only operates close to the pluralist, democratic pole of the power relations spectrum. On the other hand, the fact that such associations engage in clientelistic bargaining with the state does not necessarily mean that they help to perpetuate authoritarian power relations. “Clientelism” is an umbrella term that refers to a wide spectrum of state strategies, some of them more authoritarian than others. Magaloni,

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52 Xoxocotla and its neighbors had a high enough capacity for collective action to resist the nation-wide pressure for privatization of water in the early 1990s by occupying the state parliament building and forcing the deputies to modify the state water law to give priority management rights over water to community-based “social organizations.”

53 This case is described in detail in Section 6.2.1.
Diaz-Cayeros and Estévez (2007) distinguish between two clientelist strategies traditionally used by the PRI to secure electoral support: “distribution of private, excludable goods” and “the delivery of collective goods,” such as basic urban services, health, education, and transport, which benefit “broad categories of citizens” and from which the opposition voters cannot be easily excluded once they are provided. The first strategy is more clientelistic and authoritarian than the second, because it is targeted towards individuals and allows “to punish [those] who failed to deliver their votes.” Its use by the dominant political actors implies a greater degree of control over the political situation. The second strategy is more likely to be used in contexts where the political competition is greater – where PAN and PRD have strong support bases. I would also argue that the second strategy is more likely to be used in situations where there is greater capacity for grassroots mobilization. To be effective, clientelist strategies used by the state have to be tailored to the local conditions. Gauging the local capacity for grassroots mobilization is an important part of choosing the optimal strategy.

Unlike the purely authoritarian relations of domination and subordination, clientelistic exchanges require the state to have a good knowledge of its subjects and an ability to adequately assess their capacity for resistance. On the other hand, the people who face a clientelist state can increase their room for maneuver through grassroots organizing. The residents of Xoxocotla knew that their ability to successfully bargain with the state depended on the strength of their organizations. By the “successful bargain” I mean that they were able to get public goods from the state, but also, more

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54 This analysis is based on the Pronasol social welfare program designed and implemented by Salinas in order to “reestablish PRI’s electoral dominance” after the 1988 debacle.
importantly, that they could force the state to treat them in a less authoritarian fashion. Although clientelist power relations can be very stable and do not have to evolve in the pluralist direction over time, they do have that potential, because they allow more room for autonomous grassroots organization than the domination-subordination exchanges, in which almost any attempt at autonomous organization is met with repression. Once grassroots are ‘allowed’ to self-organize, even if it be only for a limited range of purposes, they can begin increasing their power vis-à-vis the state, and this will gradually force the state to treat them in a less authoritarian fashion.

Thus, while the residents of Xoxocotla relied on clientelist relationships, they chose the less authoritarian variant of clientelism – bargaining with the state for the provision of public goods – and reserved their right not to vote for the “providers.”55 This became especially evident in their reaction to the PRI’s attempt to resort to the “provision of private goods” during the 1989 municipal elections. “There were two candidates – from the people and form the PRI. Before the elections, the PRI people started coming to people’s houses, asking them to vote for the PRI and promising them basic [consumer] baskets. [When we found this out], we met with the PRI candidate and made an agreement with him that nobody was going to buy votes with presents and that there would be public denunciations if this happened. This agreement was signed by both candidates, in the presence of witnesses. But on the election day we learned that the PRI candidate has distributed the already-filled voting ballots and told the people that they would get their presents once they brought them to the polling station. And so one granny

55 Fox (1994) refers to this phenomenon as “semi-clientelism,” while the provision of private goods backed by coercion falls into the domain of “authoritarian clientelism.”
got confused and started asking around: ‘Who is supposed to give me my basket?’ That was the smoking gun: they were trying to impose a PRI candidate on us! We stopped the voting, told the people about the agreement, and said that we would not tolerate this.”

For Xoxocotla residents, the 1989 elections were not just the case of imposition of a PRI candidate – they were an imposition of an alien electoral system. Before 1989, Xoxocotla selected its municipal government through a public voting process that took place during a general assembly. Election procedures based on customary law are common in the indigenous zones of Mexico and the defense of these self-government practices against encroachment by the local and regional PRI party machines has been the key component of indigenous social protest since the 1970s. What happened in Xoxocotla in 1989 is a good illustration of the fact that while its residents were willing to exchange their votes for the state provision of public goods in federal and regional elections, they did not accept electoral clientelism when it came to local government. Such sophistication in interacting with the state and ability to discriminate between its different institutions and levels are made possible by Xoxocotla’s significant capacity for self-organization, which seems remarkable to an observer from Russia, where it is much more of an exception than in Mexico.

**5.4 Cross-Country Comparison and Conclusions**

The challenge faced by the Russian population in regard to grassroots mobilization can be described as getting away from ‘the freezing point’ – the situation

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56 See Trejo (2004 and 2006) on the electoral reforms that legalized these “customs and uses” as a legitimate way to elect municipal governments in Oaxaca.
when the domination-subordination mechanism is so prevalent in all spheres of social life that the attempts to form grassroots associations are met with repression and aborted before they can acquire enough capacity to begin pushing the powerful actors away from the authoritarian equilibrium. The recent experiences of first-time grassroots activists in Russia show that the state can itself unintentionally provide the way out of the domination-subordination trap by going too far in the authoritarian direction. This opening is provided by two aspects of the transformation that the state in Russia underwent after 1991. On the one hand, the Russian population that has long lived under an extremely repressive and deceitful, but strongly paternalist Soviet state now finds itself face to face with a state that defends private business interests and is itself composed of corrupt entrepreneurs. Such a state can no longer command the loyalty that was due to its Soviet predecessor and becomes an altogether alien and hostile force in the eyes of its population.

On the other hand, this new, post-Soviet state has managed to cut most of the feedback channels that link it to society and considers itself “totally autonomous” from it. Elections are the single most important such channel that has become increasingly blocked since 2003. Consequently, the people who currently call themselves the Russian state are out of touch with the social realities at the grassroots level – this state simply

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57 Margolin (2007) describes it as an “imitation state.” Glinsky Vassiliev (2000) calls it “the privatized state” and links it specifically to Putin’s presidential administration. At the beginning of Putin’s first term, he very insightfully argued that “the state that Putin has vowed to strengthen is not conceived of as a public asset, as a set of institutions in the service of society, nor as a commanding force of national mobilization, but rather as an exclusive corporate entity, the property of the state apparatus.”

58 I am grateful to Tatiana Vorozheikina (25.10.2009) for clarifying to me how this mechanism works.

does not know what to expect from its people and is extremely afraid of them. In contrast to the Mexican state officials, who have all, regardless of their party affiliations, been schooled in watching “the people” attentively and interpreting their signals as they chose the optimal strategies of dealing with them, the Russian state officials have neither the desire, nor the capacity to gain such knowledge and consequently rely on an extremely limited and ineffective range of strategies in dealing with the population. In particular, they do not seem to be interested in or capable of cultivating the kind of long-term clientelistic ties that have allowed the PRI to stay in power for so long and that still remain one of the most important mechanisms through which Mexican politicians and citizens interact.

Under these conditions, it becomes increasingly useless for the population to keep adapting to authoritarian power relations. Clément argues that the process of such general disengagement from the state in Russia was set in motion after 2000, when elections stopped being competitive and when the state began to shed all the major social obligations inherited from the Soviet system in the areas of housing, health care, social welfare, transportation, and education.60 Broad social groups currently find themselves in the situation where there is no longer anything to be gained through playing the domination-subordination game: the state clearly demonstrates that it is not interested in them either as voters or as clients and is no longer willing to provide the social welfare guarantees that gave the late Soviet state its legitimacy. In Mexico, the state has also greatly reduced its social welfare obligations since the beginning of economic reforms in

60 Clément (2006a)
mid-1980s, and this caused a similar widespread social disengagement from the state that eventually cost the PRI its political hegemony. However, the Mexican politicians, both within and outside the state, are greatly interested in “the people” both as voters and as clients.

Magaloni (2006) shows that, in electoral autocracies, such as the PRI Mexico, the erosion of mass support occurs as the regime loses the ability to maintain a balance between three important strategies: the generation of economic surplus through long-term growth; the distribution of this surplus in exchange for votes through clientelistic networks; and the use of force and electoral fraud. The Xoxocotla experience demonstrates that the use of force and electoral fraud in situations where there is no longer a possibility to effectively deliver payments in exchange for votes and to punish those who defect to the opposition by withholding vital necessities can result in dramatic growth in the levels of grassroots self-organization and protest. This mechanism of grassroots mobilization is not available in Russia, because, while the central state has recently generated significant economic surplus from oil, gas, and natural resource exports and is more than willing to use electoral fraud and force, it has no party capable of operating the electoral clientelist machine akin to the one developed by the PRI regime.

What difference does the presence of well-established organizational bases make to the mounting of social-environmental challenges? In Mexico, the communities that already have the social mobilization networks and the collective action repertoire see environmental threats as just one more reason for mobilization, but the blueprints for
such mobilization already exist. Thus, when the residents of Xoxocotla became aware of the health risks presented by the Tetlama dump, they did not have to spend much time and effort on creating the infrastructure for mobilization and could begin protesting promptly. Xoxocotla’s collective action problem had already been resolved long before the Tetlama dump became an urgent issue in 2006: the existence of local self-government structures and their intensive use for obtaining public goods from the state made a big difference. By contrast, most Russian residents who confront acute environmental threats and associated violations of citizen rights usually do not count with pre-existing social infrastructure for mobilization or with a standard, well-rehearsed repertoire of contentious action. In such cases, the collective action problem must be resolved before mobilization can begin. The first step towards resolving it is the emergence of grassroots leaders through the mechanism that I have described in this chapter.
Chapter 6: Social-Environmentalist Campaigns in Post-Transitional Russia and Mexico

This chapter focuses on post-transition attempts to overcome political and social authoritarianism within particular regional and institutional contexts through social environmentalism. It presents and compares a selection of case studies that I have assembled using my own field data from Russia and Mexico gathered between 2004 and 2007. All the social-environmentalist campaigns that I consider, except one, took place after the transition period ended in 2000. Whenever possible, I supplemented my primary materials with press accounts and other secondary sources. The Russian part of the analysis is based primarily on the comparison of environmental activism in the regions of Perm and Nizhniy Novgorod (with brief remarks on Moscow, St Petersburg, and Samara). The Mexican part includes cases from the states of Morelos, Guerrero, and Mexico City. The political environment within these regions varies all the way from highly authoritarian (Moscow, Samara, Guerrero) to relatively democratic (Mexico City). These regions also have distinct histories of social and environmental activism and provide different bases for grassroots mobilization and distinct trajectories for the development of professional environmental activists.

I focus on two sets of variables: factors that operate at the regional level and characteristics of individual campaigns. The regional factors are important, because political and social authoritarianism often lingers on subnational levels even after the

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1 The 1970s-1980s controversy around Colgate-Palmolive factory in Mexico City, described in Section 6.2.2.1. This case was included in order to provide a longer-term prospective on the nature of environmental activism in Mexico City and an additional basis for comparison with present-day environmental activism in Russia.
national political regime becomes democratic, as it happened in Mexico.\textsuperscript{2} In Russia, there was a significant diversity of regional political regimes in the 1990s, and its consequences still show, in spite of Putin’s attempts to level them out by appointing governors from Moscow.\textsuperscript{3} The regional factors include: the type of political context (varies from highly authoritarian to relatively democratic), the availability and the type of grassroots mobilization bases, and the composition of the professional environmental activist community. The \textit{campaign-level variables} are: the strength of the social-environmental mobilization, the level of success in averting the environmental threat, and the contribution to social democratization.

I consider a social-environmental campaign to be \textit{strong} if it is capable of sustaining both contentious and legal action, keeping the issue present in the press, and forcing key state and corporate opponents to pay attention and to modify their actions at least in some ways. In all of my cases, I found that the campaign strength was related to three factors that operated both at the regional and at the campaign level. These factors are: (a) the strength of pre-existing organizational bases for grassroots mobilization; (b) the characteristics of professional activists involved; and (c) the extent to which a particular social-environmental campaign was integrated into broader (non-environmental) social movement context and networks.

The fact that a particular social-environmental campaign is strong does not necessarily imply that it will be \textit{successful} – able to achieve its key objectives. I evaluate two different aspects of success – the environmental and the socio-political. The

campaign that is *environmentally* successful manages to either achieve the cancellation of the project that caused the mobilization or to significantly postpone the implementation of the project and/or modify its terms.\(^4\) I defined the *socio-political* success of the campaign as its *contribution to social democratization*. Judging from the way that social environmentalists in each particular case were treated by the powerful actors, I asked whether the campaign had caused any shift away from social and political authoritarianism. In other words, I evaluated whether this campaign had forced the powerful actors to treat the people any differently than had been the custom both during the campaign and in its aftermath. I broke this question down by looking at whether each campaign had strengthened: (a) the public dimension of the state, (b) the rule of law, (c) liberty of the press and citizen access to information, and (d) respect for human and civic rights of the disenfranchised.

### 6.1 Russian Cases

My Russian cases come from two regions: Perm and Nizhniy Novgorod. What is unusual about Perm is that there is a number of extremely active and committed grassroots and professional activists who are involved in all the different campaigns (Yushkov, Popova, Rozhina, Ogloblina). Urban protest movements against construction on public lands have sprung up in all Russian cities over the past 5-6 years; in their

\(^4\) This applies to all the campaigns, except Yugo-Kamsk, which was focused on obtaining compensation and remediation of the environmental damage which had already occurred rather than on the prevention of future environmental damage. I classified the Yugo-Kamsk campaign as environmentally unsuccessful, because the activists were unable to obtain adequate compensation for victims in court, remediation of the accident site, and restoration of the municipal drinking water infrastructure. On the difference between compensation- versus prevention-oriented grassroots environmental campaigns see McKean (1981).
origins, these movements are social-justice rather than environment-driven. In Perm many of these initiatives have been “picked up” or supported by environmental activists, most importantly, by a radical action group – Anarcho-Ecological Resistance (AES). This link between urban grassroots and environmental activism is not always present: I did not observe it in Samara at all; it exists, but is weaker in Moscow, St Petersburg, and Nizhniy Novgorod. Analyzing case material from Perm allows me to answer the question under what conditions this link can form.

In Perm, the environmental campaigns are very well integrated into a wider context of growing citizen protest that began with protests against the monetization of benefits in December 2004-January 2005. It is significant that protest marches, such as “Take back the city!” (February 2004), were jointly organized by many different kinds of grassroots movements – Revolutionary Worker Party – a Trotskist group, Worker Democracy, public transport workers, residents of worker’s dormitories (very old and dilapidated housing, whose residents live under constant threat of eviction), animal rights groups. Perm’s grassroots groups also have allies among city council and regional parliament deputies; many of those most actively involved come from “Yabloko” Democratic Party. While the campaigns that I am describing met with only limited success, this does not deter the critical mass of activists from continuing and expanding their efforts – in each subsequent campaign they use and build on the experience acquired in all previous ones.

Compared with the other cities I studied, Perm’s environmental activists display a higher-than average capacity for direct action and for maintaining a continuous presence
in the press and a constant pressure on the government. They are also better connected to the other branches of social activism, and this produces synergetic effects that increase the scope of what can be achieved through activism. Perm has been singled out by Russian political scientists and regional specialists as an unusual case, because of its relatively high levels of civic activity, numbers of NGOs and somewhat more hospitable environment for the development of civil society.\textsuperscript{5} There are macro-political reasons for this “anomaly,” such as relatively high degree of pluralism and competition within regional political and business elites (which translates into greater pluralism of the press), and the relatively high level of income associated with oil production (Lukoil made the region one of its main national bases since 1997). But I also see three important factors related to social activism.

Perm has two strong \textit{regional resource centers} for NGOs and grassroots activists – Perm Civic Chamber (PGP) and Perm Regional Human Rights Center (PRPC) – which provide the activists with legal and human rights counseling, link them with other NGOs as well as sympathetic journalists and state officials, maintain their own newspapers and news sites, and act as mediators between the resistance movements and the state authorities. The region also counts with an active group of \textit{original social environmentalists} – Anarcho-Ecological Resistance (AES) – that greatly enhances the grassroots’ capacity for direct action and deliberately links environmental and social justice agendas. What is truly remarkable is that this large impact is achieved by a very small group of people: AES has about 20-30 members, who are mostly high-school and

university students. What greatly amplifies their impact is the truly extraordinary commitment of their mentor, Roman Yushkov, and their links with other radical leftist groups active in the region and beyond. Finally, social environmentalism in Perm has benefitted from the relative absence of strong environmental NGOs of conservationist and reform-environmentalist types that came out of the Soviet forms of environmental activism (especially the Nature Protection Brigade movement, DOP). Perm’s environmental activism is very recent by Russian standards, since it only takes off in the early 2000s. This is extremely important, because the conditions under which it arises (the drying-out of the foreign grants and the growing authoritarianism of the state) push it towards greater social awareness and grassroots work and away from the focus on conservation and expert services that is so characteristic of the “older” environmental NGOs that were formed in the early 1990s, when foreign funding was abundant and the state structures were much more permeable to environmental activists.

In the 1990s, Nizhniy Novgorod was known as one of the most liberal and pluralist regions of Russia. This reputation had a lot to do with its then-governor Boris Nemtsov (1991-1997), one of the most notable democratic politicians that surfaced during the transition period. Nizhniy’s main regional environmental NGO and resource center, the Dront (Dodo) Center, has benefitted greatly from a very close and productive relationship with Nemtsov, who appointed its leader, Askhat Kayumov, as the head of the regional environmental agency. The Dront Center is one of the most important environmental NGOs that emerged from the DOP movement and has played a key information and coordination role on the national scale. Since November 1990, the
Center has been publishing the “Bereginya” newspaper, which includes environmental activism news from all over the country and is read by environmentalists nationwide.

Over the past decade, the Dront Center has expanded its scope to non-environmental themes and is now playing many of the same roles that the PGP and the PRPC play in Perm. Literally all significant professional environmental activists of the region (including those active in Dzerzhinsk) have been, at one time or another, associated with Dront, one of whose main role was to provide the structure for raising and managing funds for all its “nested” organizations. However, since the early 2000s, a growing rift has formed between Dront and many of the activists that work directly with grassroots groups and most frequently engage in direct action (Levashov, Fufaeva, Pautova, Krylov).

In the early 1990s, Nizhniy did have a number of its own very active radical ecologists, mostly members of Rainbow Keepers, but many key figures – Sergei Fomichev, Aleksandr Zimbovsky, Yulia Varakushina – left the region over the course of the decade, thus depleting its local pool of professional social environmentalists.

In Perm, the institutionalized resource centers and the resistance-oriented environmental activists have completely distinct origins, and there is a very clear and consciously maintained division of labor between them. In Nizhniy, there is more of an overlap between the two because of their common past and origins, and this leads to mutual frustration about the choice of tactics and positions that each side takes. Because of its DOP origins, Nizhniy’s environmental activism bears a very strong imprint of conservationism and reform environmentalism. The radical social-environmentalist
stream in Nizhniy is much weaker than in Perm and does not provide the kind of solid support base to the recently emerging grassroots urban activists that their counterparts in Perm can count on. Consequently, environmental activists in Nizhniy and Dzerzhinsk do not rely as heavily on confrontational and direct action strategies. Nizhniy’s environmental activists are mostly professional, while in Perm there is a greater number of grassroots leaders. Both in Perm and in Nizhniy, environmental groups usually consist of very few members – one clear leader and a few “helpers.” However, in Nizhniy, these groups were formed in the early 1990s and took the form of registered environmental NGOs, while in Perm they formed a decade later and tend to remain mostly informal.


Yugo-Kamsk (or Yugo-Kamskiy) is an old industrial worker settlement of about 8.5 thousand people, located 60km south-west of Perm. It was founded in the 18th century, during the earliest phase of state-led industrialization, when a copper smelting plant was built there. Its successor, Yugo-Kamsk Machine-building Factory, has acted as the “city-forming” enterprise in the Soviet times: it has been the major source of employment and the major provider of social infrastructure. As one of the major Russian oil companies, Lukoil, made the Perm region one of its main operation centers in the late 1990s, multiple oil and gas pipelines were laid near Yugo-Kamsk. A section of the major Perm – Almetievsck oil pipeline was laid through the sanitary protection zone of the Severinskiy pond – the town’s main source of drinking water – in violation of the
existing public health regulations.\textsuperscript{6} When a leak developed in this pipeline on April 23\textsuperscript{rd} 2002, the diesel products went directly into the Severskaya River and then into the pond.\textsuperscript{7}

The residents of Yugo-Kamsk felt the presence of oil products in their tap water the next day, but the town government did not order the municipal water supply to be cut off and waited a whole week to declare it undrinkable; this warning was not made publically, and most residents only found out about it at the general town assembly that they organized on May 6\textsuperscript{th}.\textsuperscript{8} The residents continued to use the highly polluted tap water for most household needs until mid-May, when the municipal water system was finally shut down and Lukoil began bringing in water in cisterns.\textsuperscript{9} There was an explosion of gastrointestinal and other illnesses among the people who drank the polluted water, especially small children; the public health agencies and the town hospital refused to document these cases. At the May 6\textsuperscript{th} meeting, the head of the district government and Lukoil representatives made a joint promise to conduct a prompt clean-up of the polluted municipal water pipelines and switch the water system to a new source of spring water by December. These promises were not kept: the drawing of pond water into the municipal

\textsuperscript{6} Dukhonin, 12.05.2004.
\textsuperscript{7} The size of the spill was officially declared to be 150 cubic meters of diesel fuel; federal investigation commission from the Ministry of Natural Resources later found it to be over 1100 cubic meters. (Periscop, 11.06.2003)
\textsuperscript{8} The summary of the events that follows is based on publications from Periscop, the news agency at the Perm Regional Human Rights Center (\url{http://www.prpc.ru/actual/south}), relevant articles in Perm regional newspapers (compiled at \url{http://www.alpha.perm.ru/inform/tema/tragedy.shtml}), and Rozhina’s personal interview (29.08.2006).
\textsuperscript{9} Rozhina, 29.08.2006.

Rozhina recalls that for the first two weeks only one water cistern was brought in daily to serve the neighborhood of 5 thousand people, who had to stand in long lines and then haul the water buckets to their apartment buildings, which do not have elevators. In June, “things became better: they started bringing in three cisterns instead of one,” but the residents still had to spend considerable amounts of time on daily water provision. The quality of this water was also questionable: its source was unknown and it came in cisterns marked “fire hazard” (which are often used to transport flammable oil products). All of these problems were later brought up in citizen suits against Lukoil.
pipelines resumed at the end of August, after a hasty clean-up of the pond was carried out by a private company that had no license for cleaning up oil spills, while another company with no license for municipal water works installed filters at the water uptake point. While waiting for the promised new clean water line from artesian sources, the residents switched to using bottled water for drinking and cooking; the tap water still periodically smells of oil, since the filters are not cleaned regularly enough. The pond was completely destroyed as an ecosystem, and the full environmental and public health damages from the spill were never assessed.

In the aftermath of the accident, the grassroots activists, a small group of residents headed by school teacher Svetlana Rozhina, focused their efforts on obtaining independent expert assessments of water quality. They wanted to use this data primarily to break the informational blockade that the state authorities and Lukoil created around the issue and to obtain medical treatment for the town’s children, many of whom were gravely affected by drinking the polluted water. These efforts were only partially

10 The diesel skimmed off the water surface was piled up on the pond shores along with the dead water plants and animals; since it was not removed, the rains gradually washed it right back into the pond. The booms that were placed near the municipal water uptake made the diesel products migrate from the pond surface into the water column and bottom sediments. A federal commission that took water samples from the pond in June 2002 found oil product concentrations to be 2000 times in excess of the threshold limit values.

11 Rozhina’s personal story is told in detail in Section 5.2.1.

12 The results of an official water quality investigation conducted in May by the regional Sanitary-epidemiological inspector’s office stated that “the levels of oil products in tap water did not exceed the threshold limit values.” Researchers from Perm State University department of analytical chemistry, who conducted a parallel water quality investigation upon the residents’ request, got vastly different results: concentrations of 7-10 times above the safety thresholds. (Rozhina, 29.08.2006). The Russian equivalent of “threshold limit value” is «предельно допустимая концентрация» (ПДК) – the maximum environmental concentration of a chemical compound that produces no pathological changes in the human body through daily long-term exposure. The numeric values for individual compounds are determined by Rossanepidnadzor (Federal Sanitary-Epidemiological Control Service; reorganized into Roszdravnadzor in 2004).
successful: it took several months to make the state officials acknowledge the gravity of public health situation, and even then no official dared to publically draw the link between the spill, the excessively polluted tap water, and the illnesses of the residents.\textsuperscript{13} In December 2002, Kalinin, the head physician of the Yugo-Kamsk municipal hospital, announced at the round table dedicated to the spill that, while the level of child morbidity doubled in the aftermath of the accident and these gastrointestinal illnesses were not due to bacterial infections or food poisoning, he “could not make definite conclusions, but linked the causes to water quality.”\textsuperscript{14} These verbal acrobatics stand witness to the amount of pressure that doctors in Russia feel in cases when acting in the public interest goes directly against the interests of the powerful.

Meanwhile, Perm Civic Chamber and Perm Regional Human Rights Center helped the residents to file lawsuits against Lukoil to claim moral damages for the problems that the absence of tap water caused during the summer of 2002. Over 40 such lawsuits were filed at the Perm district court, and many plaintiffs did receive small financial compensations (about $250 per person). Although these sums were clearly not commensurate with the damage suffered by the residents, the court decisions had

\textsuperscript{13} Rozhina was particularly discouraged by the conclusions of the second water quality assessment conducted in September 2002 by the Moscow-based Sytin Institute of Human Ecology: “they wrote that there were no threshold limit values set for the oil products found in the water, and so they could not say with certainty how dangerous these concentrations were for human health.” It took the residents several months to find this “independent expert agency” and to gather the 55,000 roubles (over $2,000) to pay for the study. After an arduous fundraising campaign, Rozhina obtained 15,000 from Yugo-Kamsk residents, 10,000 from Perm Civic Chamber, and 35,000 from local businesses that pleaded to remain anonymous in fearing reprisals for town and district authorities. Their concerns proved well justified, because the town mayor, Novikov, did in fact request that Rozhina “gave him a complete list of names of those who gave her money,” if she did not want him to file a complaint against her with the economic crime section of the district police department. Rozhina supplied no such information, arguing that the mayor had absolutely no legal right to make such inquiries. Rozhina, 29.08.2006; Periscop, 23.01.2003.

\textsuperscript{14} Periscop, 03.12.2002. According to Rozhina, Kalinin was explicitly instructed “not to raise noise” by the regional ombudsman who came to Yugo-Kamsk in the summer of 2002.
precedent value: in this particular case, the court judges, who routinely find themselves in
the same dilemma as the doctors, managed to uphold their professional standards. However, the residents were merely able to scratch the surface with respect to legal action. Rozhina’s group chose to focus on children treatment and compensation of moral damages, because it could not mobilize the residents for direct action that would force Lukoil to finance and conduct an adequate clean-up of the pond and of the municipal water system. The activists were also unable to pursue the deeper question of criminal responsibility: Lukoil built the pipeline in violation of sanitary norms, and this violation was permitted by the chief sanitary doctor of Perm region, Alexander Sboev, whom an independent journalistic inquiry found to have material and financial links to Lukoil. By the time that this information became available, Rozhina had already moved to Perm, and without her leadership the residents were unable to continue the campaign.

This conflict brought onto Perm’s activist scene the Anarcho-Ecological Resistance (AES), a youth organization that became a key player in all subsequent environmental campaigns in the Perm region. This informal group was founded by high-school and university students in 2003 and went public for the first time on March 21st of that year, when it came out in protest against Lukoil’s “anti-social actions in Yugo-Kamsk and Pavlovo”. The AES members marched through the center of Perm,

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16 Dukhonin, 12.05.2004.
17 The story of Pavlovo, a village in the Ordynskiy district of Perm region, is another key case of oil pollution for which Lukoil is directly responsible. The village is located in the middle of Kokuiiske oil field exploited by Lukoil; since 1997, soil, water, and air have been polluted with oil products and additives used during oil extraction. The public health situation in the village that prior to oil exploration was known for its environmental quality has become so disastrous that by 2007 the regional government finally agreed to begin the relocation of the residents. Rozhina got involved into this controversy in March 2003, when a
chanting: “Lukoil, you are a murderer!” During this campaign, the AES also made its first attempt at building occupation: in June 2003 they spent several hours in the office of the chief sanitary doctor of the Perm district. After “several unsuccessful attempts to expel them, the officials gave in” and surrendered the results of the water quality tests that were conducted two months earlier and not released to the public in spite of repeated requests. In spite of its small size (20-30 regular members), this group possesses very significant capacity for direct action that has proved an invaluable source of power and support for Perm’s grassroots environmentalists. In her interview, Rozhina repeatedly acknowledged that the presence of AES and its mentor, Roman Yushkov, gave her a greater sense of courage and confidence as she confronted state and Lukoil officials.

From its very beginning, AES has been a social-environmental group. It was formed by students who had a serious interest in anarchism as a means of achieving social justice and added environmental degradation to their concerns after attending a course at Perm State University (PGU) taught by Roman Yushkov, who gradually became the group’s main adviser and mentor. A geographer by training and a long-term PGU affiliate, Yushkov came to activism through journalism: in 2001, shortly after completing his graduate studies, he became the news chief at the private Radio “Maximum” station. He had to leave that job a year later, because his coverage of the Yugo-Kamsk diesel spill alarmed his employers who did not want to get in trouble with delegation from Pavlovo was invited by Roman Yushkov to speak at an informational meeting at the PGU Geography department. See Periscop, 18.03.2003; Katys, 02.08.2004; Nikitina, 02.07.2007.

18 Periscop, 23.03.2003.
19 Periscop, 10.06.2003; Babitsky, 30.04.2004.
either Lukoil, the owner of 45% of the mass media in Perm region\textsuperscript{20} or with the regional and city administrations.\textsuperscript{21} After that, Yushkov formed a lasting link with Perm Civic Chamber, first as an informal correspondent and then as the editor of the center’s newspaper, \textit{Lichnoe Delo} (“Personal Matter”).\textsuperscript{22}

Yushkov was impressed by the seriousness of the students’ commitment to building a new, just society and the systematic critical thinking and work that they put into developing their conception of it. Thus, even though he himself saw this initiative as “hopeless, although beautiful youth idealism,” he considered it a necessary stage of their moral development and “joined them in order to direct their actions at least in the environmental field, to show them who the real enemies [were] in that sphere.”\textsuperscript{23} Since 2003, AES members have actively participated in all environmental campaigns in the Perm region. They also bore the brunt of police repressions: the dramatic framing of their first public protest gave them the reputation of a “radical” organization, and its members tend to be the first candidates for detentions and harassment, whenever police is used to disperse the protests in Perm.

Yushkov, who maintains connections with all the main nodes of social activism in Perm as well as with select politicians and state officials, does not consider radical protests to be the only way to proceed, but he somewhat reluctantly recognizes their necessity under the current conditions: “ideally, I would want to move from the protest-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Babitsky, 30.04.2004.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Zhukov, 20.09.2004; Rozhina, 29.08.2006.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Averkiev, 28.08.2006.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Zhukov, 20.09.2004.
\end{itemize}
destructive to constructive forms of action.\textsuperscript{24} I would have dearly liked to hand over the protest initiative to somebody else. But right now I simply do not see how I could do it.\textsuperscript{25} He is careful to emphasize that there is more to his own actions than “being always against the state”: “I have many ways of interacting with [state] power constructively [and] I always negotiate when there is an opportunity. But peaceful cooperation gives little reason for media attention and noise, and that is why I appear as a clinical rebel in the media accounts.”\textsuperscript{26} Yushkov realizes that many of Perm’s most thorny issues can only be resolved if social activists and state officials form a genuine and durable alliance. In other words, the activists need a state that is willing and able to work with them, but they do not have such a state at their disposal at the moment and must attract attention to themselves through contentious action.

Yushkov’s younger comrades in arms, the AES members, also have a relatively complex vision of the trade-offs that their radical image presents. One view within the AES is that the forces of environmental opposition are simply too incommensurate with those of the state and the corporations for the battle to be fought within the institutional and legal sphere: “the battle is too unequal. You cannot fight the state while using state [structures such as] the Prosecutor’s office or the courts. If you go to court, they will finish the [harmful] project while the case is being reviewed.”\textsuperscript{27} On the other hand, the

\textsuperscript{24} Here Yushkov refers to his original activist initiatives within the “Green Oikumene” organization that he created in 1996. It brought together geographers, musicians, and actors, who engaged in ecumenic and social work and carried out projects to foster green attitudes and cooperation between Muslims and Christians in the Perm region. See Erenko, 2009; Demakova, 28.08.2006.
\textsuperscript{26} Erenko, 10.06.2009.
\textsuperscript{27} Anastasia Nelegalova quoted in Babitsky, 30.04.2004.
anarchist ecologists understand that radical methods “are only effective as part of a much wider spectrum [of strategies].” In contrast to classic anarchists, AES does not reject legal action altogether: “of course, we will not write letters to the Prosecutor’s office in AES’s name, but we actively collaborate with organizations that do it [primarily Perm Civic Chamber]. What we manage to do with our radical actions is to breach the information vacuum: [when an environmentally harmful project begins,] the media did not dare to speak ill of it at all [if state officials have vested interest in it], they only give the state’s perspective. We force the media to show the other point of view as well.”

6.1.2 Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Destruction in Perm (1996-2008)

On April 9th 2008, the office of the US Senator Richard Lugar announced in a press release that an important milestone had been reached in the “effort to secure and dismantle the weapons of mass destruction of the former Soviet Union: the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program has completed the elimination of all SS-24 ‘Scalpel’ intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).” The press release goes on to give the following brief history of the process: “In November 1991, Lugar (R-IN) and former Sen. Sam Nunn (D-GA) authored the Nunn-Lugar Act, which established the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) Program. This program has provided U.S. funding and expertise to help the former Soviet Union safeguard and dismantle its enormous stockpiles of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, related materials, and delivery
systems.” As a part of this program, the last 56 SS-24 missiles from the Soviet arsenal were eliminated “at a destruction facility near Perm, Russia.” The missiles were “unloaded from railcars in a building formerly used to maintain the missiles [and] then moved by isothermic rail cars to the facility where they were dismantled and the fuel burned out.” The destruction began shortly after Senator’s Lugar visit to Perm in August 2003, and was completed in slightly less than five years.29

In a 2006 article commemorating CTR’s 15th birthday, Lugar’s assistant Paul Walker remarked that while this program is “one of the clear successes of post-Cold War diplomacy” “local community opposition continues to be a major challenge for most of [its] work in Russia.” Walker explained that this difficulty is the result of “Russia’s democratic evolution”: its citizens are now capable of mobilizing in defense of their rights and interests and no longer permit “centralized, authoritarian implementation of dangerous and contentious projects by the Russian federal government.” It is therefore essential to ensure their participation in CTR projects so that they can be convinced that this process can be carried out in a safe and economically beneficial manner.30

Since neither of the two documents mentions Perm among places where the CTR program encountered significant “local opposition,” it is to be understood that its missile destruction project was the result of close cooperation and interaction between all concerned parties: Russian federal and regional state agencies, the military facilities, the US partners, and “the local community.” However, when seen from within the “local community” of Perm, “the SS-24 elimination process” bears little resemblance to the

picture painted by Senator Lugar’s office. Since the burning of the first missile in September 2003, regional and federal authorities periodically received letters, in which thousands of Perm residents signed under the following text:

“We are writing to you regarding the most blatant violation of our constitutional rights during the execution of the ICBM destruction program in our city. This program is carried out illegally: it has not been subjected to the state environmental expert assessment and violates a number of important federal laws. The missiles are destroyed in the most barbaric way – through open-air burning with no capture of combustion products, so that we, the residents of Perm, are being poisoned by the full range of harmful substances emitted into the atmosphere during these events, which often take place more than once a week. We suffer from coughing spells, eye and respiratory system irritation, headaches, nausea, and chronic fatigue. Our children are especially affected and react to each burning event with a range of alarming symptoms: respiratory ailments, allergies, sudden fever. We get no adequate medical help, because Perm’s regional authorities and the military plants’ management carefully conceal from the public the information about the emitted substances and their toxicity levels. Since the program has begun, we have repeatedly contacted Perm’s governor and other officials responsible for the protection of public interest and well-being. So far, no action has been taken to defend our rights. We therefore demand complete and immediate cancellation of this dangerous and illegal program.”31

31 Compiled from collective letters to the head of Perm Regional Environmental Protection Office (November 2005), Perm Regional Prosecutor’s Office (August 2006), and the President of Russian Federation (July 2006). Courtesy of Lidia Popova.
Perm’s anti-missile campaign of 2003-2008 had all the key characteristics of a social-environmental mobilization. Its main strength came from the ability of grassroots and professional activists that have until then worked on different issues to come together, form a lasting alliance, and incorporate the missile issue within a broader social and political context. Of all the activist coalitions that stood behind recent environmental campaigns in Perm, the one that emerged in response to the missile issue appears to be the most diverse and complex. On the one hand, it brought together several key grassroots activists who had until then worked on different thematic campaigns, but after 2003 switched to working as a single team on whatever issue appeared to be most urgent at the moment. On the other hand, these grassroots activists were able to establish lasting links to three very different types of professional activists. Lev Fedorov, the head of UCS network, and PGU researchers – Georgiy Voronov and Vladimir Sretensky – proved indispensable during the environmental expert assessment process, as they served on various expert commissions and provided activists with access to other scientists with relevant expertise. Roman Yushkov and the AES brought them into broader social activist networks, in Perm and beyond. Finally, the Perm Civic Chamber, headed by Igor Averkiev, acted as a mediator between the resistance movement and the regional authorities. Yet, in spite of all its complexity and sophistication, this activist coalition was unable to stop the missile destruction. Over the five years that they fought it, activists got the full measure of the institutional degradation that the Russian state has been undergoing during the last two decades. Their experience gives hope, but also paints a
very sobering picture of what it takes to push for social democratization in present-day Russia.

6.1.2.1 Pre-History (1996-2003): First and Second Coming of Missiles to Perm

The missile destruction program has severely tested Perm’s newly acquired regional democratic capacity against the traditional ways in which the Russian state has excluded its citizens from important decision-making: monopoly on information and complete lack of transparency in the name of national interests and military secrecy. The process through which four military factories within the city of Perm were eventually chosen as “the SS-24 destruction facility” had two phases. The first one (1996-1998) has been shaped by the actions of Yuriy Trutnev, a prominent regional businessman who made the missiles issue the centerpiece of the first competitive election campaign for Perm’s mayor office in 1996. The transition from appointed to elected heads of regional and local executives in Russia was not simultaneous in all the 89 subjects of federation, and the 1996 mayor elections were the landmark of regional democratic transition in Perm. Trutnev presented himself as the herald of “new capitalist-era politics” and built his platform in opposition to the “old party cadres” that have dominated the regional and municipal executives. The main target of Trutnev’s criticism was Gennadiy Igumnov, a regional Party boss and union official who was appointed governor of Perm region by presidential decree in January of 1996. That year, the Federal Space and Aviation Agency (Roskosmos) was deciding which region to designate for the program of ICBM
and the rumor had it that Igumnov had lobbied in Moscow for Perm to be chosen. His major motivation was the significant amount of money that was to come from both federal Russian funds and the American contribution made through the CTR program.

Trutnev’s campaign first brought the issue to public attention, and he won the support of Perm’s voters by denouncing Igumnov for enriching himself and the military at the expense of people’s health and safety and by promising that, as a mayor, he would not permit such a program to be carried out in Perm. Once he was elected, Trutnev continued to capitalize on the popular mobilization around the missiles issue: in 1997 he spearheaded the campaign for a city-wide referendum. This and other efforts on behalf of the citizens paid back three years later, when Trutnev won the first competitive

32 Very little reliable information is publically available about the development and siting of this program, because the agencies in charge deliberately shrouded it in secrecy. What follows is my attempt to piece together the likely course of events based on available journalistic accounts. Neither the journalists, nor the activists have ever seen the actual texts of the decrees and agreements mentioned below. The destruction of ICBMs was mandated by the START-1 treaty, which was signed by the US and Russia in 1991 and went into force in 1994. The enabling legislation followed in the form of a framework decree that was issued by the government of Russian Federation (№548, 25.05.1994) and approved the Federal program of armament utilization (destruction) for the years 1995-2000. This decree did not yet contain either the details of the destruction procedure to be used, or the designation of particular regions and industrial facilities where this program was to be carried out (Veselkova, 16.09.2003). In May 1997, the federal government issued another decree, which authorized the construction of a special installation for the destruction of ICBMs in Russia. That installation was to be provided by Lockheed Martin, an American company that developed a closed-stand technology for the burning-out of missiles. Evidently, by May 1997 or shortly afterwards, Roskosmos – the main executor for the START-1 treaty within the Russian Ministry of Defense – had already signed an agreement with Lockheed Martin for the provision of that technology, but the place where this installation was to be built most likely had not yet been chosen at that point (Kargopol’tseva, 18.12.1997).

33 By May 1997 Perm must have already been on the short list of sites under consideration, because at that time Igumnov and Trutnev received a letter from the deputy Minister of Economy Shapovaliants, which stated that Perm region was included into the Federal program of “weapon utilization” for 1995-2000. Veselkova, 16.09.2003; Fedorov, quoted in Katys, 19.01.2004.


35 This referendum never took place – in late 1997 city and regional courts ruled it to be unlawful, because ICBM elimination was a “federal issue” that could not be decided at the local level. Kargopol’tseva, 18.12.1997.
governor elections. Since late 1996 was also the time of regional parliamentary elections, other politicians also joined the anti-missile campaign. The resulting political turmoil made Roskosmos change its mind, and in the summer of 1998 the ICBM destruction program was reassigned from Perm to Votkinsk, the capital of the neighboring Republic of Udmurtia.\(^{36}\) Trutnev continued to champion the “anti-missile” cause from Perm: in 1999 he sent the president of Udmurtia a letter in which he urged him not to accept such a dangerous project.

After he was elected Perm’s governor in December 2000 and as it became gradually clear that Udmurtia was not likely to accept the ICBM destruction facility, Trutnev began to reverse his stance towards its siting in Perm. Governor Trutnev’s main reason for wanting to bring the ICBM destruction program back to Perm was probably similar to that of his predecessor, Igumnov. In its final form, the “Federal Program of ICBM RS-22\(^ {37}\) utilization in the city of Perm” had a total price tag of 6.7 billion rubles, from which 2 billion were to be contributed by the US through the CTR program.\(^ {38}\) As the mayor of Perm, Trutnev was unlikely to be a major player in determining the fate of...

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\(^{36}\) Votkinsk was chosen because it had a factory that since 1998 had been producing the SS-25 “Sickle” missiles (RS-12M or “Topol” in Russian nomenclature). The political and social reactions to the program in Udmurtia were remarkably similar to the ones in Perm. In January 1999, during a city-wide referendum, 95% of Votkinsk residents rejected the project. Although the results of this referendum were later declared invalid by the court on formal grounds – the location of the missile-burning facility was outside of the city limits, in the Votkinsk district – the preparation for the referendum has served as the focal point for the public resistance campaign, in which local politicians acquired significant amounts of political capital. Later that year, one of the most vocal opponents of the project, Valeriy Fridrikh, became Votkinsk’s first elected mayor. In October 2000, the missile issue became a major card in the first competitive elections for Udmurtia’s presidential post. In March 2002, the government of Udmurtia has issued a decree that “denied any possibility for the construction of solid-fuel missile destruction facility on the territory of the republic.” By that time, the construction of the ICBM elimination facility had already begun, and about half of the $52 million designated to this project was lost, to the great dismay of its US sponsors. See Litovkin, 17.08.2000; Safronov, 20.10.2002; Walker, May 2006; Bogdanova, June 2006.

\(^{37}\) RS-22 is the Russian nomenclature for SS-24 “Scalpel” missiles.

\(^{38}\) Khrustal’naya, 30.10.2006.
this money; becoming the regional governor turned him into number one decision-maker. Trutnev’s previous record on the issue made it imperative to hide this reversal from public and media scrutiny as completely as possible. The evidence later gathered by activists and journalists from indirect sources indicates that between 2001 and 2003 federal government officials and the US sponsors worked closely together with governor Trutnev and the directors of Perm’s four military enterprises to lay the groundwork for what became the “Federal Program of ICBM RS-22 utilization in the city of Perm.” This program was mandated by at least two federal government decrees (06.02.2002 and 30.12.2003); characteristically enough, Perm environmental activists could not find the texts of these decrees either in the electronic databases, or in “Rossiyskaya Gazeta” – the newspaper that publishes regular updates on all federal-level legislative activities.39

The program was to be carried out by four industrial plants, all located in the Kirov urban district, otherwise known as Zakamsk, separated from the rest of Perm by the Kama River. This site was the natural choice, since one of its many military enterprises, the Kirov factory, had been producing the solid-fuel inserts for the SS-24 “Skalpel” missiles and testing them on an open-air stand – a walled unpaved area the size of a hockey field – since the 1960s. Thus, all the stages of the missile destruction process could occur within one contiguous territory. The “Mashinostroitel” plant would bring the missiles in by railroad, dismantle them, and separate the fuel chamber from the body. The

fuel insert would then be burned out by NII PM,\textsuperscript{40} the construction bureau division of the Kirov factory, while the body would be burned in a pyrolysis furnace of the “Iskra” plant.

The negotiations between the directors of these four plants and the American sponsors of the ICBM elimination began back in 1996, but it appears that until about 2000 there was no agreement on the method by which the missiles were to be destroyed.\textsuperscript{41} Washington Group International (WGI), the US government’s contractor and chief negotiator, was advocating the burning of missiles – the method that the Pentagon did not endorse for the destruction of the American ICBM arsenal, because of its economic inefficiency. Instead, it recommended an alternative method – hydromonitor – that allows to recover many of the missile materials, which could then be used again in military production. Prior to 2000, there seems to have been significant support among the Russian military for choosing this option, which would require the US sponsors to finance the construction of a new facility, instead of retrofitting the one at the Kirov factory. However, since the Pentagon officials were not able to control the fate of the end products of missile destruction in Russia, they decided that it would be safer if Russia committed to a utilization method that would preclude any recycling of the missile materials into the military industry. Thus, from the late 1990s onwards, the US contractors expressed a strong preference for burning the Russian missiles out – a method that is much more economically inefficient and environmentally harmful than the hydromonitor technology.

\textsuperscript{40} This abbreviation stands for “Scientific Research Institute of Polymer Materials” – essentially a code name that has no direct bearing on the Institute’s main purpose, the production of solid fuel for ICBMs.

\textsuperscript{41} Veselkova, 16.09.2003; Mamatova, 30.08.2006.
There are two main ways to burn out ICBM fuel inserts: at open-air stands, with full emission of combustion products into the atmosphere, and at closed stands that allow to capture a significant portion of the combustion products and are much safer from the environmental point of view. By the mid-1990s, Lockheed Martin Corporation had designed a closed stand that allowed to burn missile engines out while capturing about 85% of combustion products. Meanwhile, the Kirov factory had been building its own version of the closed stand since the 1980s; when completed, this stand would replace the open-air burning. During its negotiations with the US proponents of the program, the Kirov factory management was evidently hoping to find a way to make WGI pay for finishing its version of the stand instead of installing the one designed by Lockheed Martin. When he was interviewed in 2006, the Kirov factory director bitterly commented that “the US money swam out of his hands” in 1996 because of these disagreements and the political turmoil which “forced the Americans to move the project site and the money to Udmurtia.” When the project came back to Perm, WGI was no longer willing to discuss the hydromonitor option, and the Russian military officials were made to understand that if they did not accept the burning technology offered by Lockheed

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43 Fedorov, quoted in Katys, 19.01.2004. Fedorov notes that the main reason for the construction of the closed stand was not environmental and public health concerns, but the desire to hide the ICBM burning events from American satellites.

The Kirov factory finally completed its closed stand in 2003; it was not designed to handle the burning of SS-22 fuel inserts that weigh over 48 tons. The extent to which it prevented air emissions from missile fuel combustion is unclear – the environmental activists could never find it out, since the military never agreed to disclose the composition of the missile fuel and of the emission cloud. The evidence gathered by activists shows that both open and closed stands were used for the missile burning in 2003-2005. In November 2005, the closed stand was either completely destroyed or suffered significant damage after an explosion; it is most likely that the missile burning only took place at the open stand for the remaining 2.5 years of the program.
44 Todoshchenko, quoted in Bogdanova, 2006.
Martin, they would have to finance the missile destruction all by themselves, without American help.\(^{45}\)

The final version of the program involved burning ICBMs in the middle of a large urban center in violation of all the relevant environmental, industrial safety, and public health laws. The program proponents knew that it was essential to maintain absolute secrecy during this preliminary stage, because there was absolutely no way to undertake such activities legally and with public consent. Since he was personally involved with the 1996-1998 resistance campaign, Trutnev knew all too well what kind of public outcry to expect once journalists and activists got wind of these preparations. Furthermore, this initial formulation stage was the best time for environmental activists and concerned citizens to block the implementation of the program by subjecting it to the public and expert control procedures mandated by the Law on environmental expert assessment\(^{46}\) and the Environmental impact assessment (EIA) provisions.\(^{47}\) These procedures have been the most effective legal levers for ensuring public access to environmental information and public participation in decision-making. However, they are much more effective at aborting environmentally damaging projects if they can be carried out before the program goes into operation.\(^{48}\) Since it would be much harder for the concerned public to stop the program once it started, all the efforts were made to keep it hidden all the way until the burning of the first missile. These efforts were not completely

\(^{45}\) Averkiev, 28.08.2004. He also point out that the definite shift in favor of burning seems to have taken place among the directors of Perm’s military enterprises after they made a WGI-sponsored visit to the US around the year 2000.


\(^{47}\) Appendix to Decree No.372 issued by the State Committee on Ecology (Goskomekologii), 16.05.2000.

\(^{48}\) Rozhina, 29.08.2006; Zlotnikova, 24.10.2006.
successful: the story was accidentally leaked to the press by a member of the US delegation that came to Perm in December 2002 to finalize all the arrangements.\textsuperscript{49} In early February 2003, “Perm News,” a regional daily, broke the story thereby giving the environmental activists a chance to begin mobilizing several months before the burning of the first missile on September 15\textsuperscript{th}.

The burning of the first missile took place one month after Senator Lugar visited Perm to inspect the Kirov factory and other plants involved in the missile destruction.\textsuperscript{50} The residents of Zakamsk heard a characteristic explosion noise that they knew was associated with the burning of missile fuel inserts, because they have been hearing it periodically ever since the NII PM began its operations in the 1960s. The emissions cloud that came from the territory of the Kirov factory hung over the entire city of Perm for several days. The Union for Chemical Safety and the Anarcho-Ecological Resistance were not caught by this event unawares: they learned about it “through unofficial channels” during Lugar’s visit and had immediately begun to prepare their first series of protests. The goal was to attract the maximum media attention to the fact that the burning had begun and to force the authorities explain to citizens what was going on. After the second protest meeting was held in October, the project advocates saw that the public outcry was not going to subside by itself and launched a counterattack. “It was a powerful offensive on all fronts: the vice-governor, the director of the NII PM, Professor [Yakov]

\textsuperscript{49} Bogdanova, 2006. Interview with Olga Todoshchenko, chief editor of “Perm News,” the regional daily that broke the story in February 2003.

Weisman all made public statements calling us extremists and terrorist accomplices. [They also explained] that missile burning was absolutely safe – on a closed stand, with no air emissions of any kind – and very useful [for the economy] – [that it would bring in] employment and investment. All of this was presented in such a way that Perm residents, who have heard nothing about this problem before, believed it and took no action to stop it. We had a very hard time [acting in this kind of environment]."

The person who stood at the origin of grassroots mobilization in 2003 was Lidia Popova. By the time that she returned to Perm from Mirnyi in the early 2002, she already had the experience of organizing grassroots resistance and creating a local UCS chapter. She was told that the chemical waste from Maradykovo was supposed to be processed at one of Perm’s military plants, and this made her eager to create a UCS chapter in Perm as well in order to be able to monitor the situation better. Fedorov helped her to get oriented by giving her the names of the same three Perm State University researchers – Yushkov, Voronov, and Sretensky – who have already been helping Rozhina. Once Yushkov had informed her about the impending missile program, Popova’s need to create a grassroots activist organization in Perm grew more urgent. As she searched for allies, Popova met Svetlana Rozhina, who moved to Perm from Yugo-Kamsk in 2003, and Valentina Ogloblina, who had already made herself known among Perm’s activists by initiating the

51 The chairman of the nature protection department at Perm State Technological University, who has been the chief scientist advocate of the project since 1997. He is well-known by Perm environmental activists for siding with the authorities in the promotion of environmentally risky projects. Rozhina first encountered him in 2001, when he acted as a proponent of the chemical waste depository in Taezhnyi.
52 Popova, 28.08.2006.
53 Popova’s personal story can be found in Section 5.2.1.
54 Popova, 28.08.2006.
campaign against the logging of Akulovo urban forest. Rozhina brought to this alliance the experience she gained during the anti-Lukoil campaigns in Yugo-Kamsk and Pavlovo. Ogloblina, a resident of Zakamsk, helped to bridge the divide that existed between the residents of the Kirov district – those most affected by missile burning – and other Perm residents who have remained more aloof from the missile problem.55

6.1.2.2 The Laws That Did not Work: Environmental Expert Assessment Process

The first wave of public protests in September-October 2003 helped the activists to raise alarm about the missile program and to encourage the most critically minded journalists to begin systematically questioning the program in the regional and local media.56 At the same time, even though the opposition to the program came from only a

55 Gauging the feelings of Zakamsk and Perm residents about the missile destruction program has been a major concern of the grassroots activists from the very beginning. Since September 2003, they have been using the protest meeting format in order to distribute information to any residents in attendance and to ask them what they knew and thought about the situation. In June 2004, Olga Miriasova, a researcher from the Institute of Sociology, came to Perm from Moscow and conducted a public opinion poll, which showed that, one year after the missile destruction had started, most people knew very little about the program and its possible consequences. Two thirds of the respondents had either not heard about the program or did not want to speak about it with the interviewer. Most people who have heard about it, could not distinguish between the “routine” burning of faulty fuel inserts produced at the Kirov factory and the special, US-financed program of missile destruction that began in September 2003. Yet, almost 79% of the respondents had negative attitudes towards missile destruction in Perm: they wanted it either to be performed outside of the city limits, or postponed “until safe technologies could be developed.” Zakamsk residents were overall better informed and had better-defined opinions about the issue than the residents of other Perm districts.) The survey was based on a stratified random sample of Perm residents (Zakamsk region was weighted) and was conducted over the phone. The sample size for the first question: “Have you heard about missile burning in Zakamsk?” was 1200; the rest of the survey was administered to the 400 that gave positive answers to this question. Miriasova’s report (29.06.2004) has not been published; I received a copy of it from Popova in August 2006.

56 Three Perm journalists have consistently given voice to the opponents of the missile project in the media: Aleksei Klochikhin, Roman Yushkov, and Raisa Mamatova. Klochikhin, the Permskie Novosti reporter, broke the original story and published a series of subsequent articles under the special rubric created for the issue – “The missiles come back.” His articles brought together much of the available information about the high morbidity rates in Zakamsk and Perm, especially among children. His reports on the key events, such as the public hearings in June 2006, and the course of the legal controversies, gave considerably more detailed and adequate picture of the activists’ arguments and actions than the rest of the printed media. Yushkov regularly published updates on the missile situation in two electronic NGO-supported media: the
few vociferous individuals and organizations and clearly had no mass base, the plant managers and the state agencies felt threatened by it and stepped up their efforts to promote the missile program and to discredit the opposition in the media. The leading activists found themselves in need of reliable public health data and careful program analysis in order to show that their criticisms had a solid foundation. Since the media space was dominated by their opponents, the activists had to use whatever little access they had to it very effectively, if they wanted to win the contest for general public support.

The activists used the public environmental expert assessment (PENEX)\(^{57}\) as a framework both for gathering the maximum amount of information about the program and for impeding its execution. This instrument forms part of the environmental impact evaluation process mandated by the Law on environmental expert assessment (1995) and the supporting Environmental impact assessment provisions (2000).\(^{58}\) These laws are based on “the presumption of potential environmental danger” arising from any business

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\(^{57}\) This is the translation of the Russian term общественная экологическая экспертиза (ОЭЭ).

\(^{58}\) For the overview of these two laws, see Krasnov (2006).
project or state program. They mandate a series of steps through which the environmental soundness of the projects is evaluated. The project proponent is required to prepare an environmental impact assessment, which must then be evaluated by an expert commission through the process of state environmental expert assessment (SEEA). A positive decision of this commission is required before the proposed activity can receive the necessary permits from the federal environmental control agencies and the construction can begin. Public participation in this evaluation process takes the form of public hearings, at which the EIA document is presented and discussed, and the public environmental expert assessment process, which allows concerned citizens to conduct their own investigation of the project by forming an alternative expert commission, whose conclusions and recommendations are included into the packet of documents that the developer presents for the SEEA. Thus, the state and the public environmental expert assessments are complementary processes, but the public assessment only takes place if there is a citizen organization that is concerned enough to conduct it, while the state assessment was obligatory before 2007 and could only be circumvented in a very narrowly defined set of cases.

Since the PEEA must be initiated by a registered NGO, Rozhina registered her informal group, “Ecological self-defense,” specifically for this purpose, and filed the

59 EIA Provisions, Section 2.1.
60 The Russian abbreviation is OVOS (Оценка воздействия на окружающую среду).
61 The original Russian term is государственная экологическая экспертиза (ГЭЭ).
62 Popova’s organization, the local chapter of the Union for Chemical Safety, has no bank account or juridical personality. She chose to keep her organization informal, since her group lacked the critical mass of resources (both human and material) to justify a formal structure and organization maintenance expenses. Since Rozhina, Popova, and other Perm grassroots leaders support each other in all campaigns,
first PEEA application related to the missile destruction program in October 2003. The experts were mostly recruited from Perm State University and all worked on a voluntary basis; four people participated from Moscow, Fedorov among them. The PEEA process was greatly complicated by the fact that the missile destruction program included seven separate projects that were carried out by four different entities. Thus, to begin with, the activists and the experts needed to obtain names and documentation for all the component projects. This turned out to be extremely difficult to accomplish: the directors of all four plants and their staffs did all they could to drag their feet and did not furnish the needed information until they were forced to do so by court orders. For the open stand – the most hazardous part of the program – the activists could not even get the project name until the end of 2004.\(^{63}\) In the end, three out of seven project components were subjected to PEEA,\(^{64}\) and all three expert committees gave negative evaluations.\(^{65}\) The experts summarized all the violations and shortcomings of the program, and their conclusions were sent to all the relevant state agencies. While the PEEA process had improved the activists’ access to information about the program, which was extremely difficult to get, it could not be used to stop its execution, because it only acquires legal force if it is complemented by the SEEA process.

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\(^{64}\) These were: the pyrolysis furnace at the Iskra plant, where the missile bodies were destroyed and the open and closed stands for burning missile engines at NII PM. Popova (2006)

\(^{65}\) In addition, the activists also conducted the public assessment of the only EIA document available – an overall evaluation of the missile destruction program prepared at the request of “Mashinostroitel!” – one of the four military plants. According to the expert commission, this document “does not correspond to normative standards” and is more akin to “emotional propaganda of the inadequately justified missile fuel burning scheme than to a scientific evaluation.” See Periscop, 24.06.2006.
The proponents of the missile destruction program have sabotaged the environmental impact assessment process at all its main stages. The four military plants in charge of the program components did not prepare the necessary EIA statements and did not conduct public hearings before the program began.66 If the program were to proceed in accordance with environmental laws, three sets of documents would have to be subjected to SEEA before the burning of the first missile: the “Federal Program of ICBM SS-22 missile destruction in the city of Perm,” the missile-burning technology used by NII PM, and ten specific construction and reconstruction projects that were undertaken by the four industrial plants in order to implement the Program.67 Only three projects – construction of missile warehouses and the reconstruction of open and closed missile burning stands – underwent this process at all.68 In the case of open and closed burning stands, the assessment was retrospective instead of prospective.69 The state expert commission held its meetings in Moscow between March and August of 2005 and gave post-factum approval to the closed stand that had already been in operation for 1.5 years. The results of the open stand assessment were never announced at all. The head of the commission, Leonid Zabelin, had close professional ties with the Kirov factory and

66 At the activists’ insistent requests, public hearings about the program finally took place in July 2006. The military plant workers were forced to attend them by their employers and made statements in support of the program. The hearings were orchestrated and conducted in a way that deliberately marginalized and ostracized the program opponents, who nevertheless succeeded in turning what was meant to be an acclamation event into a heated debate. Moreover, they managed to make use of the hearings to uncover the full extent of illegalisities associated with the program: the fact that NII PM failed to present any of the permitting documents requested by the activists was reported by the press. See Klochikhin, 07.07.2006; Chesnokov, 03.07.2006; Bogdanova and Luchnikov, 04.07.2006.
68 SEEA of the missile warehouse construction took place in 2003. The project was approved in spite of the fact that its documentation did not include any emergency response plans for possible accidents during missile transportation and storage in the immediate vicinity of residential neighborhoods. Popova (2006).
69 “State expert assessment gave thumbs up” in Mestnoye Vremia, 24-30.08.2005.
thus could not be considered an “independent expert.”70 The documents presented by NII PM were incomplete; in particular, they did not include minutes of public hearings and citizen comments, because NII PM gave no opportunities for public participation. Scientists Fedorov and Romanov, who attended the SEEA sessions as observers and representatives of the public, were denied access to a significant part of the materials under evaluation, such as the environmental impact statement prepared by NII PM and the complete list of compounds likely to be emitted during open-air burning of missile fuel.71 In 2006, the public expert committee that was evaluating the overall EIA of the program72 was denied access to the full text of the SEEA resolution.73

Unfortunately, this situation is a typical example of what happens to the SEEA process in practice. According to Karpov, whose EKOM-Center in St Petersburg specializes on enabling the citizens to defend their environmental rights through the EEA processes, corruption is a systemic feature of the SEEA process, because it is “absolutely not transparent.” “The appointment of experts and the decision-making mechanisms they use are completely closed and impossible [for an outsider] to understand.” Ironically, this insulation does not protect the experts from outside pressure: experts get paid very little for their work, but their decisions are made about projects worth many million of rubles.74

71 Katys, 30.03.2005.
72 See footnote 63.
73 Bogdanova, interview with Roman Yuskov, June 2006.
When they chose the environmental impact assessment process as one of their main action frames, the activists had two goals in mind. They wanted to make it legally impossible for the program to continue by demonstrating that it was based on grave and multiple legal violations. They also intended to use the EIA process as a weapon against the blanket argument of military secrecy that the program proponents used to deny them access to just about any kind of relevant information. They found that while the EIA process was widely considered to be the most effective legal mechanism available to citizens for self-protection from environmental abuses, it fell far short of helping them, because in order to operate properly it requires stronger public dimension of the state and rule of law than those available in Perm. This is an especially sobering discovery, given that Perm is one of the least authoritarian Russian regions.

6.1.2.3 The Private and Public Faces of Information

In five years of gathering testimonies of military plant workers and public health officials and of researching press articles and specialized literature, the activists and the scientific experts that supported them acquired a very detailed idea of the kinds of damage that past missile burning had caused in Zakamsk and in the city of Perm as a whole. However, they could neither quantify this information, nor support it with systematic public health data, because neither the military enterprises, nor the public health agencies had conducted regular monitoring and because, as the controversy grew, these actors did everything they could to limit the activists’ access to whatever little data was available. According to the activists, the causal chain that made them oppose the missile destruction program ran as follows: the chemical cloud that is emitted during
missile engine burning episodes spreads over the entire city of Perm; its maximum impact is felt in Zakamsk (Kirov district) – the portion of the city that houses all the military plants involved in the process. The impact of missile burning is anything but benign, because, after receiving such emission clouds for forty years, Zakamsk has abnormally high morbidity and chronic illness levels. The nature of these public health consequences can be traced directly to the properties of the compounds emitted during missile fuel burning.

The activists’ predicament was complicated by the fact that missile burning is by far not only industrial process that contributes to environmental pollution in Zakamsk. The list of air pollutants emitted in the Kirov district that the activists obtained from the Regional office of nature protection (GUPR) has 225 compounds, all of them harmful for human health. The regional division of Rosgidromet – the main agency in charge of monitoring air pollution in Russia – only measures about ten pollutants out of this long list. It does not measure the most dangerous products – such as cyanic acid, dioxins, and

75 In the kindergarten closest to the Kirov plant the frequency of child illnesses doubled over the first year of missile burning (2003-2004). The kindergarten nurse who gave this information to the activists later lost her job. Svetlana Vagner, quoted in Katys, 23.08.2004. See also Zimovsky, 09.04.2009.

76 Dioxin emissions from missile burning are likely to be the most dangerous long-term public health consequence of the program. This issue became a major controversy, as the NII PM director Anatoliy Ponik, accompanied by the main scientific advocate of the project, Yakov Weissman, denied that dioxins formed part of the emissions mixture, all the while refusing to disclose the complete chemical composition of the missile fuel being burned and arguing that emissions monitoring for dioxins was useless, because there were no threshold limit values set nationwide for these compounds. On the other side of the debate, Lev Fedorov argued that dioxin pollution had been a long-term issue in Perm, given the nature of its industrial complex, and that alone was reason enough for the state public health agencies to invest in a dioxin monitoring program. Presently, Russian only has one such program: in Bashkiria, where a major dioxin laboratory was built and comprehensive monitoring introduced in the aftermath of the 1990 dioxin contamination of the drinking water. Mamatova, 02.06.2005.

77 Popova, 28.08.2006.
furans – under the pretext of its limited budget.\(^78\) Rosgidromet’s schedule of air sampling was ill-suited to capture the emissions from missile burning events: the missiles were often burned at night, when no air samples are taken.\(^79\) Thus, even if good public health and emissions monitoring data were available, it would have been extraordinarily difficult to trace the harm back to individual industrial processes. The activists were well aware of this and framed their argument as follows: “we do not want the missile burning program to take place in Zakamsk, because this zone is already overloaded with toxic pollution. There is no missile destruction process that results in zero toxic emissions, therefore, this program will inevitably increase the existing toxic load and exacerbate the public health situation. State officials in charge of the program are aware of all this and therefore are knowingly violating the law by permitting it to happen.”

The rhetoric of military secrecy made it literally impossible for activists to present their case credibly and completely in the courts and in front of the general public. In particular, a major controversy has developed around the chemical composition of the emission cloud, which is determined by the composition of the missile fuel and the characteristics of the burning process. The heads of the military enterprises do their best to block public access to this information. They did not allow inspectors environmental control agencies to enter the factory grounds, and therefore the activists have to rely on indirect signs and on the information provided by former and current factory workers to know exactly what compounds are burned and how. The heads of military enterprises

\(^{78}\) Katys, 23.08.2004.
\(^{79}\) Katys, 19.01.2004.
dismissed the charges based on the activists’ deductions, arguing that the precise fuel formula is a state secret.\footnote{Katys, 30.03.2005; Periscop, 13.07.2007.}

The problem was not that there was really no way for the activists to obtain this information: Fedorov’s research demonstrates that the fuel composition can be deduced from publically available sources. The issue was that unless the military enterprises and the state public health agencies publically acknowledged the validity of these deductions, the activists had no institutional levers to stop the execution of the project. Those in charge of missile destruction did their best to shroud the whole process in secrecy precisely because it allowed them to dismiss citizen lawsuits and accusations in the media on the grounds that “the general public does not know what it is walking about, because there is no official information available on this matter.” Thus, in the five years that the missile-burning program lasted, the activists were unable to break the vicious circle: the project promoters charged them with not having any credible data to show that the project caused harm, and the activists could not produce such data on their own, because, in order to be credible, the data had to come from the state, and the relevant state agencies refused to produce it, since they had a vested interest in the project.

The activists’ predicament in this particular case stems from a much broader problem: in order to prevent environmental harm coming from state sources, environmental activists most urgently need a working and capable state. Yet the kind of state that tends to cause major environmental harm normally has very low capacity in all the relevant spheres, such as emissions monitoring and law enforcement. This has
definitely been the case in Perm: during the entire duration of the missile program, Rostekhnadzor and other environmental control agencies were not allowed to enter the territory of the four plants for inspections, so the residents and the activists were the only ones documenting day-to-day violations, based on the information given to them by the plant workers. These agencies are required by law to carry out inspections in response to citizen complaints. If violations are found, they have the power to bring lawsuits and request the project termination through court. However, it usually takes an extraordinary amount of pressure on the part of concerned citizens and NGOs to get the control agencies to fulfill their duties. Askhat Kayumov from Nizhniy Novgorod speaks for more than just his region “Even when they are given full information about the violations, the most that these agencies will do is to impose a minimum penalty on the offender. [In our region] there has not been a single case of control agencies suing the developers over environmental violations. We still have not figured out how to make these agencies comply with the corresponding legal requirements.” In Perm, it took a letter from the region’s governor to the regional Prosecutor’s office in January 2006 to enable Rostekhnadzor officials to carry out their duties. The result was a lawsuit against the head of NII PM that remains the only case of holding the missile program managers directly accountable for at least some of the violations.

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82 Popova, 28.08.2006.
84 In an interview given to Aleksei Selunin (26.05.2006), Roman Yushkov gives very revealing details about this episode: “There was a Rostekhnadzor official by the name of Viktor Nazarov, who effectively stood behind this court case and pushed the prosecutor’s office to conduct the inspection. Nazarov spearheaded Rostekhnadzor’s effort to push all relevant agencies to move missile destruction outside of the city limits. The result of all this is that Nazarov no longer works at Rostekhnadzor.”
Even highly motivated and mobilized citizenry cannot monitor toxic emissions on its own: it is too expensive and requires too much resources and special knowledge to be carried out by grassroots organizations. Even if Perm activists, who could count on the help of highly qualified scientists from Perm and from Moscow, were capable of putting together a comprehensive air quality monitoring program, the problem would not be resolved: the factory management would not allow them to carry it out. In 2007, when Roman Yushkov was giving an interview to two journalists from Ekaterinburg who were making a documentary about the Perm missiles controversy on the street in front of the Kirov plant, all three were taken into police custody on the request of the plant management. They were told that “the Kirov plant was a closed facility and video recording was not permitted in its vicinity.” The management did not see any inconsistency between the factory’s closed status and the fact that the video recording was taking place on a public street that is daily used by pedestrians and is on a public bus line.\(^{85}\)

6.1.2.4 The Legal Battle: How Much is a Precedent Worth?

The ultimate irony of the missile destruction in Perm was that the activists found multiple ways to demonstrate its illegality, the courts acknowledged them to be right, but the burning of the missiles continued unchecked. On October 4\(^{th}\) 2005 Perm region appellate court announced that the entire program of missile utilization in Perm was

illegal.\textsuperscript{86} This decision, later confirmed by three other courts, included a long list of violations, the first and foremost of which were the absence of the SEEA of the Perm missile destruction program and the fact that NII PM lacked permits for toxic air emissions that resulted from missile burning on an open stand.\textsuperscript{87} In theory, the burning of missiles on both open and closed stands had to be stopped after these court decisions, but it was continued nevertheless – there was no state agent powerful and committed enough to stop it.

Protected by the blanket of secrecy and by the complicity of the regional executive authorities, the military officials in charge of the burning process felt complete impunity, which led them to disregard even basic safety measures. On November 4\textsuperscript{th} 2005, there was an explosion on the closed stand, because the missile engine that was burned was several times heavier than the maximum weight for which the stand was designed (48 tons instead of 18.7 tons).\textsuperscript{88} On November 9\textsuperscript{th}, 11\textsuperscript{th}, and 12\textsuperscript{th}, three more missile engines were burned on the open stand. Two weeks later, the regional office of Rostekhnadzor ordered NII PM to stop using both stands, but Zakamsk residents registered another missile burning event just a week later. Since the closed stand sustained heavy damage during the explosion, there could be no doubt that the burnings

\textsuperscript{86} Paradoxically, the lawsuit that prompted this decision was brought in by the NII PM against Rostekhnadzor, whose air emissions permit it found too stringent to make it possible for the NII PM to do what was necessary under the federal disarmament program (Derbenev, December 2005).
\textsuperscript{87} NII PM did have such a permit until July 2005, at which point it expired, and Rostekhnadzor refused to renew it. See Selunin, 29.05.2006; Zimbovsky, March 2006.
\textsuperscript{88} Antonov, 14.11.2005.
over the next few months were conducted on the open stand, with the full release of the toxic substances into the atmosphere.89

Over the first two years of missile burning, the activists learned that they would never be able to extract enough information from the plant management and state officials for proving the link between health damages in Zakamsk and air emissions from missile burning, past or present. Nonetheless, Valentina Ogloblina, a retired woman from Zakamsk who became a grassroots activist through her efforts to protest urban forests from land-use change, and Lidia Popova decided that the legal road was worth pursuing and filed two separate claims for moral damages.90 Both involved multiple defendants,91 who did all they could to obstruct the process by not coming to court sessions and discrediting both plaintiffs in the press at every opportunity.92 Nevertheless, decisions in favor of both activists were reached within three months of each other in 200693 by the same judge of Leninskiy district court, Kristina Shabunina, who consistently came out on the activists’ side in several landmark environmental cases.94 Yet, the damage payments awarded were puny: 5000 rubles (US $185) instead of 1 million that the plaintiffs demanded. Furthermore, these positive decisions were promptly appealed by NII PM in a

89 This episode was one of the very few times when the Hydrometeorological Service lab – the state air quality monitoring agency – registered air emissions in excess of critical safety thresholds. Thus, after the burning on November 25th it measured concentrations of hydrochloric acid that were almost 20 times greater than the critical threshold value. See Yushkov, August 2007; Zimbovsky, September 2005.
90 Popova filed her claim in late 2004; Ogloblina followed suit in March 2005.
91 Popova’s case had ten defendants: the four factories, Rosaviakosmos, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Perm regional government.
92 Popova, 28.08.2006 and 08.09.2006. Ogloblina, 30.08.2006.
94 These decisions include the order to stop construction and restore the forested land in Akulovskiy urban forest (August 2006, Ogloblina was the plaintiff), the invalidation of Perm’s 2004 general plan which allowed construction in Akulovo and other urban forests (April 2007), and the defense of AES activists against libel and press discreditation by Lukoil after their first protest march in 2003. See Anokhina, 2007.
different court, which reversed the original ruling. Both sides clearly saw this lawsuit to be setting an important precedent: the size of the compensation hardly mattered to anyone involved, but the fact of it being or not being awarded was a matter of principle.

Kristina Shabunina – the judge whose professionalism and ability to resist pressure gave so much hope to all Perm’s environmental activists – suddenly withdrew her application for a life-long federal judge appointment and left her post in August 2007. The activists were ready to organize a support campaign for her, but Shabunina denied that she was under any pressure to resign. The timing of this resignation and the fact that she accepted a judge’s assistant position, effectively breaking her career, left all Perm’s activists with a strong impression that there was more to the story than Shabunina was willing to admit in public. This story illustrates the typical predicament of a judge who tries to keep her professional ethic and commitment in the context of growing court dependence and of the general tendency of judges not to accept environmental cases brought against powerful state and business agents.

One of the important positive consequences of Popova’s and Ogloblina’s lawsuits was that they paved the way for similar demands to be made by Zakamsk residents themselves a year later. The plaintiffs had trouble getting these lawsuits accepted by the courts, and so far there had been no resolution of the cases. Nevertheless, for Popova the filing of these lawsuits was a milestone event, because it showed that her efforts to mobilize those residents who were most affected by the missile program were beginning

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95 Yushkov, August 2007; Zimbovsky, 24.01.2007.
96 See Anokhina 2007.
97 Yushkov, August 2007.
to bear fruit. Since the missile program is but one of the many environmentally hazardous activities that takes place in Zakamsk, it is more than likely that the resistance experience that the Zakamsk informal group has acquired between 2004 and 2008 will be much needed in the future. Popova, Ogoblina, and Rozhina all see their experience with the legal system as very important training for a grassroots activist to have, regardless of whether or not the lawsuits can be won.\textsuperscript{99}

\textbf{6.1.2.5 Keeping the Pressure on: Direct Action}

Anarcho-Ecological Resistance (AES) occupied a very special place within the anti-missile coalition, because of its links with Perm’s anti-globalist and radical Leftist activists on the one hand and its connections with nation-wide eco-anarchist networks on the other. These links have significantly increased its direct action potential and also allowed it to make the anti-missile campaign part of several broader streams of social activism in Perm and beyond. Major protest marches organized under slogans such as “Take back the city” (2004) and “Anti-capitalism” (2005) brought together Perm residents frustrated by urban land-use changes, public transport employees, radical youth and labor organizations, and social environmentalists. All these actors saw themselves focusing on different aspects of the same general problem – absence of functional democratic institutions. In Perm, as elsewhere in Russia, this problem is manifested as lack of transparency and accountability in urban and regional decision-making, erosion of the public dimension of the state through the complete subordination of public goals to

\textsuperscript{99} Popova, 28.08.2006; Ogoblina, 29.08.2006; Rozhina, 29.08.2006.
private interests of individual officials and their allies in the functioning of state institutions, and the growing dependence of public media and courts on the main nodes of economic and political power.

The AES members also spearheaded the organization of the environmental protest camp in Zakamks in the summer of 2004. This camp became part of the yearly summer protest camp series held by the nation-wide eco-anarchist networks – “Rainbow Keepers” and “EcoDefense” – at the sites of most pressing environmental problems since the early 1990s. The decision to use this action mode in Perm was taken at the national conference of radical greens that assembled in Nizhniy Novgorod in March 2004. The main organizers included members of the “Autonomous Action” (AD) network of anarcho-libertarian groups (created in 2002) and of the anti-war “Movement against violence” that arose in the mid-1990s in response to Chechen War. The three months of the camp’s operations were crucial to the activists’ ability to mobilize the residents of Zakamks, since it provided a physical focal point for regular interactions between those living closest to the plants and grassroots organizers from Perm (Union for Chemical Safety, Ecological Self-Defense). During the operation of this camp, protest meetings were regularly organized, information was distributed about the project and its likely health consequences, and groundwork was laid for the creation of an informal group in Zakamsk, which took place by the end of 2004.

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101 Katys, 23.08.2004.
The operation of the protest camp under the very walls of the Kirov factory was a huge thorn in the side of the military plants management and of Perm’s regional and city authorities. Officials of various levels would periodically accept the activists’ invitations to negotiate, but they talked around the main issues, worrying little about the fact that their story was full of contradictions. Sometimes the activists were told that the different components of the missile program had been duly subjected to the EEA procedures and received all the necessary permits. At other times, the officials assured the activists that the burning of missile fuel inserts was already suspended and would not resume until the relevant permitting was completed. The activists knew that this was cheap talk, because they were given no official documents to confirm any of these versions and could personally observe the multiple burning events that took place at the Kirov factory while the camp was in session.  

The authorities made multiple and varied “prophylaxis attempts” to persuade the camp dwellers to refrain from radical actions. As these attempts proved unsuccessful, police violence was used to disperse some of the more visible protest events sponsored by the camp. On July 16th, several activists were beaten and detained by the city police during the first protest meeting in Zakamsk – other meeting participants soon managed to

102 The members of the Union for Chemical Safety have organized a system of citizen inspections to record all available information about each burning event in a standard format; these “citizen inspection acts” were then aggregated and submitted to Rostekhnadzor with the goal of pushing it to inspect NII PM grounds. Faced with the reluctance of both Rostekhnadzor and Hydromet to comply with their monitoring and inspection duties, the grassroots activists did all they could to replace these state control agencies in the task of gathering systematic information and presenting it in the most credible and “official” way possible. They also strove to compensate for the lack of action on the part of public health and emergency response agencies by issuing detailed instructions telling residents what to do and where to turn to obtain medical help during the burning events.
free the detainees. On August 10th, special riot police (OMON) was used to disperse the meeting in front of the regional administration in Perm. It was a deliberate and excessive display of violence clearly meant to intimidate all meeting participants and to put an end to such protests in the future. Yushkov and 13 other activists were taken into custody, where they were beaten and tortured; they were denied medical aid and the right to have their trial open to public and journalists. Two years later, in March 2006 Yushkov was able to obtain two court decisions that declared illegal two of his many detentions – in Feburary and in August 2004 – and awarded him moral damages. Yet, neither the municipal and riot policemen directly involved, nor the city police chief, Konstantin Strogiy, who gave the illegal order to arrest Yushkov and other activists in August, bore any responsibility for their actions.

6.1.2.6 Conclusions

The activists were unable to prevent the completion of this program, but they did everything in their power not to let its promoters to carry it out quietly. The available information about the likely composition of air emissions that accompanied the burnings and their health consequences indicates that Perm residents will experience the peak of the negative impacts within the next decade – the full human and environmental price for

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105 SEU, 26.03.2006; Zimbovsky, 24.01.2007. The stand-off between Yushkov and Strogiy continued in the summer 2006, during the protest campaign against the logging and burning of Gaiva urban forest. This episode was also marked by the attack on Aleksey Chernykh, the Gaiva activists’ lawyer and by the involvement of criminal elements that dispersed the resident protests together with the police. See Periscop, 22.06.2006; Katys, 27.06.2006; ECO-HR bulletin No.2336 (27.12.2006).
this program has not yet been paid, and no state authorities have demonstrated any willingness to confront this issue.

In spite of their best efforts, grassroots leaders and the AES were unable to achieve mass mobilization of residents either in Zakamsk or in Perm as a whole. Given the high background levels of industrial pollution in Perm and the highly contested nature of the information about its environmental and public health consequences that is available to the general public, it is no surprise that citizen mobilization around the missile issue did not go far beyond the activist networks. However, the missile campaign was by no means the work of a few “professional radicals,” as the program proponents and the loyal press were trying to make everyone believe. First, it must be noted that the resistance campaign was truly initiated “from below” – by grassroots activists. In fact, professional activists who became involved in this controversy have repeatedly emphasized that the grassroots activists were more daring and have bitten off much more than they could chew, because the problem was simply too complex for any resistance campaign to be successful. When Roman Yushkov entered the battle in 2003, at the insistent request of Lidia Popova, he had deep misgivings about what could be achieved through civic activism – the forces were too unequal: “This was big politics, at the Bush-Putin level. I suspected that we would be banging our heads against a stone wall. Essentially, that is exactly what ended up happening.”106 In 2006, as the missile burning continued in spite of all efforts, Averkiev argued that the issue of toxic pollution in

106 Bogdanova, 2006. Interview with Roman Yushkov.
Zakamsk had plenty of other aspects, around which the residents could be more successfully mobilized than around the missiles issue.\(^{107}\)

However, it is important to point out that this inability to choose battles strategically is one of the key characteristics of grassroots activism in general and of first-time grassroots mobilization in particular. Popova did not “choose” to tackle the missiles issue after a careful evaluation of what Perm’s environmental problems were and where she could make most difference. Instead, the issue found her and seemed urgent: she felt that there was still time to stop the program from ever coming into being and causing enormous harm, but that there was no time to lose. Her previous experience of working and living in places where illness and death from toxic pollution was the rule of the day told her that she could not miss the chance of preventing another project of this kind of being carried out. To the honor of Yushkov and Averkiev, whose greater experience told them that this campaign would be most unlikely to succeed, they nevertheless supported Popova and other grassroots activists in good faith and until the bitter end.

Another key feature of the anti-missile resistance was that the former Kirov factory workers constituted the most active fraction of the “general public” that the grassroots activists managed to mobilize. The fact that Popova and her allies managed to mobilize primarily these “old and sick people” bear witness to the hostility of the context in which they had to act. The former factory workers were easier to mobilize and capable of greater commitment, precisely because they were most immediately affected and knew more about the missiles through their work.

\(^{107}\) Averkiev, June 2006.
6.1.3 A Tale of Two Forests: Akulovo and Gaiva Campaigns in Perm

These two urban forests are located in the heavily industrialized Zakamsk region on the right shore of Kama river that divides the city of Perm into two parts. Akulovo forest consisted of 1.2 hectares of an old linden grove. Gaiva forest is a pine grove and has an area of about 25 hectares. The residents of the surrounding neighborhoods value the forests as spaces for recreation and other communal uses and as natural screens against strong winds and air pollution. They have no formal property or use rights to these forests, but have been using them informally for decades without much state interference. These customary use rights give the residents a sense of ownership, which is particularly strong in the case of the Gaiva forest, which was planted by the previous generations of residents about 60 years ago. Thus, the current residents feel that Gaiva pines are “their” trees, even though they grow on government land.

As the major cities all over Russia became much more crowded and polluted over the past twenty years, such urban forests became very attractive places for the construction of individual “cottages.” In Russia, this word is used to denote a privately constructed single-family house with all the amenities and usually a sizeable plot of land that can be used either as the main city dwelling or as a very comfortable second home not too far from the city center. The people who have “cottages” in urban and near-

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108 The most important one is the storage of preserved vegetables for winter. The economic crisis of 1998 and the subsequent growth in food prices forced urban dwellers all across Russia to use their summerhouse plots in the countryside for a variant of subsistence farming: a significant portion of the vegetables grown during the summer season are preserved and eaten in winter to reduce food expenditures. These vegetables require more room for storage than is usually available in a typical city apartment, hence many open spaces become filled with storage sheds and “vegetable pits” – individual and family winter food cellars.

109 Sretensky, 29.08.2006.
suburban forests tend to belong to the political and economic elites, not only because they can afford to build and maintain such elaborate second homes, but more importantly because they have the leverage required to obtain access to the prime land on which they are located. The conflict between the “cottage-dwellers” and the residents of the apartment buildings and old wooden houses that surround the urban forests is a very clear manifestation of the profound and growing social and material inequality that has characterized post-socialist Russia.

6.1.3.1 Akulovo (2001-2007)

The “Akulovo forest” was an old linden-tree grove that separated two neighborhoods, both built in the 1950s. One is the settlement of Dzerzhinskiy factory workers – it consists of apartment housing with all the basic amenities built by the enterprise for its employees. The other consists of wooden homes built by people who were resettled there in 1958 from the territories flooded after the construction of the hydropower station on the Kama River. Many residents of this “old” Akulovskiy neighborhood are elderly, poor, and have limited access to public services: there are few phone lines and paved roads. It is no accident that when the residents found out in the fall of 2001 that the grove was going to be logged and divided into cottage lots, the two main grassroots leaders – Valentina Ogloblina and Nina Yuzhakova – emerged from the older and poorer neighborhood. Just as Lidia Popova, these two retired women could more easily “afford” to become activists than their younger neighbors, because they had more

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110 This case-study narrative is mainly based on Ogloblina’s personal interview, given in Perm on 30.08.2006.
free time and greater financial independence. As Rozhina’s and Yushkov’s cases demonstrate, working-age people often lose their employment when they turn to activism, both because it requires all their time and because most employers themselves do not want to be attacked by the powerful forces that the activists challenge for supporting such “troublemakers.” By contrast, as Ogloblina pointed out, her meager source of income – the pension paid by the state welfare agencies – cannot be easily taken away from her to punish her for her activism.\textsuperscript{111} As most retirees in Russia, Ogloblina and Yuzhakova live close to the poverty line, and they felt profound indignation at the thought that some of the richest and most powerful individuals of the city and of the region would convert “everybody’s forest” into a gated community of luxury private residences located literally across the street from their old houses.

When it comes to identifying the main violators and framing the cause for resistance in these cases, the identity of the developer (who actually does the logging and the building) matters much less than the identities of the permitting authority and of the clients – the future cottage owners. Almost invariably, such land-use changes are mandated from the top of the municipal executive power pyramid, while the beneficiaries are the prominent members of regional and local state/business elites. Ogloblina and Yuzhakova discovered early on that the logging of the grove was authorized in May 2000 through a decree issued by Yuriy Trutnev, who at that time was the mayor of Perm. The lots were originally given to a semi-fictitious “developer” to be resold later to high-

\textsuperscript{111} Ogloblina, 30.08.2006.
As is typical in these cases, the activists found themselves challenging the private dimension of the state, whose officials placed themselves above the law in order to convert public resources into private benefits for themselves and their close associates.

Being first-time activists, Ogloblina and Yuzhakova first searched around for some kind of existing structure that they could use to mobilize the residents. Their choice fell on the “local self-government council” – a constitutionally mandated structure for citizen participation in municipal decision-making that normally has very little clout in the face of the municipal executive structures. They called a general neighborhood meeting and reelected the neighborhood council (poselkovyi sovet). The old counselors, suspected of being in league with those who wanted to log the forest, were replaced with people who were ready to organize resistance. Yuzhakova became the head of the new council, which gave her an “official status” – the minimum prerequisite for getting access to any kind of city planning information. At the same time, the meeting was used to inform the residents and to create an “initiative group” in defense of the forest. Although the activists did use a state-mandated structure as the starting point for the resistance campaign, they quickly realized that the council was of little use: the councilor status gave them no special powers apart from somewhat better ability to request government information. Nevertheless, the municipal legislature saw it as a threat and dissolved it in April 2005. This did not have any major negative effect on the campaign, because by that

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112 One of them was Arkadiy Kamenev, who succeeded Trutnev as the mayor of Perm in 2000 and later authorized similar subdivisions of Gaiva and Cherniaevskiy forests.
time its full weight was borne by the informal “initiative group” – Yuzhakova, Ogoblina, and a few “regular helpers.”

Having started from the premise that the logging of the forest was a gross injustice and must not happen, the grassroots leaders needed to establish “which of their rights have been violated.”\[^{113}\] That is, they chose to frame their actions as resistance against illegal behavior and power abuses of particular state officials. In order to do this, they began to gather all kinds of land-use and planning documents and to acquaint themselves with the relevant laws. Ogoblina and Yuzhakova lost little time in becoming self-taught lawyers, because they found good allies who had previous experience in such matters as well as connections in state agencies for getting access to documents. These allies included Perm Civic Chamber, which helped them to establish contacts with several sympathetic city council deputies and Perm State University researchers: Georgiy Voronov – a biology professor who headed an earlier campaign to prevent construction in the nearby Proletarskiy forest – and Roman Yushkov, who at that time was working at “Radio Maximum.” Thus supported, Ogoblina filed her first lawsuit, arguing that Trutnev’s decree violated the Law on the protection of the environment and the Forest Code, because it permitted residential construction in an urban forest without following the due procedures for environmental impact assessment and public consultation.

In spite of the injunctions imposed by the court in connection with Ogoblina’s suit, the logging of the Akulovskiy forest began in January 2002. The loggers came accompanied by two men with machine guns. Ogoblina description of the scene

\[^{113}\] Ogoblina, 30.08.2006.
transmits the sense of impotence that the Akulovo residents felt in the face of arbitrary power: “It was a cold winter day. The people just stood in the deep snow and watched, one granny was crying. They cut about 150 trees in two days and put a tall blind fence around most of the grove. We let all the media know, TV crews came, all journalists reported it, but nobody dared to say that the loggers worked under machine gun protection and that the residents were denied all access to the area.” The stage was thus set for the conflict that lasted for the next five years. The residents kept filing lawsuits in the hope that the court injunctions would at least suspend the project for the duration of the lawsuits, but logging and construction continued unabated. The grove was fenced off, and the armed guards simply would not let in the court bailiffs who were repeatedly sent to suspend the construction and to enforce court orders. Meanwhile, Ogoblina and Yuzhakova were unable to get enough people to participate in citizen watches that could physically stop the construction crews who came accompanied by armed guards and did the work by night. By the summer of 2007, most of the grove was logged and replaced by cottages.

Realizing that her ability to mobilize people for direct action was very limited, Ogoblina chose to focus her efforts on the legal battle. Right away, she ran into the problem of standing: in November 2002 the judge rejected her lawsuit on the grounds that “this land was considered municipal property, did not have the status of an urban forest, the plaintiff had no property rights to it, and the construction did not violate her environmental rights.” While Ogoblina gathered new evidence to prove the judge wrong

114 Ogoblina, 30.08.2006.
115 Sretensky, 29.08.2006.
on all these counts, mayor Kamenev, whose cottage was also being built in the grove, canceled the decree that she was disputing and issued two new ones to replace it. Over the next two years, as she got mired in an endless series of lawsuits, Ogloblina understood that the city administration was always one step ahead of her, issuing ever new decrees as she kept unearthing violations in the old ones. Yet until 2005 she kept running on this treadmill in the hope that if she could not make the courts prohibit the construction outright, it could at least be stalled or slowed down for the duration of her lawsuits.

Since court orders had no effect, Ogloblina eventually acknowledged the futility of disputing individual decrees and instead attacked what she now saw as the source of all the illegality – the general construction plan for the city of Perm.\textsuperscript{116} The city parliament approved this plan in 2004 without modifying it in the ways that were required by the State environmental expert assessment commission. The main modification in question was to classify the urban forests in question as “recreational territories,” which would make them unavailable for private residential construction. By the time Ogloblina decided to launch this new legal attack, her informal group was no longer fighting on its own. In June 2005, a total of 30 lawsuits against the general plan were filed, with the help of grassroots and professional activists that were active in Yugo-Kamsk and missile campaigns.\textsuperscript{117} This strategy did bear some fruit: when the plan was declared invalid by the court in April 2007, Ogloblina and Yuzhakova were able to move

\begin{footnotes}
\item[116] Periscop, 15.08.2005.
\item[117] Periscop, 24.06.2005.
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ahead their original lawsuit about the illegality of the mayor’s permission to use Akulovo land for construction.\textsuperscript{118}

In October 2007 Perm district court ruled in favor of Yuzhakova and Ogloblina and ordered the developer to surrender the property rights to the Akulovo territory. A month later, a different district court ordered the demolition of all cottages built in Akulovo. The plaintiffs considered these to be important precedent-setting decisions: in the words of Ogloblina, “for the first time Perm judges confirmed what we have been claiming for years – that these are urban forests and federal property which is being squandered by the municipal authorities.” However, these court decisions came too late to save the forest, which was mostly logged by 2007, and neither of them could be enforced. The bailiffs were unable to get hold of the original developer, Zlobin, who was given the original titles to the lots by the mayor and then resold them to the owners of the cottages. The demolition has not taken place, and the forest ceased to exist, because most of the trees had been logged.\textsuperscript{119} The frustration that Ogloblina and Yuzhakova felt at not being able to save the forest closest to their homes urged them to join the campaigns for Gaiva and Cherniaevskiy forests and to turn their attention to the urban planning documentation, which was the source of a systematic illegal conversion of Perm’s green zones from public to private use by the city administration.

\textsuperscript{118} Periscop, 01.11.2007.
\textsuperscript{119} Periscop, 02.10.2007 and 01.11.2007.
When this forest came under attack, Perm environmental activists had a strong sense of *déjà vu*: the actors were different, but the script was essentially the same as in Akulovo. In July 2004, Kamenev issued a decree that permitted the conversion of this territory into 12 private lots for cottage construction. This time, the developer was represented by a well-known local businesswoman and the beneficiaries included top executive officials of the Ordzhonikidze city district, in which Gaiva is located, as well as the leader of Perm’s regional chapter of “United Russia.” What made Gaiva’s story different from Akulovo was a much higher level of resident mobilization. Aided by the ubiquitous AES, Gaiva initiative group, headed by Svetlana Lozhkina was capable of sustaining direct action at a level that has both slowed down the process of logging and construction and forced the developer and the district authorities to negotiate with the residents. However, this increase in grassroots power was also met by heightened repression: the district police chief (Petukhov) and prosecutor (Almukhametov) were among the beneficiaries and took the resistance campaign very personally. The future of the forest is still unclear, but the fact that it is still largely unlogged after four years of very intense confrontation bears witness of how much Perm’s social environmentalists have learned from the failure in Akulovo.\(^{120}\)

The Gaiva residents became aware of the threat to their forests in early June 2005, when they saw announcements posted about an informational meeting with the developer.

\(^{120}\) The activists’ ability to hold back the developers in Gaiva is especially impressive given that this controversy broke out in the middle of the anti-missile campaign and that the list of urban forests that the activists were trying to protect from development grew rapidly over the same time period.
and the district administration. More than 150 people turned up for the meeting only to find that the other two parties were absent. The meeting then spontaneously turned into a general assembly, at which an informal group for the defense of the forest was created. Its representatives then met with two future beneficiaries of the project – the head of the district administration, who declared that the residents had no right to tell him where to build, and the district prosecutor who promised that no trees would be cut down.\textsuperscript{121} The first clash between the residents and the construction crews took place three weeks later. The residents formed a human chain and did not let the trucks unload gravel. They spent the next day building a children’s playground on the central clearing of the forest – an action obviously intended both to claim ownership of the forest and to emphasize the contrast between its traditional public uses and the intended conversion to private lots. Another confrontation followed the next day, which ended with the setting of the date for three-part negotiations. These negotiations fell through, because the district administration refused to accept Igor Averkiev, the head of Perm Civic Chamber, as one of the representatives chosen by the residents. Averkiev’s presence sent a clear message to the project proponents that the residents had serious allies and would not be easily placated. Soon afterwards, the residents also filed a lawsuit disputing the legality of this construction project.

The higher levels of resident participation, compared to the Akulovo case, seem to come from a stronger sense of ownership of the forest and from a sense of urgency that

\textsuperscript{121} The daily chronicle of Gaiva events in 2005 can be found at: http://www.prpc.ru/gazeta/89sg/gayva.shtml
was created by the situation in Akulovo. Gaiva grassroots leader, Svetlana Lozhkina, quickly came into contact with other “urban forest defenders” – Ogloblina, Yuzhakova, and Popova – who by that time had significant experience in both legal and contentious action. They knew that initiating a legal process against the project would not give them any effective means to suspend the construction, so round-the-clock resident watches were organized to prevent construction by stealth. Over the next three years, the residents used a mixed strategy of periodic confrontations with the construction crews, lawsuits, and negotiations. They gradually came to realize that sustained direct action at the site was their most powerful weapon as far as impeding logging and construction went. However, what they could not achieve was any kind of lasting behavior change on the part of their opponents, who kept seeing the residents as hindrance to be get rid of through either repressions or negotiations, but not as another affected party whose interests had to be taken into account.

One feature that was already present in Akulovo and got greatly magnified during the Gaiva controversy was the use of police and criminal elements to guard the construction site and to intimidate the residents. The difference between private and state

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122 I do not have the data that would allow me to compare the demographic and social profiles of the two neighborhoods, but it appears that Gaiva activists were on the whole somewhat younger. Lozhkina, the leader of the group, is a middle-aged woman with a teenage daughter; by contrast, Yuzhakova and Ogloblina are in their seventies.

123 The press chronicles of three major negotiation episodes – in 2005, 2006, and 2007 (all in July – at the height of the summer construction season) – make it evident that the developer and the district authorities approached the negotiation process in bad faith. They either made empty promises to suspend construction and to declare Gaiva a protected territory, or proposed unfeasible compromises, such as leaving the residents the use of one major forest clearing with recreational infrastructure (after it was torn apart by the construction crews) while the rest of the forest would be fenced and converted to private grounds. They used these negotiations chiefly as a means to call at least a temporary halt to the residents’ protests at the site, not to resolve the grievances that were the root cause of these protests. See Periscop, 11.07.2005 and 17.07.2006; ECO-HR bulletin No.2543 (27.07.2007).
violence was completely erased by the fact that the “criminal-looking young men with shaved heads and no identification” who were brought to the site by the leader of “United Russia” – a local businessman and criminal authority – harassed and dispersed the residents in close coordination with the policemen who came at the request of the district police chief.124 Both “security contingents” were violating the residents’ rights while defending their bosses’ right to violate land-use laws. The intimidation and harassment of residents and activists took a variety of forms – from verbal abuse and arbitrary detentions to more sinister cases of targeted attacks on the key participants. Thus, Aleksei Chernykh, the lawyer who represented Gaiva residents in court,125 was beaten up by unknown thugs in June 2007; Yuzhakova became the victim of a similar attack in April 2008. All leading activists have received repeated threats from representatives of the developer as well.126 The residents found that they had no legal recourse against these human rights violations, because the district police chief and prosecutor were among the main instigators of the violence. They appealed to President Putin, asking for the dismissal of Perm regional prosecutor and police chief who took no action to stop the

124 Periscop, 17.07.2006. The policemen held frequent drunken parties at the entrance to the forest, from where they dispersed through the neighborhood, shouting offenses at the passing residents and molesting women. Lozhkina’s teenage daughter was threatened repeatedly on account of her mother’s activism. Periscop, 27.06.2006.
125 Chernykh is a member of “Solidarity” trade union, a local chapter of a prominent human rights NGO “Za prava cheloveka” (“For human rights”) headed by Lev Ponomarev. “Solidarity” focuses on defending the rights of social activists in courts. Averkiev, 28.08.2006.
126 These threats ranged from promises of physical harm to those of “miring them forever in expensive lawsuits.” In 2008, five lot owners brought a lawsuit against Ogloblina, who was once more at the forefront of the legal action, and tried to make her pay all the court expenses suffered by the developer under citizen lawsuits regarding Gaiva. This suit was dismissed in 2009: the judge ruled that citizen lawsuits were brought against the district administration and the developer, so that individual lot owners were third parties and as such had no standing. ECO-HR bulletin No.3106 (04.02.2009).
abuses of their subordinates. This appeal received no reply; the multiple legal cases against human rights abuses brought in by the activists remain unresolved.\footnote{Those who gathered signatures under the petition to Putin became targets of a separate wave of repressions. One resident was beaten up by thugs and ended up in a hospital, from where he was forcibly taken to a psychiatric clinic by two policemen. Another was detained by the police in the street, taken to court and fined for disturbing public order. Periscop, 19.06.2006, 27.06.2006; ECO-HR bulletin No.2862 (05.06.2008).}

Putin’s silence on the issue of human rights abuses was not the only instance when the Gaiva activists confronted the ineffectiveness of their attempts to hold the offending officials accountable by appealing to federal state agencies. In 2007, they wrote a collective letter to their countryman, Trutnev, who moved to Moscow in April 2004 after he was named the Minister of Natural Resources. In it, they enumerated all the recent cases of urban forest logging and park destruction sanctioned by Perm city and regional officials and asked Trutnev to take action to stop these abuses. Leaving aside the obvious irony of the fact that Trutnev himself was implicated in several of these violations,\footnote{Apart from signing the decree that permitted the logging of Akulovo, Trutnev became involved in the scandal that surrounded the building of a family cottage by his son on a large riverside lot next to a spring that the Perm residents consider holy. Periscop, 06.08.2006; ECO-HR bulletin No. 2187 (31.07.2006).} the activists did receive some satisfaction a year later, when the Ministry of Natural Resources conducted an inspection in Perm and “recommended to its mayor, Igor Shubin\footnote{He became mayor in April 2006, in what was widely seen as a rigged election.} to include the Gaiva forest into the city’s recreational zone.”\footnote{ECO-HR bulletin No.3069 (29.12.2008).} However, it remains to be seen whether this “recommendation” will be enforced in the case of Gaiva and other threatened urban forests of Perm. In spite of Putin’s many references to the “vertical of power” as the federal guarantee against abuses by regional and local...
executives, Perm’s environmental activists found that they could not use it to hold their local strongmen accountable for legal violations.

While Perm’s social environmentalists confronted greater challenges in Gaiva than in Akulovo, they also found new ways to confront them by forging broader cross-sectional alliances. What began in 2002 as Ogoblina and Yuzhakova’s lone campaign against individual land-use change decrees grew into a successful challenge to Perm’s general construction plan in 2007 and into the creation of a new alliance of Perm social and political activists concerned about the broader issue of urban planning. This alliance, created in the summer of 2007 and christened “Perm Residents’ Defense Union,” brought Perm’s social-environmental activists together with the members of Perm’s fraction of “Yabloko” democratic party – the deputies of the regional and city parliaments who have been actively supporting urban grassroots protest movements. The main goal of this alliance was to bring together grassroots activists with considerable experience of environmental litigation and professional politicians and businessmen committed to the reform of urban land-use and planning legislation through lobbying and citizen watchdog and enforcement activities. While it still remains to be seen, how effective this new network will be in pushing through its agenda in the current political environment, the interest that Perm’s social environmentalists demonstrate in linking their campaigns to the broader issues of transparency and citizen participation in municipal decision-making makes them contribute more to the process of social democratization.

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131 Periscop, 22.07.2007.

Krasnokamsk is a city of about 52,000 people that lies about 50km west of Perm and was founded in the 1930s around the Kamskiy pulp and paper plant. It forms part of Perm’s urban agglomeration, and many of its residents commute to Perm for work, shopping, and leisure. The situation that caused the resident protest on one of Krasnokamsk’s central streets in spring 2007 is the most typical case of the so-called “fill-in” construction policy that has been widely practiced all over Russia over the past decade, which consists of raising new commercial or residential buildings, parking garages and other facilities on the available land within established urban neighborhoods. This “available land” comes in the form of courtyards and other open spaces between the multistory apartment buildings, much cherished by the residents as green and recreational spaces in what are already quite crowded and polluted urban environments. In the Soviet times, when all such housing and the land on which it stood was state-owned, residents of the apartment complexes routinely made improvements to these territories by planting trees, shrubs, and flowers and installing children playgrounds and other sports and recreational equipment. After the 1993 state-announced privatization program, which allowed the residents to claim private ownership rights over their apartments free of charge, some flats in these buildings have been registered as private property, but the land around them remains municipal property unless all flats in the building are privatized and the residents agree to form a condominium that has the formal property

132 In order to “privatize” their apartments, the residents need to complete the required paperwork and file it with the state registration agencies, but they do not buy their apartments out from the state – the ownership is transferred to them free of charge.
right to the building and the adjacent territory. The process of forming such condominiums has proceeded very sluggishly, and most Russian urban dwellers currently still have no right to dispose of this land, which is considered municipal property and is routinely claimed by developers for building projects, often in violation of the existing building and sanitary codes and other laws. Although the Urban and Land codes as well as the EIA Regulation require the municipal government and the developer to notify and consult the residents, more often than not the residents only find out about the impending construction project, when they see a fence go up around the area in question.

In this particular case, the residents found that the municipal authorities gave a local businesswoman the permit to use the land under the children’s playground and the green space to build a structure that would contain an eye-glasses shop and a bar. Soon after they saw the tell-tale fence, the residents met with the city mayor, who promised to revoke the building permit. The next day, on May 29th 2007, when the residents witnessed the logging of three large old trees in their courtyard, they lost their patience and went to picket the nearby building of the city parliament. For half an hour they called the city counselors to reckoning to no avail and then proceeded to blockade (for 10 minutes) the federal highway that runs through the city.\textsuperscript{133} Although this blockade was dispersed by the police, it did have the desired effect: during the next month there was no logging and construction activity at the site.

Yet the residents knew that this was but a temporary respite and that further action was needed to obtain secure guarantees that the construction would not go on at some

\textsuperscript{133} Periscop, 29.05.2007.
later point. The leader of the “initiative group,” Tatiana Gushchina, filed a lawsuit demanding the revocation of the building permit issued by the district head in violation of the environmental expert assessment and public hearings procedures. The courts routinely reject such lawsuits on the grounds that the citizens bringing them have no property rights over the territory in question and therefore have no standing. Gushchina received such a rejection on July 20th, and the logging of trees began again a week later. On July 27th, the residents clashed with the logging crews, and the police was brought in to disperse them. Incensed both by the continuing construction and by the refusal of the court to let them “resolve the conflict in a civilized legal manner,” several dozens of residents accompanied by the members of AES and two sympathetic deputies, occupied the city parliament building. This sit-in lasted a week and ended in 4-hour negotiations with the city authorities who in the end agreed to satisfy all resident demands.

Unlike in Mexico, where road blockades and state building occupations are among the most common forms of citizen protest, in Russia grassroots urban protesters usually limit themselves to forming human chains and shields at the construction sites and picketing in front of the government buildings. What stood behind this extraordinarily vigorous and effective series of direct actions? First of all, the residents had two allies among the city deputies: the Communist Party (KPRF) member Elena Korliakova and the director of Krasnokamsk Human Rights center Oleg Sergeev. These two individuals led the road blockade on May 29th and took part in the building

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134 Periscop, 27.07.2007; Regnum.ru, 27.07.2007.
135 Periscop, 03.08.2007.
occupation of July 27th-August 3rd. These kinds of deputies – human rights advocates and politicians who preserved the ties with their constituents after the election – have become an increasingly rare species over the last decade, as the electoral institutions progressively lost their substance in Russia. The fact that they can still be found in Perm demonstrates the unique characteristics of the region.

Another key ally of the residents was the Anarcho-Ecological Resistance – the radical youth group that has participated in every protest campaign of note that took place in the central part of Perm region since its creation in 2003. Of all Perm’s social activists, the AES members probably have most experience when it comes to protest and direct action. They participated in the road blockade and led the city parliament occupation and saw this event as an authentic popular uprising. The mentor of the group, Roman Yushkov, has served as the key resource to the residents, advising them on strategy and tactics, taking part in protests alongside the residents, and representing them in front of the press and during negotiations.

One of the strategies that Yushkov and the AES members used was to link this particular struggle to the wider “confrontation of citizens with state authorities and business” in cities throughout Russia. When they occupied the city parliament building, they decided to make it the site of an “All-Russian forum of radical ecological organizations.” The idea was to invite radical environmentalists from all over the country and to discuss strategies in dealing with “blatant violations of [the constitutional] citizen

136 The major environmental campaigns in which the AES played the key role include: Yugo-Kamsk oil spill (2002-2003), Perm missile destruction (2003-2008), oil pollution in Pavlovo village (2002-2008), and radioactive waste contamination in Berezniki (2005-present).
right to healthy environment, and the use of arbitrary power” in making urban land-use decisions. This forum was scheduled to take place on August 4th-5th and was cancelled only because a full agreement was reached with the city authorities on August 3rd.  

Nevertheless, this was an attempt to turn a particular protest campaign into a focusing event for a broader issue and to bring a local controversy to the attention of social environmentalists nationwide.

The comparatively mild level of repressions that the protesters suffered sets this resistance movement apart from other protest campaigns in the Perm region. Krasnokamsk city authorities did not attempt to use force to stop the building occupation. The participants were not held criminally responsible; they even escaped administrative charges. This is especially noteworthy, when seen in comparison to the attempt by the young members of National-Bolshevik Party to occupy the public reception office of the presidential administration in Moscow in December 2004. They demanded a meeting with Putin and put a banner in the window asking for his voluntarily resignation from the presidency. 40 participants were originally accused of “violent takeover of state power”; later this accusation was replaced by that of “participation in mass disturbances.” All 40 were found guilty and given prison sentences. Yushkov points to this lack of repressions and links it to Perm’s special status as the region with relatively strong social

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137 Regnum.ru, 06.08.2007.
138 The occupation took place on 14 December 2004; the verdict was announced on 8 December 2005. 31 participant was placed on probation, eight went to serve their prison terms (1.5-3 years), one was freed because he was underage.
activism and low repressive capacity.\textsuperscript{139} It is also highly likely that the occupation of the city parliament building was not seen as very threatening by the authorities, because municipal representative organs have a relatively low importance in the Russian hierarchy of state power. The activists probably chose this target partly due to these very considerations: a take-over of Krasnokamsk mayor’s office or some other municipal executive agency would probably not have been tolerated. In addition, a building occupation in a small town is not the same as a building occupation in the \textit{regional capital}: when the AES activists occupied buildings in Perm during the missiles and the Gaiva campaigns, the police was used to evict them, and the officials did not grant their demands.\textsuperscript{140}

The lower level of repressions has another explanation: in this case, the private developer did not seem to have strong enough links with the municipal administration and therefore could not count on the police to do her bidding. This was clearly manifested in December, when, following the mayor’s revocation of the building permit, the residents first removed the fence around the construction site and then filled in the foundation pit. In spite of the calls by the developer to stop the residents, the police and the private guards who witnessed these events took no action. Apart from not having received orders to repress, the “guardians of public order” likely remained passive, because they were daunted by the level of organization and energy that the residents manifested in their direct actions. Since protest levels have been so low in Russia for so

\textsuperscript{139} Erenko, 2009.
\textsuperscript{140} AES occupied the Perm city council building in April 2006 and the office of the regional environmental agency in September 2003.
long, the police are generally not accustomed to handling well-organized and numerous protests and their level of aggression is greatest when they have a numerical advantage over the protesters.\textsuperscript{141}

The residents were also able to make use of the fact that their building was on the list of the city’s architectural monuments. Although “the architecture of the Stalinist epoch” is not usually seen as a very valuable part of the built environment, the residents were able to secure the commitment of the regional minister of culture to declare the surrounding area (including the construction site) to be the “protective zone of an architectural monument.” This strategy is an example of the pragmatism and resourcefulness that is quite typical of grassroots social-environmentalists: they will use any available arguments – environmental and public health damage, cultural and historic value, public access rights – to prevent undesirable land-use change of the territory that matters to them.

\textbf{6.1.5 Solid Waste Issue in Dzerzhinsk (2004-2009)}

The toxic pollution problem in Dzerzhinsk has many different dimensions. For reasons described in Section 5.1, the main one – past and present contamination from chemical factories – so far has been the concern only for the professional activists and produced no grassroots response. However, over the past five years some Dzerzhinsk residents began to tackle another aspect – pollution associated with household and commercial solid waste. While the grassroots activism associated with the issue is still

\textsuperscript{141} This has been the case during the “Marches of those who disagree” – a series of protests organized by OGF in Russia’s major cities in 2006-2009.
relatively sporadic and weak, these initiatives begin to acquire certain key social-environmentalist characteristics. Of particular interest in this respect are the protests against Igumnovo garbage dump (2002-2009) and the waste separation and recycling project in Pushkino-Babushkino (2005-2006).

6.1.5.1 What it Takes to Close a Garbage Dump: Igumnovo (2002-2009)

The Igumnovo garbage dump has been in operation since 1972 and has the dubious distinction of being the largest one in Russia and in Europe. It is an unlined dump that occupies an area of 110 hectares and contains about 34 million tons of garbage.\(^\text{142}\) It is located mid-way between the cities of Dzerzhinsk and Nizhniy Novgorod and receives municipal waste from both. Together with the adjacent industrial dump of the Gorkiy Automobile Plant (GAZ) factory, it forms part of the extensive and surreal wasteland around Dzerzhinsk’s eastern industrial zone that consists of major chemical enterprises lined up along the 25 km-long railroad line that links the “capital of Soviet chemistry” to the regional capital. The toxic pollution problems of the two cities are intertwined: Nizhniy Novgorod sends its garbage to the Igumnovo dump\(^\text{143}\) that is located within Dzerzhinsk city limits and in return receives the pollution from Dzerzhinsk with

\(^{142}\) In 2006 only 36 hectares were already filled with garbage – the rest of this enormous territory was still available for dumping. About 4 million metric tons of garbage are added to it annually. Chelikov and Razborkis, December 2006.

\(^{143}\) Igumnovo receives over 60% of Nizhniy Novgorod’s waste, making Dzerzhinsk residents feel that their land is being as the dumping ground by “the rich and the powerful” that reside in the regional capital. The rest of Nizhniy’s waste goes to the second major regional dump near the city of Kstovo. Chelikov and Razborkis, December 2006; Kalinycheva, 26.06.2009.
the prevalent westerly winds and with the waters of the Oka River that flows past Dzerzhinsk and joins the Volga River in Nizhniy Novgorod.¹⁴⁴

Smoke from Igumnovo’s garbage fires has long formed part of the pollution cloud that issues from Dzerzhinsk. Over the past twenty years, these fires have created periodic states of emergency that drew attention to the dump’s overall environmental and public health impacts. Two particularly bad fire episodes of the late 1980s have prompted the environmental control agencies to make an argument for the closure of the dump.¹⁴⁵ Similar calls have been heard ever since, but the issue remained unresolved, because there was still a lot of empty ground available at Igumnovo, and it was easier to keep dumping there than to look for a new location.

The first episode of grassroots mobilization took place in 2002, when the city administration announced the plan to add another industrial waste dump to the Igumnovo-GAZ complex. The residents of the nearby worker settlement, Gorbatovka,¹⁴⁶ created a local initiative group against this project, whose promoters included the GAZ factory and a key official within the city Environmental Protection Committee. Social-Legal Ecological Partnership (SPES), Dzerzhinsk-based environmental NGO headed by Dmitriy Levashov, played a key role in organizing resistance by acting as an advisor to Gorbatovka’s residents. Together, they managed to impede the permitting process by subjecting the project to public EEA – the regional Department of Natural Resources

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¹⁴⁴ Savos’kina, 30.11.2007; Levashov, 03.09.2006.
¹⁴⁵ Kommersant-NN, 02.08.2007.
¹⁴⁶ Taken together, this and other worker settlements located in the immediate vicinity of the dump – Lesnaya Poliana, Poselok Stroitelei, Orlovskie Dvoriki, and Igumnovo – have the population of about 20 thousand people. Gellertova, 05.06.2008.
postponed the state EEA by six months in order to include the public EEA conclusions into the document packet. Finally, the activists managed to achieve the cancellation of the project by securing the support of a key local politician, Evgeniy Liulin, who at that time was taking part in an election campaign for the regional legislative and had personal ties with Sergey Kirienko, the Plenipotentiary Presidential Representative of the Privolzhskiy Federal District within which Nizhniy Novgorod region is located.¹⁴⁷ Levashov attributes this success to “an opportune coincidence” of three main elements: mobilization of the residents, availability of a politician who was interested to present himself as the defender of the local people’s interests to his voters, and proper functioning of the environmental impact assessment process.¹⁴⁸

The cancellation of the new dump, however important, did nothing to resolve the chronic problems of air and water pollution from the Igumnovo dump. At that time, it was managed by PBO-NN – a private company that also subcontracted with the city government of Nizhniy Novgorod for a large share of its municipal garbage collection.¹⁴⁹ PBO-NN maintained absolute control over the fenced-off “active” area of the dump: its private guards did not let anyone but the garbage truck drivers past the entrance and oversaw the “waste recycling and separation” carried out on the dump grounds by a captive labor force – the local homeless people.¹⁵⁰ As is typical for Russia, the extraction of valuable materials from waste is a highly lucrative and criminalized business in

¹⁴⁷ After the 2002 elections, Liulin became the speaker of the regional parliament and in spring 2003 was appointed the head of United Russia’s regional chapter. Demenev, 14.06 and 21.06.2007.
¹⁴⁸ Levashov, 03.09.2006.
¹⁴⁹ Kriaizhev, 08.06.2007.
¹⁵⁰ Chelikov and Razborkis, December 2006; Levashov, 03.09.2006.
Dzerzhinsk, and there are powerful forces interested in keeping waste separation and recycling confined to the dump grounds where neither environmental activists nor state inspectors are allowed to enter.151

Dmitriy Levashov and his colleagues from SPES have been trying to attract the attention of state environmental control agencies to the situation at Igumnovo since the mid-1990s, but the tide only began to turn after these agencies felt that the regional executive was interested in the issue. When Valeriy Shantsev, a new governor appointed from Moscow, came to Nizhniy Novgorod in August 2005,152 he lost little time in declaring that the region’s entire waste management system needed an overhaul. In particular, he promised to eliminate the majority of smaller open-air garbage dumps and to channel municipal waste to a few well-chosen locations, where modern landfills and solid waste processing facilities would be constructed. Igumnovo, the largest dump not only in the region, but also in the European part of Russia, was declared to be the first candidate for “modernization.”153 This attention from above was accompanied by the revival of old plans to attract foreign investment for building incineration and processing facilities for municipal and toxic industrial wastes that have been accumulating around Dzerzhinsk for many decades. The plans also included the possibility of importing waste

151 Russian environmental activists see the criminalization of companies that manage Russia’s waste dumps as one of the most intractable issues. Aleksey Yablokov, a very well-known environmental and political activist, and Aleksey Kiselev, the head of Greenpeace-Russia toxic waste campaign, have both mentioned to me their sense of complete impotence in the face of this problem. Environmental activists who have attempted to tackle it were repeatedly forced to retreat, as they began receiving life threats from the criminal groups associated with this business and could hardly find any state officials brave enough to fulfill their control and inspection duties under such conditions. Yablokov, 25.10.2003; Kiselev, 14.09.2006.
152 Before he was appointed Nizhniy’s governor by the president, Shantsev was the deputy mayor of Moscow.
from other regions of Russia and the investors’ countries of origin (Austria, Germany) for processing and final deposit.

Spurred on both by Shantsev’s declarations and by the steady stream of complaints from residents and activists, the Interdistrict Environmental Prosecutor’s Office of Nizhniy Novgorod\textsuperscript{154} conducted an inspection of the dump in 2006 and filed two lawsuits at the Dzerzhnisk city court in March 2007.\textsuperscript{155} In the first lawsuit, it demanded a definite closure of the dump, because its operation was found to violate the federal laws on Environmental Protection and Protection of Atmospheric Air, as well as various sanitary-epidemiological norms. The second lawsuit was filed against Roman Koverdiaga, the director of the Igumnovo dump and a PBO-NN employee, for violating Article 251 (air pollution) of the Russian Criminal Code. The forensic inquiry ordered by the court documented a three-fold increase in the morbidity rates in settlements around the dump between 1998 and 2005, as well as concentrations of persistent organic pollutants (POPs)\textsuperscript{156} in locally produced food products that were 4-14 times above the threshold limit values.\textsuperscript{157} At the same time, three more criminal lawsuits were brought against PBO-NN by Nizhniy Novgorod city administration and by the regional Office of the Interior Affairs for tax avoidance, rent payment arrears and other financial irregularities.\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{154} Нижегородская межрайонная природоохранныя прокуратура.
\textsuperscript{155} Orekhov, 21.07.2008.
\textsuperscript{156} Organic compounds, such as polychlorinated dibenzodioxins and dibenzofurans, that are resistant to environmental degradation, capable of bioaccumulation through the food web, and have significant impacts on human and ecosystem health. In Russian, they are known as «стойкие органические загрязнители» (СОЗ).
\textsuperscript{157} Bubnov, 28.08.2008.
\textsuperscript{158} Kriazhev, 08.06.2007; Kommersant-NN, 02.08.2008.
On the surface, it all looked like a genuine state effort to investigate PBO-NN for environmental and other kinds of violations and to question its capacity to adequately manage the dump. Court decisions on both of these lawsuits were reached in the spring of 2008 – one cannot help but ask how much longer it would have taken had the suits been brought by citizens rather than state agencies. In March, Koverdiaga was fined 200,000 rubles (about US$8400) and forbidden from working in the waste management industry for two years.\textsuperscript{159} In May, Dzerzhinsk city court ordered a definite closure of the Igumnovo dump by January 2010. Before that time limit, PBO-NN was supposed to carry out remediation of the site.\textsuperscript{160} Meanwhile, the regional government announced that it was preparing a tender for the construction and management of a new, “modernized” landfill and a comprehensive plan to attract foreign investment into all aspects of waste collection, processing, and disposal.\textsuperscript{161}

However, the following year had shown that the situation was not nearly as simple. First of all, neither the regional nor the two city governments involved really meant to stop waste deposit and processing activities at the Igumnovo site. In April-May 2007, Bulavinov, the mayor of Nizhniy Novgorod and Shil’nov, the head of regional environmental protection agency, made public statements, explaining that, since the construction of new landfills would take at least 2 years, Igumnovo would have to be kept

\textsuperscript{159} Kovaleva, 13.03.2008; Kruglov, 17.03.2008.
\textsuperscript{160} Rosbalt.ru, 30.05.2008.
\textsuperscript{161} This “regional waste management program” was adopted without any public consultations; its text was not made available to the citizens and has not been subjected to environmental expert assessment. The key objective of the program was the consolidation of existing 250 garbage dumps into 7 larger inter-district landfills with waste processing facilities. Under this plan, Igumnovo would become the “focus” landfill for the center of the region, where the cities of Nizhniy Novgorod and Dzerzhinsk are located. Orekhov, 21.07.2008.
in operation for at least as long. Shil’nov has also pointed out that, since 60% (70 hectares) of Igumnovo’s territory had not been in use, building “modern waste processing facilities” on that land was a better option than finding a new site for the landfill.\footnote{Kulagina, 16.04.2007; Kovaleva, 11.05.2007.} In November 2007, Dzerzhinsk city administration announced an international tender for the remediation of the developed portion and the development of empty lands of Igumnovo.\footnote{Ermakova, 15.11.2007.} Project tenders and negotiations with several foreign waste management companies continued all the way through May 2009, but in the end no foreign investor committed to either remediation at Igumnovo or construction of a new landfill.\footnote{Among those most interested were the German Remondis AG – one of the largest European solid waste processors that had been negotiating with the regional government since 2006 – and the Austrian A.S.A. Environmental Services GmbH. While Remondis did sign agreements with the city governments of Nizhniy Novgorod and Dzerzhinsk about the creation of joint enterprises that would create infrastructure for separate collection of recyclables, neither of the two companies took up the task of reconstructing Igumnovo and creating a new landfill. The regional government wanted the foreign investors to shoulder the entire cost of the project and refused to either make a contribution to it from public funds or to allow the companies to raise the garbage collection fees charged to residents and businesses. As the world economic crisis deepened, the foreign investors became increasingly unwilling to finance such a project entirely on their own, and the negotiations fell through. Regnum.ru, 14.02.2008; Novaya Gazeta, 11.04.2008; Zubakina, 23.04.2008; Regnum.ru, 22.04.2009; Ermakova, 06.05.2009; Regnum.ru, 20.05.2009; Levashev, 20.10.2009.} Instead, this task fell to a local company called “MAG Group,” which was created and financed by the “Agzho Group of Companies,” whose general director, Oleg Zhokhov, not-so-coincidentally turns out to have served as the managing director of PBO-NN from 2003 to 2008.\footnote{Kriazhev, 08.06.2007; NTA-NN, 17.06.2009; Vovk, 02.10.2009.}

In the light of these recent developments, what looked like an attempt to displace one of the major established players from waste management business turned out to be little more than a public show, that involved the punishment of a scapegoat (Koverdiaga)
but left intact the business power structure that gave rise to PBO-NN in the first place. Zhokhov has been active in the waste business since the late 1980s and has been long accustomed to work with the city and regional administrations while implementing his own vision of waste management. In particular, he agreed with the court’s decision to close Igumnovo and argued that the best way to attack the “systemic waste problem” was through the combination of waste recycling (managed by his companies) and waste incineration. This later idea has been considered by the regional government at least since the mid-1990s, and has been a recurrent nightmare of all environmental activists. Not surprisingly, the already much polluted Dzerzhinsk has been considered as the prime location.\textsuperscript{166}

The hide-and-seek game around Igumnovo was followed with great concern by the small circle of professional social-environmental activists of the Nizhniy Novgorod region – Dzerzhinsk’s own SPES and several Dront-affiliated individuals from Nizhniy Novgorod. In 2004, the residents of Gorbatovka who first rose up two years earlier against a new industrial dump project, began to lose their patience and to make phone calls to all state environmental control, public health and emergency agencies they could think of, asking “the authorities” to do something about the smoke and the stench of the dump.\textsuperscript{167} In 2006, Mikhail Bubnov and Vladimir Orekhov from Gorbatovka put together

\textsuperscript{166} The first attempt to locate a waste incineration plant in Dzerzhinsk was made in 1993. Levashov (03.09.2006) points out that this project was kept back through the efforts of Askhat Kayumov who served as the head of state regional environmental department in 1993-1998 and his successor Anatoliy Sokolov. In 2006, this plan was revived once more, and three private companies, including a French one, were considered as potential contractors. SPES and Zelenyi Mir, two main NGOs active in Dzerzhinsk responded to this development with a series of protests. See Fufaeva, September 2006; Levashov, 02.09.2006.

\textsuperscript{167} Savos’kina, 30.11.2007; Orekhov, 21.07.2008.
an informal group, Vyunitsa, named after the river in whose watershed the dump and the settlements are located. Once more, Levashov acted as their main adviser as they gathered signatures and filed petitions and complaints with the relevant authorities.

So far, grassroots activism at Gorbatovka has not resulted in a broader social-environmental mobilization. Levashov points out that Vyunitsa has confined itself almost exclusively to Gorbatovka’s problems and has not attempted to mobilize residents of other nearby settlements that are immediately affected by the Igumnovo dump.168 Although the grassroots activists from Gorbatovka sensed the need to find political allies for their local cause, they do not have a preference for democratic or oppositional political actors. After a brief period of associating with the “Green Russia” party, founded in 2005 by Aleksey Yablokov and incorporated into the Yabloko Democratic Party as an environmental fraction a year later, they eventually came under the aegis of the Russian Ecological Party “The Greens” – a Kremlin-sponsored structure headed by Anatoliy Panfilov. This structure has nothing to do with either a genuine political party or environmental activism, and it is not clear, how Vyunitsa’s membership in it has helped to advance its cause.169 At the same time, Vyunitsa maintained an alliance with the regional chapter of oppositional United Civic Front (OGF)170: together they organized a

169 The Party’s site (http://www.greenparty.ru/) describes its approach as “constructive, mindful of Russian national interests, and based on a negative attitude towards manifestations of political and ecological extremism.” Since Putin became the president of Russia in 2000, all of these phrases have been part of the standard state jargon in reference to environmental activists who refuse to be co-opted. One of the Party’s founding organizations, Constructive Ecological Democratic Movement (KEDR), is well-known among environmental activists for its unconditional support of major environmentally damaging projects promoted by various state agencies and enterprises.
170 This civic movement was initiated in 2005 by the former world chess champion Garry Kasparov. It is currently forming part of the “Solidarity” movement that brings together many of the well-known political
series of protests in the summer of 2008 to pressure the governor to comply with the court decision to close Igumnovo.\footnote{Mikitik, 04.08.2008.} Overall, Vyunitsa’s behavior seems quite opportunistic and reveals no strong concern for remaining autonomous from the state.

\textbf{6.1.5.2 Community-Level Waste Minimization at Pushkino-Babushkino (2005-2006)}

The most promising current signs of grassroots social environmentalism in Dzerzhinsk come from the Pushkino-Babushkino settlements located on Dzerzhinsk’s southern fringe. Their informal “environmental commission” emerged as an outgrowth of the “territorial public self-government” (TOS) – a legally sanctioned but relatively rarely used form of local organization that a group of committed residents managed to fill with real substance and turn into an instrument for addressing pressing local problems.\footnote{Although Pushkino and Babushkino are really two separate settlements of individual wooden houses, the city administration considers them part of the city and refuses to register their organization and to allow it access to municipal resources, arguing that they are not entitled to have a self-government structure (Fufaeva, 20.04.2006). There seem to be no legal grounds for this refusal, because, according to the Federal Law No.131 (“On the general principles of public self-government organization in Russian Federation”), TOS can be formed even at the scale of a single street or apartment building, if the residents are sufficiently interested.}

While they are further removed from Igumnovo dump, the issue of household garbage collection and disposal has been of major concern to them. One of their first achievements was to lobby Dzerzhinsk city administration to include their settlements into the municipal garbage collection scheme. Dzerzhinsk’s urban core (with apartment buildings) is surrounded by multiple village-like worker and summer-house settlements, many of which have for years “resolved” their waste disposal problem by creating numerous ad hoc garbage dumps. The activists from Pushkino-Babushkino wanted to

activists who oppose Russia’s return to political authoritarianism and call for a regime change and the reconstruction of democratic institutions. See \url{http://www.rufront.ru}.
break with this “tradition” and clean up their place. Their efforts were soon noticed by professional environmental activists from Zelenyi Mir who had been searching for a grassroots base to test their model of community-based separation of recyclables and waste minimization.

Zelenyi Mir (Green World) is a small group of professional activists that came together at a youth cultural club in Nizhniy Novgorod in 1988. In 1992, they registered their group as an NGO and, until the last few years, had functioned as one of Dront Center’s “structural subdivisions.” Its main thematic focus has been on water quality and solid waste, and it currently does most of its work in and around Dzerzhinsk. Its most active members – Tatiana Pautova and Fedor Krylov – have been working with Levashov on a wide variety of projects. In particular, since 1992, they have been jointly organizing environmental expeditions and clean-up events that involved schoolchildren and orphans from Nizhniy Novgorod and Dzerzhinsk in removing trash from lake and river banks and carrying out environmental monitoring. In 2005-2006, Zelenyi Mir used the grant money received from a European foundation to create infrastructure that would allow Pushkino-Babushkino residents to minimize their waste generation and to earn money by selling recyclable materials to processing companies. Pautova was delighted to find that the TOS provided the residents with an organizational base and motivation to overcome what is widely seen in Russia as the completely insurmountable problem – “lack of

173 A profile and a brief history of this organization can be found at the Dront Center website: http://www.iuc.nnov.ru/dront/greenmir.ru.html
culture for keeping one’s place free of garbage in general and for recycling valuable materials in particular.”

Pautova had been thinking about the waste issue for a long time before she came to Pushkino-Babushkino. Together with her colleague and friend, Irina Fufaeva,\textsuperscript{176} she had investigated the obstacles to effective waste management in Dzerzhinsk and Nizhniy Novgorod and found that, contrary to popular perceptions, the main problem was not in the lack of private companies that would buy and process the recyclables and not even in the “intrinsic” inability of residents to get organized, but in the absence of reliable intermediaries that would link the waste-processing companies to the base-level collectors – residents and apartment building superintendents (\textit{dvorniki}). In Pushkino-Babushkino, the role of such intermediaries was played by the TOS members who, with the help of Zelenyi Mir, transformed their neighbors’ way of thinking about trash and disposing of it through community inspections and demonstrations. Yet, when Pautova and Fufaeva asked themselves what it would take to replicate this experience in the apartment buildings of Nizhniy Novgorod and Dzerzhinsk, they quickly came to the conclusion that the missing link was the state.

The state – in the form of building maintenance agencies (DEZ) that are in charge of organizing household waste collection and contract with the waste disposal companies in the cities – was completely absent in the essentially rural environment of Pushkino-Babushkino, whose residents were able to fill this vacuum through self-organization. In

\textsuperscript{175} Fufaeva, 20.04.2006.
\textsuperscript{176} Editor of the Bereginya environmental newspaper at the Dront Center and member of the anti-war Movement against Violence.
Nizhniy Novgorod, Fufaeva discovered an exceptional case of a conscientious superintendent who took it upon himself to both organize the residents for waste separation and to make connections with the private waste collection companies. Yet, in order to replicate this experience, most superintendents would need information and training, which, giving their dependence on the DEZ, would be impossible to provide without the latter’s active cooperation. Yet, during a series of round-tables that Zelenyi Mir organized on this issue, its members met with complete indifference and even hostility on the part of DEZ officials. This reaction stems from the unity of interests that exist among the DEZs and the large waste collection and disposal companies.177

6.1.5.3 Conclusions

The experiences of grassroots and professional activists’ collaboration in Gorbatovka and in Pushkino-Babushkino are especially illuminating when they are seen as attempts to address two different aspects of the solid waste issue – the siting and operation of waste processing and final deposit facilities and the minimization of waste volumes that reach them. The controversy around the Igumnovo dump, in which Vyunitsa was involved, was framed as a classical confrontation on the issue of an undesirable land-use: the activists argued that the dump had to be closed and used direct action and legal instruments to push the state to deal with a waste crisis. Given that most

177 Fufaeva, August 2006. In particular, DEZs have no interest whatsoever to minimize the waste volume, because they charge the residents a flat fee for garbage disposal per person, not per volume of waste that is collected and transported to the dumps. Meanwhile, large waste disposal companies, like PBO-NN prefer to collect unsorted waste so that they can extract the valuable recyclable materials themselves once the trash comes to the dump, rather than have the residents profit from them by selling them to smaller specialized processing companies.
of the trash at Igumnovo was not produced at Gorbatovka, but came from elsewhere, the
tenor of the grassroots campaign was that they should not be made to suffer from dealing
with other people’s waste. Meanwhile, the professional activists who worked with the
TOS at Pushkino-Babushkino pushed the grassroots activists to take a more long-term
view of the waste issue and tried to make them responsible for their own trash generation.

Although waste minimization and recycling was brought up as part of the solution
to the Igumnovo controversy both by the state and by the main business player –
Zhokhov, it was packaged together with proposals for waste incineration and opening of
a new major landfill. Moreover, these actors were promoting a top-down program that
would give complete control over waste separation and recycling to one (or a few) large
management companies. Such an approach presents an obstacle for self-organization of
residents, because it creates an illusion that the waste problem can be resolved without
active involvement and participation at the grassroots level. Residents who have never
recycled before can be easily lulled by the promises of a large effective company
“organizing it all for them,” and this can create a rift between them and professional
activists who, like Zelenyi Mir, advocate waste separation at the household and
community level as a way of developing both environmental responsibility and
autonomous organizational capacity at the grassroots. Characteristically, the leaders of
“Vyunitsa” argue that this is not an effective strategy, because it “requires too much

178 Fufaeva, April 2006.
effort from individual residents, who should only have one garbage bin to worry about and let the company who collects the garbage sort it all for them.”

Ultimately, the course of events around Igumnovo was shaped primarily by state and business actors – the activist campaign was not intensive and sustained enough to push the powerful decision-makers to make any lasting changes. Levashov notes that the court decision about Igumnovo’s closure, whose coming into force is less than three months away at the time of this writing, will likely not be carried out: the same business players are in charge of the dump, and there is currently no project of any kind for its remediation. The status quo “satisfies all the concerned officials,” and the activists are currently unable to turn the tide. While the professional activists from SPES remain in contact with the grassroots activists from Gorbatovka, SPES has so far been unable to involve Vyunitsa into any broader campaign that does not affect Gorbatovka directly.

Meanwhile, the alliance between professional and grassroots activists at Pushkino-Babushkino seems to have a greater potential to eventually become a multi-purpose socio-environmental structure. One of the TOS leaders, Tatiana Bogaeva, has recently become involved in a campaign to prevent the logging of Pervomaisk urban forest in the center of Dzerzhinsk. This pattern of transferring experience gained through activism on one environmental issue to the campaign on another is the same that I found in Perm and that makes grassroots activists more effective over time both as opponents of environmental degradation and as agents of social democratization.

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6.1.6 Additional Thoughts on the Comparison of Russian Regions

This section presents some preliminary ideas about the five regions in which I conducted my fieldwork – Perm, Nizhniy Novgorod, Samara, Saint Petersburg, and Moscow. My data shows that the conditions for the development of social environmentalism are not equally favorable each of the regions. In all five, the post-2004 urban grassroots mobilization has been strong and provides a potential mass base for social environmentalism. However, this mass base is not equally well used by environmental activists (grassroots and professional).

Individual Russian regions followed distinct political trajectories in the aftermath of the transition, and the level of political pluralism at the regional level affected its overall capacity for social mobilization and through it the ability of social environmentalists to form alliances with other social movement sectors. The regional context also strongly affects the character of professional activists. Availability of strong regional support centers for NGOs and social activism positively affects the chances of first-time grassroots activists to find professional allies. Paradoxically, social environmentalism tends to be weaker in regions where the environmental activism scene is dominated by conservationist and reform-environmentalist NGOs (especially those staffed by former DOP movement members – the main Soviet-time activist current, described in Section 3.4.2.1).

Perm is an example of a more effective movement toward social environmentalism. Urban protest movements against construction on public lands have sprung up in all Russian cities over the past 5-6 years; in their origins, these movements
are social-justice rather than environment-driven. In Perm many of these initiatives have been “picked up” or supported by environmental activists, most importantly, by a radical action group – Anarcho-Ecological Resistance (AES). This link between urban grassroots and environmental activism is not always present: I did not observe it in Samara at all; it exists, but is weaker in Moscow, St Petersburg, and Nizhniy Novgorod.

In Perm, there is a strong positive synergy between the nation-wide post-2004 urban mobilization, a more favorable regional political environment, and a critical mass of professional activists originally oriented towards social environmentalism. Paradoxically, but characteristically, social environmentalism in Perm benefits from the relative absence of strong environmental NGOs that came out of the Soviet forms of environmental activism (especially the Nature Brigade movement, DOP). Perm’s environmental activism is very recent by Russian standards, since it only takes off in the early 2000s. This is extremely important, because the conditions under which it arises (the drying-out of the foreign grants and the growing authoritarianism of the state) push it towards greater social awareness and grassroots work and away from the focus on conservation and expert services that is so characteristic of the “older” environmental NGOs that were formed in the early 1990s, when foreign funding was abundant and the state structures were much more permeable to environmental activists.

Perm also has strong regional support organizations, such as Perm Civic Chamber (PGP) and Perm Regional Human Rights Center (PRPC), which connect grassroots activists with legal advisors and relevant NGOs as well as sympathetic journalists and
state officials, maintain their own newspapers and news sites, and act as mediators between the resistance movements and the state authorities.

_Nizhniy Novgorod_ is a major center of DOP-originated NGOs, mostly of conservationist and reformist nature. Literally all Nizhniy’s environmental activists have at one time all worked under the umbrella of Dront Center – a collection of NGOs with separate projects that share a single financial and material resource base and are known as Dront’s “structural divisions”. A few of these divisions have evolved in the social environmental direction. The Environmental Expertise Agency systematically deals with urban construction groups.\(^{182}\) Four of its affiliates – Dmitriy Levashov, Fedor Krylov, Tatiana Pautova, and Irina Fufaeva – form a more social-oriented current that has been active in Dzerzhinsk and in the recent anti-nuclear campaign. The regional political environment has evolved from being one of the most liberal to quite authoritarian after the coming of the Moscow-appointed governor in 2005.

_Samara:_ This is the region where neither the post-transition structuring of the environmental activism and nor the regional political context favor a strong link between professionals and grassroots. The interactions between professional environmental activists (mostly of DOP origin) and grassroots urban groups are limited. The members of the local SEU chapter, Simak and Nikitina, frequently serve as members of PEEA commissions and know about most cases of urban resistance, but assisting and supporting these initiatives is not their main priority. In contrast with Nizhniy Novgorod, Samara’s environmentalists do not gravitate towards one strong multipurpose umbrella

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\(^{182}\) Krasnov (04.09.2006); Chebotareva (01.09.2006).
organization – there is no equivalent of Dront Center. Neither is there a critical mass of other kinds of professional activists with social environmentalist leanings. The regional political environment in Samara is much less pluralist than in Perm.

Moscow is an extreme case of regional political authoritarianism. The levels of repression are high, because it is the place where the federal government is located. The city government is notorious for its corrupt and non-transparent power structures that no one quite knows how to attack. The mayor of Moscow, Yuriy Luzhkov, has been in charge of the city for 17 years and has built a business empire based primarily in the construction sphere. So far, there has emerged no environmental NGO or professional activist network that is willing to link with post-2004 urban campaigns and turn them towards social environmentalism. I can think of several reasons for this. First, many of them are national in scope and are located in the capital because it is the center of economic and political power, not because they see Moscow’s intrinsic urban problems as a priority. Greenpeace is one notable exception to this rule. Second, the activists do not know how to attack Luzhkov’s business empire, high levels of repression, politically authoritarian region. Nevertheless, there are multiple urban protest campaigns that make alliances with the political opposition that also concentrates in Moscow (OGF, Solidarity) and with radical Leftist groups. The overall picture is that of a disjoint between grassroots urban initiatives that could be framed as social environmentalism and professional environmental activists.

Saint Petersburg is politically more pluralist than Moscow and also has a very wide spectrum of environmental NGOs, many of which have strong social components:
Bellona Center, the satellite office of Greenpeace, Ekom Center. The DOP movement was never very strong in Saint Petersburg and does not dominate the environmental activist scene. Thanks mostly to the efforts of the satellite office of Greenpeace and of the EKOM Center, the grassroots urban protests are framed as social-environmentalist and begin to merge into networks.

6.2 Mexican Cases

In this section, I present recent campaigns from three states: Guerrero, Morelos, and the Federal District (Mexico City). Mexico City stands apart from the rest of the country, because it has the most democratic regional political environment by Mexican standards – with high levels of state tolerance for social protest and respect for autonomous citizen associations. Because of this, and because it is the capital, it attracts protesters from all over the country: protest movements that cannot achieve their goals at the regional level come to the capital to pressure the federal authorities.¹⁸³ Social activists in the state of Mexico that surrounds the Federal District greatly benefit from their proximity to the capital not only because they can easily send their delegations to Mexico City, but also because activists from Mexico City can quickly come and join them. The same phenomenon can be also observed in Morelos and Guerrero: activists from Mexico City routinely come to join campaign events in these regions. In Guerrero, this pattern is weaker than in Morelos, because the distance from the capital is greater and many protests take place in mountain zones that are harder to access. Of these three states, ¹⁸³ This is a phenomenon that has no parallel in Russia, where Moscow remains one of the most authoritarian and protest-intolerant regions.
Guerrero is the most authoritarian, in spite of the fact that it has been governed by PRD since 2005. I classify Morelos, where the governorship passed from PRI to PAN in 2000 and where many municipal presidents are from PRD, as an intermediate case.

All three regions have historically strong bases for grassroots mobilization. Guerrero and Morelos form part of the densely populated Central zone that is known for its peasant and indigenous movements. These rural / small town mobilizations draw on the traditions of self-government that in some cases go back to colonial times and on the post-1968 evolution of autonomous social movements. Mexico City has a long history of social mobilization, which includes movements directly related to the political opposition as well as those with a primarily socio-economic focus.

6.2.1 Solid Waste Issue in Morelos: the Campaign Against Tetlama Garbage Dump

The open-air garbage dump in Cerro de Milpilla (located on the territory of the Tetlama ejido and next to the town of the same name) is over 30 years old. It has an area of about 16 ha and is estimated to hold close to 9mln tons of garbage (2007 estimate). It receives about 60% of the garbage produced in the state of Morelos, including the daily 700 thousand kilograms from its capital Cuernavaca. It has no insulation and is located on very porous soils, so over the years of its operation the toxic effluent had polluted both the groundwater table and the Apatlaco river with its tributaries. In addition, the gases

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184 According to the residents of Alpuyeca, there have been several deaths from contaminated well water. It is unclear, how much clinical proof exists for the connection between these deaths and water contamination. The main land-use in the area surrounding the dump is agricultural, there is no industrial production. However, I am not aware of anyone investigating the possibility that the contamination of the wells was due to the use of agricultural chemicals – everyone sees the garbage dump as the most likely
and the heat from garbage decomposition result in periodic fires that have not been put out. Apart from household waste, the dump also receives commercial waste, animal waste from the nearby chicken farms, and hospital waste.\textsuperscript{185}

The first town to mobilize against the Tetlama dump was Alpuyeca (Xochitepec municipality). The garbage trucks drove through it on their way to the dump, so in early March 2006 Alpuyeca residents blocked that access road. Alpuyeca is also the first downstream town from the dump: it uses the water from Río Frio\textsuperscript{186} – the first stream that the dump effluent gets washed into on its way downhill. In the residents’ minds, dump effluent was firmly related to the adverse health effects that they have been experiencing: cases of cancer, thyroid illnesses, and several deaths from contaminated well water.\textsuperscript{187}

The causal link that the Alpuyeca residents saw between the dump and the negative health effects was based primarily on anecdotal evidence of their higher-than-normal share of grave illnesses. Respiratory infections, allergies and irritation of skin, eyes, and lungs, regular strong headaches have become a constant backdrop of their lives over the dump’s lifetime. Over the last decade, they also noticed the rise in cases of more serious illnesses: cancer (especially leukemia in children), diabetes, malformations at

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\textsuperscript{185} Gimeno, 25.10.2004; Balboa, 24.10.2006.
\textsuperscript{186} Río Frio is a tributary of Colotepec that flows into Apatlaco, on which the towns of Xoxocotla and Jojutla are located.
\textsuperscript{187} Barreda, 18.11.2006.
\end{flushright}
Pipe water comes to Alpuyeca only once a week, so river water is used for bathing, cooking, and household cleaning. Gabriel Mejía Pablo explained that the residents’ concern grew not only because of the illnesses, but also because they felt that the government health officials were not willing to document these cases and investigate their causes. “We saw many cases of cancer [and we linked them to the garbage dump, because] there would be several cases within the same family. Little children were getting leukemia. We have a government health center, but the doctor does not want to document these cases, because he is paid by the state. We are trying to find other doctors, because we want to have all cases documented.”

This search for independent experts resulted in an analysis of dump effluents and Colotepec river water conducted in late 2006 at the residents’ request by chemists from the Iberoamerican University in Mexico City. It showed levels of mercury and arsenic above the official safety threshold, and the authors of the study declared the river water to be “unfit for human consumption.”

The resentment about the dump seems to have grown steadily for at least six years before the grassroots mobilization took place. During his campaign for the governorship of Morelos, Sergio Estrada Cajigal promised to address the state-wide waste disposal issue through the siting and construction of a new regional landfill. The residents of the Xochitepec and Temixco municipalities located closest to the Tetlama dump have heard him reiterate this promise throughout his term, but it was never fulfilled. After 2003, the governor’s failure to close the state’s open-air dumps has become a direct violation of the

189 Mejía Pablo, 18.11.2006a.
federal waste management law and the associated Official Norm (NOM 083), issued by Semarnat, which specified the standards for “sanitary landfills” and mandated the closure of open-air dumps that did not satisfy these requirements. The residents knew about these developments from the press and considered both the state and the municipal authorities guilty of inaction.\footnote{Balboa, 24.10.2006, quoting Juan Oriañeiqui Cosme of Alpuyeca. Gómez-Portugal, 20.10.2006. The federal law, Ley General para la Prevención y Manejo Integral de Residuos (2002) expressly forbids the operation of open-air dumps. Norma Oficial Mexicana (NOM) 083 was issued by Semarnat in 2003 as an enabling rule for this federal law.} In early 2004, the municipal authorities of Temixco – the district where Tetlama and the garbage dump are located – contracted garbage collection and disposal out to a private company, “Ecogana.”\footnote{Morales, 17.01.2004.} In spite of promises that privatization would lead to better garbage management and remediation, people living around the dump saw no improvements: the entrance to the dump was unguarded, so that anyone who wanted could bring trash there; the fires kept burning – the new operators were not putting them out.\footnote{Gimeno, 25.10.2004.} The residents of Alpuyeca began to threaten to block the access road to the dump if this situation persisted.\footnote{Morales Velázquez, 27.01.2004.}

The events that took place between 2003 and 2006 seem to have greatly undermined any confidence that residents might still have left in the government’s willingness to resolve the issue and to include them into the decision-making process. On the one hand, they heard too many promises that were not followed up with actions. On the other hand, the waste management business has been known for years to be one of the most lucrative and corrupt spheres of municipal government.
The grassroots mobilization began in early March 2006, when Alpuyeca residents finally lost their patience and blocked the main road through the town that was used by garbage trucks to access the dump. The core group of organizers – residents who have already been socially and politically active in the past – called themselves “The Committee of Resistance against the Tetlama Dump.” According to Gabriel Mejía Pablo, a primary school teacher, the catalyst for mobilization had been the death of a small child from brain cancer.

The governor sent in riot police to dismantle the road blockade, and his undersecretary, Rafael Martínez Flores, began to negotiate with the Commission. In the written agreement signed with representatives of Alpuyeca residents on March 14th state government took on the responsibility to close the Milpilla / Tetlama dump completely no later than in 90 days; the daily garbage load coming to Tetlama was supposed to be gradually diminished over this period of time. CEAMA took on the obligation to work out a remediation plan, and state and municipal authorities promised to initiate “social infrastructure projects” in Alpuyeca, including provision of well water, treatment of waste waters, improvements in health and school facilities. The text of this agreement was signed by all parties involved: CEAMA and state officials, five Alpuyeca representatives, and even the visitor from the State Commission for Human Rights.195

During the “truce period” between March 15th and June 16th, the residents saw no visible progress on the part of the government agencies. On March 16th, the State Water and Environment Commission (CEAMA) announced that it had already found the

alternative site for the landfill, but did not give any details about its location or the work required to bring it into operation.\textsuperscript{196} The daily load of trash brought to the dump showed no signs of diminishing – Alpuyeca residents manned a community watch in the main square of the town that counted the number of garbage trucks passing by. The “social infrastructure” projects failed to materialize, except for the new door added to the town’s health center and described in official documents as “health center improvements.”\textsuperscript{197}

During the month that followed the initial road blockade, the Alpuyeca Resistance Committee members got in touch with residents of towns further downstream, whose water supply and agricultural lands were affected by the dump – Xoxocotla and Jojutla, as well as the residents of Tetlama – the town located upstream from the dump, but closest to it, which most affected by the smoke, sooth, and odor from the dump’s ever-burning fires. Together with representatives from the municipal centers of Xochitepec and Temixco, these communities formed a network, “Morelos People Front in Defense of Water, Land, and Air.”\textsuperscript{198} Characteristically, the main reason that the leaders of the network gave for its formation was their frustration with “the indifference of the authorities to the problems confronted by the communities … who want to be heard and attended to.” All member communities had grievances related to the Tetlama dump, but Xoxocotla and Jojutla were also demanding government aid in improving drinking water access. The crisis at the dump gave these communities additional momentum in

\textsuperscript{196} José Luis Garcitapia. “Listo, predio para sustituir tiradero de Tetlama,” La Jornada Morelos, 16.03.2006; online at: \url{http://www.cemda.org.mx/artman2/uploads/1/Notas_per_odisticas.pdf}
\textsuperscript{197} Saguayo Lira, 19.11.2006.
\textsuperscript{198} Morales Velázquez, 19.04.2006.
confronting the state and municipal governments on a number of long-term issues.\textsuperscript{199} Thus, the inhabitants of Jojutla pointed to the contamination of their agricultural lands and demanded that the government compensated their inability to sustain themselves through farming with social infrastructure projects. Although the government eventually would agree to hear out the protesters, all these negotiations bore no fruit.

On the 15\textsuperscript{th} of July – the next day after the deadline for the dump’s closure – the residents of Alpyueca and Tetlama blocked the main federal road passing through Alpuyeca and demanded that the government fulfill its promise to close the dump.\textsuperscript{200} This action created the first garbage crisis in Cuernavaca: waste management companies had stopped collecting garbage in the residential neighborhoods outside of the city center, and frustrated residents started leaving their trash bags in the central streets.\textsuperscript{201} On July 16\textsuperscript{th}, CEAMA issued an official order for the immediate closure of the dump. At the same time, its head, Adolfo Lizárraga Fontes, asked the residents for a 45-days extension of the dump’s operation, justifying this delay by the impossibility of bringing a new dump site into operation over three months. The residents thought this move to be quite disingenuous, because CEAMA had announced the need to close the dump in early 2004 and was supposedly working on a proposal for a new regional landfill ever since then.\textsuperscript{202}

Signs, announcing the closure were posted at the entrance, but the garbage was still

\textsuperscript{199} García, 19.04.2006.
\textsuperscript{200} Hugo Barbieri Rico. “Bloquean el acceso al tiradero de Tetlama,” La Jornada Morelos, 15.06.2006.
\textsuperscript{201} Elizabeth Cuevas Villalobos. “Confía comuna que no cerrarán Tetlama; restringen recolección,” La Jornada Morelos, 15.06.2006.
brought in as before. An additional space was cleared at the edge of the dump in order to enlarge it; this required clear-cutting of trees on the land of the Tetlama ejido, which was done without the permission of the ejido members or the Semarnat authorization required for such land-use changes. Since the access road through Alpuyeca was still blocked by the protesters, the garbage trucks from Cuernavaca started coming through the back way, by the secondary road via Tetlama. This development finally gave Tetlama residents the push they needed for mobilization, and on September 25th they blocked the secondary road, after which the confrontation went into its most acute phase.

The now complete blockade of access to the dump plunged Cuernavaca into a waste crisis on the scale that it had never experienced before. The residents of towns around Tetlama have succeeded in showing the residents of the state’s capital that they could not forever export their waste to be dealt with elsewhere. As Cuernavaca’s newly elected city government frantically searched for alternative locations to deposit the rapidly accumulating trash, other major Morelos municipalities also denied it access to its dumps. As the residents of Cuernavaca organized themselves through the “Committee of Civil Resistance” and began to block major city arteries with trash, Cuernavaca’s waste was illegally dumped in the neighboring state of Mexico for about three weeks, before the two state governments signed an agreement that essentially authorized a fait accompli.

204 Gómez-Portugal, 20.10.2006.
The mobilized communities presented their plight as that of being “the waste dump of the entire state.” As the campaign went on, it acquired an unmistakable focus on stopping the rich people from big cities, especially Cuernavaca from dumping their trash on the poor rural dwellers. However, it must be pointed out that the residents from all the protesting communities used the dump themselves to dispose of their own waste and thus were also contributing to the problem. Professional environmental activists that sympathized with and supported the movement considered this NIMBY attitude to be damaging to the movement’s reputation and chances of changing the environmental situation for the better in the long run. They therefore urged the communities to expand the scope of the movement beyond fighting for the definite closure of Tetlama dump and to work on reducing consumption of highly-packaged goods sold by “large commercial companies” and on organizing separation and recycling of their own domestic waste.

The attempts by the elite activists to broaden the campaign agenda from mere protest against an undesirable facility to the promotion of a life-style change do not seem to have been very successful. Although community activists from Alpuyeca did make and effort to organize waste separation during the summer and fall of 2006, these efforts were clearly considered less important than the confrontation with the municipal and state government. The stakes were raised especially high, because municipal elections took place in September 2006, and the residents hoped that the new government might include

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206 Balboa, 24.10.2006. This vision was additionally reinforced by the fact that waste collection companies from the neighboring Mexico state had been illegally depositing additional trash at the Tetlama dump. The discovery of these illegal shipments during a police raid in 2003 caused a scandal, which was well publicized in the press and of which the communities near Tetlama were well aware. See Morales Velázquez, 10.04.2003 and 26.05.2003.

them into the decision-making process. “We hoped that the [new municipal council] of Xochitepec would invite us [to work with them], because we went to see the municipal president [Basilíso Miranda Román] before he was elected and … told him that we wanted to be part of the solution, instead of just [going on with the] roadblocks. But they started it off badly: they called us to a town-hall meeting and then did not turn up. So we started getting organized without them – separating the garbage, working with schools and with the parents.”

In spite of the efforts of various environmental and leftist organizations in Cuernavaca to use the 2006 garbage crisis to make the capital dwellers conscious of the enormous amount of waste they were producing and to turn it into a major effort at waste reduction and recycling, the solution that the Cuernavaca city government came up with in April 2007 neglected these proposals: the concession to manage Cuernavaca’s trash was sold to a private company (PASA) that accepted the obligation to construct a new landfill. The choice fell on Loma de Mejía – an area on the Western outskirts of the city. The EIA of the sanitary landfill that PASA to CEAMA – the agency responsible for giving it the construction permit – was independently analyzed by a group of UNAM researchers and rejected as inadequate. The residents of Subida a Chalma, the closest neighborhood to the proposed landfill site, began to organize resistance in August 2007 – it seemed that the waste issue had gone around a complete circle.

However, this time there was one major difference: the new municipal president of Temixco who, like many others, made the resolution of waste crisis his key campaign

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208 Mejía Pablo, 18.11.2006b.
issue, embarked on a new, although still top-down, strategy, which clashed with Cuernavaca’s plans to turn Loma de Mejía into a regional landfill. Javier Orihuela García allied himself with the grassroots opponents of the new landfill, because some of them lived in his municipality and because he had a plan to turn the Tetlama dump into a regional waste processing center by attracting outside funds and technological help. When the Congress of Morelos mandated the closure of Tetlama in June 2006, it was understood that the responsibility for cleaning up the dump site would lie primarily with the Temixco municipality, on whose territory it was located. Orihuela García criticized this decision, saying that the municipal funds were clearly not sufficient for the undertakings, but, instead of asking the state or the federal government for more money, he decided to turn abroad. In 2007, he attended an environmental technology exhibition in the UK, at which he signed an agreement with a Spanish-US company “Tú transformas” (“You transform”), according to which the company would receive carbon credits under the Clean Development Mechanism clause of the Kyoto Protocol in exchange of doing remediation work at Tetlama, which consisted largely of methane collection and destruction. A UN inspection had visited the Tetlama site in November 2007, and the methane-destroying project was approved in February of the following year, which gave Temixco access to 40 million pesos (just under $4 million) in UN funding.

In spite of the innovative character of this initiative, all these steps were once again taken without consultation with the communities that consider themselves affected by Tetlama. The local press gave victorious accounts of the clean-up progress at the
dump, but there was no attempt to make the process transparent to the concerned residents. Neither did the municipal authorities make an effort to observe the proper EIA procedures: in November 2008, the EIA Technical Committee of the State of Morelos had rejected a methane-based energy generation project that was to be built within the dump’s territory, because the document package submitted for EIA was not complete. Nevertheless, CEAMA found these incomplete EIA materials to be sufficient to issue the permit for the project in April 2009, and that event was immediately followed by a renewal of protests in Alpuyeca and Tetlama. Orihuela García’s explanation of these protests was essentially correct: he said that “the residents lacked information about the project” and promised that “the municipality would update them about it and make them see that they will receive their share of the benefits.”

In spite of being a member of PRD, a party that portrays itself at the national level as a champion of citizen participation and transparency and in spite of his “activist past,” Orihuela García chose the traditional way of dealing with the population: he made and framed the important decisions behind closed doors and, when protests erupted, made the usual move of negotiating about the “sharing of the benefits.” The confrontation is still not over, and it is not clear at the point of this writing whether the municipal authorities will be able to provide the residents who have been mobilized for over three years with a share of benefits large enough to stifle the protest movement.

The closure of the Tetlama dump had more to do with the goodwill of an individual politician, who found it in his interest to respond to the main demand of the

\footnote{209 See footnote 185 in this chapter.}
protesters than with the operation of law-enforcing institutions. The complaint that Guadalupe Saguayo Lira, a school teacher from Alpuyeca, filed at the General Prosecutor’s Office (PGR) in October 2006 against CEAMA and five municipal governments that used Tetlama as their garbage dump was left without response for 5 months. When the PGR finally acted and asked the Office of Federal Environmental Prosecutor (Profepa) to conduct an under-cover inspection of the Tetlama site, Profepa officials refused to do so, saying that this case was not within their competence. The PGR took no further actions, and in September 2007 Saguayo Lira filed an *amparo* request arguing that Profepa and PGR had failed to respond to her initial complaint and had done nothing to investigate the alleged violations of CEAMA and the municipal authorities with respect to the closure of Tetlama dump. I am unaware that this case ever received any resolution.

### 6.2.2 Urban Environmental Campaigns in Mexico City

Urban environmental activism in Mexico City provides an extremely informative comparison to its Russian analogues. Many of the issues that grassroots urban environmentalists face are remarkably similar – land-use change driven by the “normal” logic of urban development and expansion routinely creates environmental and social

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210 Norandi, 20.03.2007.

211 Juicio de amparo is a legal instrument peculiar to Mexico that allows the citizen to file a complaint against a state agency that is deemed to be violating his or her constitutional rights. It is based on Article 107(2) of the Mexican Constitution, which states that the judicial power of the federation has the obligation to guarantee public rights. The plaintiff (citizen) presents an amparo request (demanda de amparo) to a federal judicial agency (in this case, the district court), which acts as the arbiter in the conflict and decides whether the violation of rights took place or not. In the affirmative case, the agency orders the offender to give back the rights and guarantees to the plaintiff. See Pezzoli (1998: 372, fn.7). The full text of Saguayo Lira’s amparo request can be found at: [http://www.cemda.org.mx/artman2/uploads/1/DEMANDA_DE_AMPARO INDIRECTO_1.pdf](http://www.cemda.org.mx/artman2/uploads/1/DEMANDA_DE_AMPARO INDIRECTO_1.pdf)
risks that the developers and the municipal authorities are unwilling to take into account. The common issues are largely the same: insertion of new residential, commercial, and industrial buildings into existing neighborhoods and their dissection by new transport arteries, encroachment of these new constructions into green and recreational spaces, and pollution from industrial facilities. What makes Mexico City a very different space for urban environmentalism, in comparison not only with Russia, but also with most other Mexican cities are the strength of its post-1985 urban activism and the political environment that is very favorable to citizen participation and protest.

Neighborhood-level social-environmental activism in Mexico City began in the 1970s, at the time when the city government was a department of the federal government and the mayor was appointed by the president. Explosive population growth and rapid urban sprawl, caused by the huge influx of rural migrants into Mexico City that began in the 1950s, created a host of urban problems that could not be effectively addressed by the corrupt and ineffective municipal government linked to the business sector by numerous formal and informal ties. As the urban quality deteriorated, informal groups began to form in both middle- and working-class neighborhoods in response to the industrial pollution from nearby factories and the laying of new major traffic arteries through densely populated areas. These groups were often led by professional organizers from the radical Left. The creation and evolution of the Association of Residents and Property

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212 Umlas (1996: 2003) notes that “it is not clear whether land use [change] is always considered to be an ecological issue per se, either by residents or by authorities.” I argue that it can and should be considered a socio-environmental issue, in cases where the residents focus their campaign on a dual goal: 1) defense of their rights to be informed about the changes and to participate in their formulation; and 2) defense of a certain space that has both environmental and social value to them.

Owners of Colonia Irrigación (ARPCI) provides a typical example of grassroots mobilization within the traditional context of PRI-controlled urban politics.

6.2.2.1 The Struggle Against the Colgate-Palmolive Factory in Colonia Irrigación

Tzintzún Carranza, whose ample experience of community organizing included working as a liason for the Mexican Communist Party (PCM) at a major electrical company, came to live at the Irrigación colony in the early 1970s.214 He and his wife Susana quickly became aware of the damage caused by their neighbor – the Colgate-Palmolive factory: “there was no fence around their waste yard, the smell was horrible. Every morning, we found a layer of white ashes on the top of our car.” By the time the couple came to the neighborhood the problem was old enough for “all the objective conditions to be ripe for mobilization: the people were ready for it, they just needed someone to direct the organization process.” The Carranza couple naturally assumed this leadership role and began to organize people by city blocks – Tzintzún proceeded in the same way when he was canvassing for a Communist youth organization in the colony where he grew up. At first, the group had 20-30 people, later it grew to over 100 members. At the same time as they organized the neighbors, the Carranza couple began to attack its powerful opponents: “I wrote newspaper articles all the time – was denouncing one abuse after another. We also made demands at the environmental ministry,215 went to negotiate with businessmen – there were many other companies [who owned industrial facilities in the neighborhood], besides Colgate-Palmolive. At first, they

214 This section is based on Tzintzún Carranza’s personal interview, given in Mexico City on 01.10.2006.
thought we were crazy, but our press articles attracted the government’s attention, the [state control agencies] began to pressure them and they grew angry. We forced them to put fences [around their waste-yards], install sulphur scrubbers, water treatment systems.”

The confrontation went into its most acute phase in the late 1970s, when Colgate-Palmolive decided to expand its factory to the building across the street from its existing location. In order to have a contiguous territory, the company simply bought a major neighborhood thoroughfare and blocked it: “they made a deal with Hank González, the Mexico City regent [1976-82], and one day we saw the decree in the Diario Oficial [de la Federación].” The residents responded with a fresh wave of protests, and “the businessmen were really bothered by it.” Soon afterwards, the Carranza couple received a breakfast invitation from the company’s manager and lawyer; the conversation that ensued is a classic example of the Mexican style in dealing with social movement leaders. “They told us: ‘look, we are a very powerful company, we have an international network of factories. We have links with the government; what we did is already legalized: the government decree is published, so there is nothing to fight about anymore. We know that you two are the head of the movement, and we want to settle the issue with you. We know a lot about you’ – they proceeded to recount our biographies with great precision. – ‘Tell us what you need and you will get it. Señora, wouldn’t you like to have a house of your own?’ My wife grew highly indignant: ‘The only thing we want is that you give us back the street!’ So they tried me instead: ‘You are an architect, you know how business is done in this country – tell us what you want.’ I replied: Compared to you,
I am nothing: we have no resources and you have all the power, but there is nothing I want from you.”

In the end, the Carranzas were able to get the street back by finding their way to the ears of the powerful. Mana Dorbier, a journalist who sympathized with the protest movement turned out to be a personal friend of Hank González. When she found out what was going on, she wrote him a personal letter and accused him of having sold a public street. As a result, the Carranza couple was invited to the mayor’s office and treated to a classic populist show by a PRI politician who was approaching the end of his term and could therefore indulge himself in gaining some political capital by siding with the city residents without worrying too much about spoiling his relations with a powerful business actor. “He told us: ‘I was not aware of this problem, but now that I am I would like to help you.’ He then called the delegado:216 ‘I need to have that company out of there sharp – it is high time for them to return the street to the citizenry. And if they refuse to do it, we will expropriate217 the street from them.’ And he did ‘expropriate’ it, even though the company paid about 2 million pesos to his government for the right to occupy the street. See, he was nearing the end of his term – he could afford to do it.”

This early campaign shows the typical trade-off confronted by social environmentalists who act in authoritarian settings: they often find that they can better achieve their environmental objectives by first creating a sense of crisis through direct action and then finding a powerful ally within the state who can resolve the problem for

216 In this case, the head of the Miguel Hidalgo ward, where Colonia Irrigación is located.
217 The use of this revolutionary term by the state official who was personally responsible for this situation is an admirable example of the PRI rhetoric.
them through non-institutional and non-public channels. While the leaders of this campaign did make use of the press to make the company’s abuses public, they knew better than to try to take the case to court: given the nature of connections that existed between Colgate-Palmolive and the high levels of the city government, legal mechanisms would not have helped to get the street back. Thus, the activists focused their efforts on negotiations with both the company and the state and by doing so accepted the dominant rules of the game. The Carranzas refused to become clients of the company, but they did manage to use the mayor as their political patron. Nevertheless, using this non-institutional avenue did not cost ARPCI its autonomy: its “alliance” with the mayor was short-lived, since they simply managed to make use of a very special political moment. After the end of the Colgate-Palmolive campaign, the ARPCI, now led by Susana Carranza, continued to work as an autonomous grassroots association and shifted its attention to the pollution from an oil refinery in the Azcapotzalco ward. 

6.2.2.2 Mexico City Under PRD Governments: A Major Change in Opportunity Structure

A major change of the political environment in Mexico City took place in 1997, when the PRD leader, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano, won the first competitive mayor elections. From the time when Cárdenas was campaigning as the presidential candidate of the National Democratic Front in 1987-88, PRD leadership has dedicated an enormous amount of effort and resources to the task of winning the support of the capital’s residents.

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over from the PRI and the PAN. Making alliances with the urban popular movement and other grassroots urban associations has been a key aspect of this strategy. PRD’s uninterrupted control of Mexico City government over the past twelve years has allowed it to essentially displace the PRI as the main patron of citizen groups and social movements. Many of the social organizations that have established close links with PRD over this period have become integrated into its corporatist structure that bears much resemblance to that used by the PRI.

Nonetheless, the PRD has been much more reluctant to use repression, the other half of the classic PRI strategy of dealing with social movements. Since PRD came to power, Mexico City has become a very attractive venue for protesters from all over the country, because the government’s tolerance for all common forms of direct and contentious action used by Mexican protesters is much higher there than anywhere else in the country. This has been manifested particularly clearly by the events that accompanied and followed the highly-contested presidential elections of 2006. When Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the PRD candidate and a former mayor of Mexico City, refused to accept the official results of the vote that showed the PAN candidate, Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, to be a winner with a very narrow margin, Mexico City became the stage for mass protests that continued almost without interruption until the beginning of

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220 Valencia Mulkay (28.09.2006) complains that “PRD’s corporatist effort” has made it harder for autonomous groups that have to compete with PRD’s clientelist organizations.
221 Magaloni, Díaz-Cayeros, and Estevez (2007) argue that this greater tolerance for social protests has to do with the fact that Mexico City was one of the first places where the PRI’s electoral and political hegemony was challenged by the opposition parties. See Trejo (2004) on the subject of regional variation in the levels of state repression of social protests in Mexico between 1975 and 2000.

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Calderón’s term. The extreme skill and caution with which these protests have been handled by the administration of Alejandro Encinas\textsuperscript{222} bear witness to the enormous progress that democratization has made in Mexico City.\textsuperscript{223}

I was personally present at many protests that took place in Mexico City between September and December 2006. As a Russian citizen with considerable experience of participating in street protests, I was genuinely amazed at the contrast between the behavior of the Mexico City traffic and riot police and that of their Moscow counterparts.\textsuperscript{224} Since around 2004, violent police dispersal of street protests began to be used with increasing frequency in cities all over Russia. From 2006 onwards, the use of force has become increasingly incommensurate with the numbers of protesters, which rarely exceed a few thousand people.\textsuperscript{225} In Moscow, the national capital that holds the dubious distinction of having the most authoritarian and corrupt city government in the

\textsuperscript{222} His position is summarized in an interview that he gave to the Proceso magazine in September 2006. See Monge, 24.09.2006.
\textsuperscript{223} One of the most impressive aspects of the government’s behavior was its decision not to evict two large protest camps that have blocked traffic in two of the busiest sections of the city center. One was maintained by Obrador’s supporters through July and August on about 1.5km stretch of Paseo de la Reforma, the most prestigious central thoroughfare of Mexico City. The other operated one block north of the Alameda Park between October and December and was organized by the delegation from Oaxaca, the site of a very powerful social movement that resulted in the creation of Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca (APPO) and was demanding the resignation of the state governor, Ulises Ruis. In addition to these two major sources of protests – the presidential elections and the conflict in Oaxaca, Mexico City streets also played host to delegations from La Otra Campaña – “the Other Campaign,” a political tour of the country organized by EZLN as an alternative, non-electoral way to give voice to “people’s demands” (see Mora, 2007) – and from San Salvador Atenco – the site of 2001-2002 protests against airport construction that evolved into a local self-government movement, which was brutally repressed in May 2006. See Stolle-McAllister (2005) and Proceso (Issues 1540, 1541).
\textsuperscript{224} I was particularly impressed by the fact that the traffic police actually protected the protesters during the (often spontaneous) blockades of very busy streets – they created buffer zones between the protesters and the oncoming traffic and diverted it into adjacent streets.
\textsuperscript{225} For comparison, the protest rallies at the Zócalo – the central square of Mexico City – that took place on 30 July and 20 November of 2006 have been attended by more than 1 million people and have been the largest in history.
country, the denial of protest permits,\textsuperscript{226} encirclement of the protest rallies by riot police and the army, beatings and detentions of protest participants, have become routine ways of dealing with any kind of political and social protest over the past five years. I have not seen such measures being used against Mexico City protesters in 2006. These high levels of state tolerance for protests in the capital contrasted sharply with the treatment of protesters in Oaxaca, to where federal army\textsuperscript{227} was sent in October at the request of state governor Ulises Ruiz who was being pressured to resign by a broad alliance of social forces known as the Popular Assembly of Oaxaca People (APPO).\textsuperscript{228}

Finally, the PRD governments have been making an effort to provide residents with effective participation channels and better access to decision-making on urban land-use issues. The new city law on citizen participation passed in 1998 laid out the procedures for the creation of neighborhood committees (comités vecinales) that were supposed to form “the base for a city-wide network of territorial representation.” These committees are staffed with representatives elected by the residents and are meant to serve both as the link between the city government and the residents and as spaces for grassroots participation.\textsuperscript{229} This arrangement was meant to be an improvement upon the

\textsuperscript{226} In Moscow, an organization that wants to hold a protest meeting or march that involve more than 10 people must notify the city authorities at least 10 days in advance and receive their permission to hold it. I am not aware of any such requirements that protesters in Mexico City must comply with.

\textsuperscript{227} The contingent mostly consisted of the Federal Riot Police, which is part of the Mexican military and is notorious for its involvement in the violent suppression of protests.

\textsuperscript{228} On the origins of APPO see González (2006) and Esteva (2007). The events in Oaxaca received daily coverage in all Mexican media; I relied primarily on the three national newspapers – La Reforma, El Universal, and La Jornada – and the weekly magazine Proceso. In spite of partial political and electoral reforms implemented in Oaxaca in the mid-1990s, this state remains one of the authoritarian enclaves with regard to human rights violations and high levels of police repression of social and especially indigenous protests. See Welna (1997) and Trejo (2004, 2006).

\textsuperscript{229} Mejorada Sánchez and Alvarez Enríquez (2003: 258).
one provided in the 1995 Law on citizen participation.\textsuperscript{230} However, observers and participants argue that this state-mandated method of grassroots organizing has not been effective. In neighborhoods, where active resident associations existed as informal groups or civic associations (NGOs) before 1995, these “bottom-up groups” have continued to function largely outside the new structures.\textsuperscript{231} The level of participation in the elections of “citizen councilors” (\textit{consejeros ciudadanos}) has remained relatively low.

The city government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador that came into office in 2000 has adopted a program whose effects are similar to that of Russian “fill-in construction.” This program, called Bando Dos, was aimed at containing the urban sprawl in the Valley of Mexico by mandating that new housing developments were built within the central zone of Mexico City.\textsuperscript{232} It has resulted in numerous neighborhood-level protests. Its critics pointed to instances when new apartment and office buildings came to replace the already-scarce green spaces or buildings of historical value.\textsuperscript{233} Although “to provide low-income groups with affordable housing in central locations” was one of its main goals, Bando Dos has resulted in a 5-fold increase in land values and a doubling of housing prices within the affected zone, and there were also cases when people from old low-income housing were forced to relocate to the urban periphery, as it was replaced

\textsuperscript{230} Umlas (1996: 205).
\textsuperscript{231} Valencia Méndez, 22.11.2006.
\textsuperscript{232} Mexico City (officially known as the Federal District) is divided into 16 urban wards or delegaciones. Four of these - Benito Juárez, Cuauhtémoc, Venustiano Carranza y Miguel Hidalgo – were designated as the preferred zones for new housing construction under Bando Dos. Lino, 01.07.2007.
\textsuperscript{233} Valencia Mulkay (28.09.2006) notes that it is especially difficult to prevent the demolition of historic buildings that are less than 100 years old.
with expensive apartment condominiums. This program has given an additional impetus to the formation of grassroots groups concerned with urban land-use change that began in Mexico City in the mid 1980s.

6.2.2.3 Foro Ecologista de la Cuenca de México – A Social-Environmentalist Network

Since the early 1990s, many grassroots and neighborhood movements of the Mexico City urban agglomeration have benefitted from the support of a very unique socio-environmental network – Foro Ecologista de la Cuenca de México (FECM). This network was created by Miguel Valencia Mulkay, a chemical engineer who turned to environmental activism after the 1985 earthquakes and has been one of the key members of the PGE. Valencia’s aim was to create an “ecoregional” structure that would allow grassroots groups within the Mexico Valley hydrological basin (Cuenca de Mexico) to coordinate their campaigns in response to rural and urban land-use changes. Since its creation in 1991, the network has coordinated grassroots responses to a variety of transport mega-projects, such as the elevated suburban train line (1993) and the Metro Line B that linked the satellite city of Ecatepec to the main metro system (1994-95), the

234 See Gómez Florez, 03.10.2006; Valencia Mulkay, 13.10.2006; Lino, 01.07.2007. These effects are very similar to those of the “wave relocation program” initiated by the Moscow mayor, Yuriy Luzhkov in the late 1990s. The main purpose of the program was to upgrade the Khrushchev-era apartment buildings that constituted a significant portion of the public housing. The residents were promised that they would be given new housing built in the same neighborhood, on the sites that would become available as the old apartment buildings were demolished. Although the program did benefit some low-income residents, it also resulted in numerous cases of land speculation and other abuses, with the original residents being relocated to remote and underdeveloped neighborhoods at the urban periphery and upscale apartments being built instead of “social housing projects.”

235 Since 2005, this organization has been known as Ecomunidades.

236 For a detailed and insightful study of the network’s early history, see Umlas (1996: ch.6).
construction of the new major transit roads (La Venta – Colegio Militar, 1994-95) and the expansion of the existing ones (Chalco-Cuautla highway and addition of second floors to major urban arteries – el Viaducto and el Periférico, 2001-2006).

FECM’s structure and mode of functioning is remarkably similar to that of the Union for Chemical Safety in Russia. Both networks are held together by the main coordinator, who serves at once as the key professional, legal, and strategic advisor, processor and distributor of information, and a bridge to other activists and resources. One of the main reasons for the effectiveness and durability of both networks is the ability of their coordinators – Valencia and Fedorov – to accumulate an incredible wealth of information from all the individual grassroots campaigns and use it to come up with effective action strategies.\(^{237}\) Years of working on the same set of issues have also allowed them to identify key informants and allies within state structures. Thus, rather than seeing the state as uniformly hostile to their actions, the network activists can exploit its splits and weaknesses and also make full use of the sympathetic officials.\(^{238}\) The preferred action strategy in both networks relies on a mixture of denunciations in the media, direct action by the residents, lawsuits, and negotiations with the government and the developer. Both coordinators emphasize the indispensible role of the citizen protests, which essentially open the way for all other action avenues and make them much more

\(^{237}\) For example, Valencia keeps a database of all the journalists who have given thorough and sympathetic coverage of FECM-supported campaigns in the past. Access to this database allows the grassroots activists to find allies in the media and thus to quickly raise enough noise to make it impossible for the developers to begin a controversial construction project quietly. Valencia Mulkay, 28.09.2006.

\(^{238}\) Valencia points to the good relations that he has developed over the years with the environmental prosecutors of the City and the surrounding state of Mexico, as well as officials from the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing (Seduvi) and from the Institute of Fine Arts that is in charge of cataloguing historic buildings.
effective. Neither Valencia, nor Fedorov strive to create grassroots groups “from above” in places where they see the need for urgent action – they wait for the people to get organized first and come to them for help.

One recent case, in which FECM was able to successfully support a grassroots association, is the fight against the logging of an urban forest in the zone known as Santuario de los Remedios, which is a green and recreational space that also has high historical value (it contains an arch from the Colonial period). This zone was declared a national park 50 years ago, and the residential construction project within its limits clearly violated city and federal environmental laws. The protesters managed to obtain the cancellation of the project in 2006 by using the time-honored combination of direct action with a well-framed media campaign. It is notable that in spite of the major changes in the overall political environment that took place since the Colgate-Palmolive campaign, the legal instruments still do not prove to be of much use. As Valencia points out, they did not “discard legal action altogether, but [did] not put much emphasis on it either.” Instead, the residents guided by FECM found a way to turn this campaign into a major threat for the political reputation of two well-known PAN activists who had a vested interest in the project. Since the PAN politicians compete fiercely for votes with

239 It is for this reason that Valencia (28.09.2006) refers to the “legal fight” as “something that we do not dismiss, but do not give much importance to either.” Fedorov (27.07.2006) echoes this sentiment: the stakes of the game are usually so high that not all judges dare to accept the cases brought by activists and to make independent decisions. Thus, “picketing, demonstrations, protest camps” have to go on, no matter what the state of the legal process might be.

240 Valencia notes that in some colonies (the next administrative division below the delegación in Mexican cities) “we could do nothing to control [the land-use change] – it depends on the level of residents’ participation.” Fedorov (09.07.2007) explains: “I do not create these [local] organizations. Instead, an individual comes to me … and says: ‘we have a problem, and I want to create a group.’ And this is the only way. Why? Because the problem is hanging over them, and they have to feel it in order to act.”
PRD in many areas of Mexico City, “creating a scandal through the Internet” proved a very effective way to remind the two individuals involved that they stood to lose more by alienating potential voters than by not having the project completed.

6.2.3 Campaign Against La Parota Dam in the State of Guerrero (2003-2009)

Guerrero is one of the poorest states in Mexico and has one of its most authoritarian subnational regimes. It also has one of the strongest traditions of autonomous peasant and indigenous activism and is one of the first regions where rural social environmentalism began to develop. I analyze the resistance to the La Parota dam project as the case of a social-environmental campaign that develops in a very hostile political context but draws on very strong pre-existing bases of social mobilization.

The rural population of Guerrero has long been denied full citizenship rights. There was no strong agrarian movement in Guerrero during the Revolution, and its post-revolutionary power structures were dominated by strong regional and local caciques that controlled extensive clientelist networks. Rubin (1996: 114) argues that between 1930s and 1960s cacique politics “challenged the directives and projects of the central state” and thus limited its reach into Guerrero. Extreme concentration of power and property in the hands of a few individuals at the top of the clientelist pyramids was one predictable result of this arrangement. Another was the extreme inequality in access to land and natural resources. By the late 1960s, 4/5 of Guerrero’s forests (most of which were

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242 O’Donnell (1993: 138) refers to such regions as “brown zones of privatized power,” where “the public dimension of the state” is largely absent “both functionally and territorially.”
formally within communal and ejido lands) came to be controlled by four large timber companies. They operated with the sanction and the blessing of the state government, and the abuses committed by this state-business alliance were one of the major reasons behind the emergence of radical peasant organizations in the regions of La Montaña, headed by Genaro Vázquez (Primera Asociación Cívica Nacional Revolucionaria) and Acapulco, where Lucio Cabañas founded Partido de los Pobres in 1967. In order to crush these movements and eradicate their social base, the federal government used a dual strategy of military occupation and massive investment in rural infrastructure. Between 1968 and 1975, the rural dwellers of Guerrero lived under the federal army occupation and suffered from massive repressions. At the same time, the federal state introduced several major top-down development programs: agricultural credit and marketing support through Inmecafé and Conasupo, reorganization of the timber industry in 1972 under a single parastatal company Forestal Vicente Guerrero, construction of several major dams and of a federal highway.

In spite of these efforts at “social reconciliation,” Guerrero continued to produce radical peasant and indigenous movements and the state continued to repress them. In June 1995, the federal army opened fire in Aguas Blancas, in an attack directed against

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243 These movements also had a root in the earlier struggle against Guerrero’s top cacique, the state governor Caballero Aburto, that took place in the early 1960s. The Asociación Cívica Guerrerense that forced the governor to resign was unable to get its own gubernatorial candidates elected – at that time, the PRI did not allow opposition governors to come to power. See Bartra (1992), Carlsen and Cienfuegos (2003).
244 To this day, La Montaña remains the poorest region of Guerrero and of the country. See Tlachinollan (2006 and 2009), Lemoine (1998), Carlsen and Cienfuegos (2003).
245 Cabañas’ main social base was in the Sierra de Petatlán, which divides Chilpancingo and Atoyac municipalities. He was assassinated in December 1974.
the Peasant Organization of the Sierra del Sur (OCSS) that emerged in the municipality of Atoyac (Costa Grande) during the January 1994 Zapatista uprising in Chiapas.248 A year after, a new guerrilla organization, People’s Revolutionary Army (EPR), made its first public appearance at the commemoration of the Aguas Blancas massacre and then launched an offensive in seven states.249 Meanwhile, the Organization of Peasant Ecologists of the Sierra de Petatlán (OCESP) surged in the municipalities of Petatlán and Coyuca de Catalán, in protest against the excessive logging of forests by the Boise-Cascade company that was granted the exclusive right to extract timber in the Costa Grande region by Guerrero’s governor in 1995. To facilitate the logging process, a local cacique, Bernardino Bautista, created a “union of ejidos” appropriately named after the governor, Rubén Figueroa. In 1998, Bautista called in the federal army to lend him a hand in the confrontation with OCESP. In the following seven years, this controversy became the center of attention for Mexico’s human rights advocates, as OCESP members and their supporters confronted armed attacks, unlawful imprisonments, torture, and murders.250

248 The Aguas Blancas massacre caused a huge public outcry after a videotape made by one of the policemen at the site fell into the hands of Ricardo Rocha, one of Mexico’s leading journalists, who showed it in his TV program. As a result, Ruben Figueroa, the governor of Guerrero was forced to resign in early 1997. See Cienfuegos and Carlsen (2003: 66, fn.35).
249 EPR has its roots in the guerrilla groups of the 1970s, including the Party of the Poor, reorganized after the assassination of Lucio Cabañas. Its main bases are currently in Guerrero, Oaxaca, Veracruz, and Chiapas. See Lemoine (1998); Vera (12.11.2006).
250 In May 1999, Rodolfo Montiel Flores and Teodoro Cabrera García, members of OCESP, were detained during an army attack on Pizotal. They were charged with fabricated offenses – illegal possession of fire arms and marijuana planting, tortured, and sentenced to 7 and 10 years in prison. Their lawyer, Digna Ochoa, was murdered in October 2001, and this murder was presented as a suicide (Mendez Ortiz and Petrich, 19.10.2006). Both activists were released a month later “on humanitarian grounds,” but the criminal charges against them were never removed. In November 2004, Felipe Arreaga Sánchez, another OCESP member was arrested and falsely charged with the murder of Bautista’s son. He was released from prison in September 2005, after an intense campaign in his defense conducted by Mexico’s division of
The controversy around La Parota dam was developing just as Guerrero’s governorship finally passed out of PRI’s control and was won by PRD, the party that has traditionally had very strong support in Guerrero.\(^{251}\) However, the alternation of political parties in power did not suffice to uproot the authoritarian political culture and to change the dominant pattern of state-society relationship. Since his election in 2005, Guerrero’s first PRD governor, Zeferino Torreblanca Galindo, has consistently used the traditional strategies of dealing with social protest and has personally contributed to the subversion of human rights and of the rule of law. In the case of La Parota project, his main economic ally was the Federal Electricity Commission (CFE), the state monopoly in electricity generation.

La Parota dam was conceived as a hydro-energy project of national importance: the electricity generated there would be added to the peak-hour supply for the central region (where Mexico City agglomeration is located) and exported to Acapulco and other tourist centers on the Pacific coast. The proposal involves damming the Papagayo River just below its confluence with the Omitlán River and would affect about 100 thousand people in five different municipalities – Acapulco, San Marcos, Tecoanapa, Juan R. Escudero (Tierra Caliente), and Chilpancingo.\(^{252}\) Of these, 25 thousand would be

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\(^{251}\) PRD claimed victories in Michoacán and Guerrero in the 1988 presidential elections. In these states, there were several cases of municipal occupations by peasants, workers and students, who held them for 2-3 months in order to force the electoral officials to recognize PRD’s victories. Salinas sent in the army to deal with these protests. See Haber (2006: 119).

\(^{252}\) Tlachinollan (July 2006); Leticia Díaz (07.05.2006). 98% of the 17,300 hectares affected by the dam are within three municipalities: Acapulco, San Marcos, and Juan R. Escudero (Tierra Colorada). 63% of the affected lands are within four agrarian communities (núcleos agrarios) located within the Acapulco municipality: Dos Arroyos (5,000 residents), Los Huajes (3,000), La Palma (8,000 people in 3 villages),
displaced and another 72 thousand indirectly affected, mostly through the desertification of the agricultural and forested lands downstream from the proposed reservoir.

The project has been under consideration since 1976; by 2002, the CFE had completed the geological, economic, and socio-environmental viability studies. In 2003, the CFE began cutting down the forest, building access roads, and digging on the communal lands of San José Cacahuatepec. On 28 July 2003, the peasants of Cacahuatepec, Arroyo Verde, Garrapatas (a village within La Palma) installed protest camps in the CFE work zone and started obstructing the movements of CFE personnel and equipment. The Council of Ejido and Community Members Opposed to La Parota Dam (CECOP) – was formed to coordinate the actions of the affected communities. The protesters argued that the CFE was not authorized to carry out this preparatory work for two major reasons: it had violated procedural requirements in its dealings with both the affected communities and the Semarnat. The CFE had not properly informed the affected communities about the nature and the extent of the project and had not obtained permissions from community assemblies to be doing work on communal lands and thus was violating the Agrarian Law and the communal property rights guaranteed by the Mexican Constitution. In addition, it had begun work without submitting the EIA documents and obtaining the required permit for land-use change from Semarnat.

and San José Cacahuatepec (40,000 people spread among 47 villages). The first three communities are ejidos; San José Cacahuatepec is a communal indigenous territory (bienes comunales).

253 Rodriguez Santos, 18.04.2006. The Acapulco based newspaper, El Sur, has provided very detailed and almost daily coverage of the controversy throughout its duration. The articles can be found at http://www.suracapulco.com.mx.
255 Amnesty International, August 2007. Note the characteristic contrast with the Russian situation, where the main levers for ensuring public participation in decision-making related to mega-projects are provided
The continuous operation of four protest camps forced CFE to suspend the work and to temporarily withdraw its equipment. In 2004, it decided to change strategy and to pay lip service to the public consultation process that is mandated by the Agrarian Law in cases of rural land expropriation and land-use change. In April and December 2005 assemblies were held to obtain authorization for land expropriation from the most affected communities – Cacahuatepec, Dos Arroyos, Los Huajes, and La Palma. The tactics used by the CFE to prevent opponents from attending these assemblies and voting were the same those used traditionally used in Guerrero and elsewhere in Mexico to manipulate elections. The assemblies were not held within the affected ejidal and communal territories, but in the neighboring towns, and no proper notification was given about their time and location. On the assembly dates, peasants from unaffected by environmental laws. To this day, the question of securing the rights of rural dwellers to agricultural land remains largely unresolved in Russia, where there is simply no equivalent to the Mexican agrarian legislation that could be used as an effective legal base for social environmentalism. La Parota case clearly shows that, the 1992 constitutional reform notwithstanding, the Mexican peasants can still rely on the institution of communal and ejido property to protect their lands from expropriation and development. Meanwhile, the Russian peasants have no such recourse, because the process of converting state-owned collective farm lands into communal and private property has proceeded very slowly and is increasingly controlled by large agri-business and real estate corporations. See Polukhin, 07.09.2006; Goncharuk, 07.08.2006; Kirchik (2004).

256 Latin American Water Tribunal, March 2006. The CFE later commissioned the University Program for the Environment at the UNAM to carry out the environmental impact assessment study (manifestación del impacto ambiental, MIA). Semarnat officials reviewed this document in September 2004 and recommended that the CFE consulted the affected communities. The conditional approval of this MIA by Semarnat caused a wave of criticism, because the study failed to consider high seismicity of the project site and the irreversible impacts that the dam was going to have on public health, hydrological regime, and the state of ecosystem. See CEMDA-AIDA, December 2007.

257 The first Cacahuatepec assembly was held in April 2004. It was accompanied by all manner of violations and irregularities, and its positive decision was disputed by COCEP at the Unitary Agrarian Tribunal in Acapulco, which declared the assembly illegal and issued an injunction against CFE prohibiting it from entering and conducting work on Cacahuatepec’s territory. Nevertheless, the CFE made a further attempt to continue its work in June 2004, when it came accompanied by two truckloads of federal soldiers. Castro Soto, 31.08.2005; Tlachinollan (2006); Rodríguez Santos, 18.04.2006.

258 The CFE changed the locations, because the peasants refused to let the CFE enter their territories.
villages were bused in and paid for the voting, while those from the opposing communities were prevented from reaching the assemblies. The assemblies took place in the presence of large state police contingents and agents from the Interior Ministry.

Thus, the positive assembly decisions were obtained through all the imaginable violations of the Agrarian Law. COCEP members have successfully challenged them in court, and in 2007 the Unitary Agrarian Tribunal declared the protocols and the decisions of all four 2005 assemblies invalid. Added to this, was the March 2006 decision of the Latin America Water Tribunal (TLA) that ordered complete cancellation of the project. During the communal and ejidal assemblies that were conducted in August 2007 in the presence of CFE representatives and under the vigilance of CECOP and its professional activist allies, all affected communities have overwhelmingly voted against La Parota. Nevertheless, the legal prohibitions did not stop the CFE from making further attempts to continue the preparations for construction. It took advantage of the fact that President

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259 Even so, the attendance at these assemblies was below the legally required quorum. There were also multiple cases of voting by proxy and votes cast by dead peasants and those working in the United States. Habana de los Santos, 28.12.2005; Tlachinollan (2006); CECOP and Tlachinollan, 23.04.2007.

260 Los Huajes was encircled by the state police to prevent the peasants from leaving the ejido and coming to the assembly which was held in a town 15km away and in a different municipality. In Dos Arroyos, there was a violent clash between the police and the protesters who were trying to break a similar encirclement. Habana de los Santos, 28.12.2005.

261 According to COCEP spokesperson, Marco Antonio Suásteegui, the state government sent a police contingent of around 1500, which included federal traffic, riot, and judiciary police (the last one is especially notorious for its frequent links with criminals and human rights abuses), as well as people from the Federal Investigation Agency (AFI). Rodríguez Santos, 18.04.2006.

262 See Latin American Water Tribunal (March 2006). According to Tlachinollan (2006), this decision was very significant as an international moral condemnation of the project, even though the Mexican government is under no legal obligation to abide by the TLA’s verdict.

263 Cencos, 13.08.2007.

264 While the judges of the district agrarian court in Acapulco upheld all COCEP’s claims, the reaction of the federal courts was much more ambiguous and seems to indicate that the judges were under political pressure. In May 2007, a federal court reversed the Agrarian Tribunal’s decision about the Cacahuatapec assembly and declared it valid once more (Tlachinollan, 2009). The same federal judge that issued an injunction against CFE in Sept 2006 in response to the amparo lawsuit brought by the residents of
Calderón had launched a massive anti-drug offensive in the neighboring state of Michoacán shortly after coming into office in December 2006. In May 2007, army soldiers appeared in Dos Arroyos under the pretext of looking for drugs and illegal firearms; in June they also came to Cacahuatepec.\textsuperscript{265} The human rights abuses committed by the army, the state police, and the CFE personnel prompted an investigation by the Mexican office of Amnesty International.\textsuperscript{266}

Apart from intimidation, the CFE also resorted to co-optation: the peasants in the affected zone were promised public works and social infrastructure projects, some of which were actually completed in towns that were well within the flooding zone. In 2005, 45 years after the construction of La Venta dam that had affected the lands of La Palma ejido, the CFE suddenly made the long-awaited compensation payments to the ejidal officials, who responded by becoming ardent supporters of La Parota project.\textsuperscript{267} The promises of “money and better life” have created deep internal divisions within the affected communities and resulted in several cases of intra-communal violence and three deaths between September 2005 and January 2006.\textsuperscript{268} The rhetoric of fighting poverty through development was also used by the state government and the CFE to discredit the...
environmental and human rights NGOs that supported CECOP by declaring them to be “foreign-funded advisors”\textsuperscript{269} who did not care that people in the affected zone did not have enough to eat and lacked basic services.\textsuperscript{270} These divide-and-rule strategies were especially effective given the low levels of literacy among the affected peasants and the CFE’s withholding of information about the project’s specific impacts – the names of the villages and towns that would be flooded, the places where their residents would be relocated, the size of compensation that they would receive for their land, etc.\textsuperscript{271}

The campaign against La Parota has been joined by practically all major environmental and human rights NGOs, as well as social movements regionally and nationwide. Professional activists, lawyers, peasant and indigenous leaders, and many other social actors see it as the controversy that has brought into focus all of Mexico’s major problems in overcoming authoritarianism. CECOP has received support and solidarity from Guerrero’s major peasant networks, such as OCSS and OCESP. It has joined the Mexican Movement of Dam Opponents and River Defendants (Mapder) – a

\textsuperscript{269} It is noteworthy that accusing NGOs of being foreign mercenaries is the standard harassment tactic used in Russia as well.

\textsuperscript{270} The CFE’s key ally in this task came from the National Peasant Confederation (CNC) that had become the most loyal supporter of the powerful in the countryside. After the communal assembly of Cacahuatepec had rejected the project in August 2007, Evencio Romero Sotelo, a regional CNC leader, gave a press conference in which he asked President Calderón and Governor Torreblanca “to intervene and apply the law” against COCEP, an illegitimate group that has been violently imposing its will onto the peasants. He also aided the state government in its campaign against El Sur – the newspaper that had been giving detailed daily coverage of La Parota issue. In a letter to its editor, Romero Sotelo questioned the newspaper’s reasons for adopting such a sympathetic stance towards COCEP and accused it of being the mouthpiece of the Tlachinollan human rights center and thus “losing objectivity in legal matters.” El Sur, 16.06.2007 and 14.08.2007.

\textsuperscript{271} Cencos, 13.08.2007; Tlachinollan (2009). This strategy of being very vague about the project’s impacts while exaggerating its benefits is highly reminiscent of the one used by Perm regional authorities to quench the opposition to the missile destruction program. Although in that case the subjects of brainwashing were much better educated urban dwellers, the effect was similar, because they had very little knowledge about the missile program, since it was related to military production – a sphere traditionally shrouded in secrecy.
nationwide network created in 2003. It receives legal and human rights help from the most prominent human rights and environmental lawyer organizations – Tlachinollan, Fray Francisco de Vitoria, and Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Centers, Mexican Center for Environmental Law (CEMDA). This case has also attracted the attention of major international actors – Amnesty International, the Latin American Water Tribunal, the Interamerican Association for Environmental Protection (AIDA), World Commission on Dams, and the UN special rapporteurs on indigenous rights and adequate housing.²⁷²

Such a strong and diverse coalition of supporters has been indispensable, since it permitted COCEP to draw on a wide variety of action strategies and to continue operating for six years under very hostile conditions. However, the nature of some COCEP supporters also renders it more threatening and subversive in the eyes of state and federal authorities. Two major anti-systemic actors – EPR and EZLN – have publicly declared their support for La Parota opponents,²⁷³ and this has given the state government an additional justification for using harsh measures against COCEP and accusing it of “undermining the rule of law,” inciting mass riots, and generating political instability.²⁷⁴

After his election, Zeferino Torreblanca, who made a campaign promise to initiate a dialogue with Guerrero’s social movements and organizations, has settled for a window-dressing strategy of handpicking “the civil society” that suited him and branding all other

²⁷² In December 2007, the affected zone was unofficially visited by Rodolfo Stavenhagen and Miloon Kothari. See Cencos, 04.12.2007; CEMDA-AIDA, December 2007.
²⁷³ In August 2005, right after the CFE-organized fraudulent communal assembly, EPR sent an appeal to the people of Cacahuatepec “to defend their land” and continue resistance. In 2006, Subcomandante Marcos included the region into his Other Campaign (Otra Campaña) tour itinerary, during which his delegation listened to “people’s grievances” and supported social protest campaigns all over the country. See Reyes Maciel, 27.08.2005; Rodríguez Santos, 18.04.2006.
social activists as inflexible and non-constructive radicals. He has fast become an expert in presenting authoritarian policies as actions that are aimed at upholding democratic institutions and principles.\textsuperscript{275} Thus, in a 2007 interview, he declared bygone “the times when politics was made through the old means of shouts and marches” and hypocritically called Guerrero’s citizens “to make use of the institutional channels.”\textsuperscript{276}

The case of La Parota, along with many other cases of social resistance in Guerrero, clearly demonstrates that its residents resort to “protests and disorder” precisely because their access to “institutional channels” has been securely blocked for decades. It is highly unlikely that COCEP would have been able to block the construction for six years without keeping the pressure on through the operation of protest camps, organization of road blockades, and occasional use of more drastic and large-scale forms of direct action, such as the taking of Acapulco’s municipal drinking water system in April 2005.\textsuperscript{277} The CFE was not daunted by multiple legal decisions that forbade it from starting construction. Yet, COCEP seems to be winning the war of attrition: the recent press reports multiple signs of CFE’s increasing reluctance to continue pushing through this project, even though it is evident that Torreblanca is personally interested in pursuing it at all costs.\textsuperscript{278} In early September, the CFE officially announced the cancellation of the project, but its opponents know better than to take its word for it. COCEP responded with the demand that the federal government issued an official decree confirming the

\textsuperscript{275} Although Torreblanca is most likely unaware of it, he has a soul mate in Russia: his rhetoric and handling of social protest bears an almost uncanny resemblance to that of Vladimir Putin.
\textsuperscript{276} El Sur, 27.10.2007.
\textsuperscript{277} Leticia Gómez, 07.05.2005; Castro Soto, 28.09.2005.
\textsuperscript{278} El Sur, 14.09.2009 and 17.09.2009.
cancellation: its spokesperson said that they would not believe it until they saw the decree in the Diario Oficial de la Nación – the official periodical that publishes all new Mexican laws. Thus, while they are often unable to use institutional channels themselves, La Parota opponents pressure the government to do so and to make its dealing with them public and transparent.

6.3 Social-Environmentalist Campaigns in Comparative Perspective

6.3.1 The Post-Transitional Political Sphere in Russia and Mexico

While before the beginning of transition the party-state was the main locus of political power in Russia and in Mexico, the number and diversity of political players have greatly increased since then and the political sphere has become more complex and pluralist. Yet, this has been much more the case in Mexico than in Russia, where the levels of political pluralism increased dramatically after 1989, but have been deliberately and systematically reduced by the presidential administrations since 1996. By the year 2000, the Mexican political system became drastically different from the Russian one because Mexico had all the essential attributes of both political democracy and federative state, while Russia was rapidly sliding back towards a system where political life revolved around an authoritarian and a unitary state.

Over the last decade, Russian activists came to face the return of political authoritarianism at the federal, regional, and local levels. It was manifested in the rolling back of the environmental legislation, in the restrictions imposed on the operation of

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NGOs, and in the overall suppression of autonomous activist activities. This should not be taken to mean that Mexican activists no longer have to deal with authoritarian power relations. Rather, they confront them mostly in subnational – regional and local – contexts and within individual state institutions (most notably, the courts, the police, and the army). By contrast, Russian activists have to deal not only with such particular manifestations of authoritarianism, but also with its general advance that is primarily driven by the federal executive. Since 2006, the presidential administration has used the parliamentary majority held by United Russia to pass a series of federal-level legislative changes that have significantly restricted the citizen rights to association and information. These changes have included the modification of laws that regulate the operation of NGOs, the expanded definitions of state secrets, state treason and espionage, extremism, and terrorism. Their combined effect has been to render almost any critique of the current political regime or protest against it punishable as an act of extremism, terrorism, or state treason. Legal mechanisms now exist for classifying the routine gathering and distribution of information by environmental NGOs as the disclosure of state secrets. The definitions of terrorism, extremism, state secrets, and state

280 FZ No.18 (10.01.2006), went into force on 18.04.2006. See Popravko (July 2006).
284 Changes to the Federal law on counteracting terrorism went into effect in December 2008. See Memorial (01.12.2008)
285 To the best of my knowledge, this phenomenon has no analogue in post-transition Mexico, at least at the federal level. However, there are recent instances when state laws have been reformed to limit civic freedoms and criminalize social protest. For example, in 2003, the Criminal Code of Guerrero was modified to make the blockade of any road a crime punishable with 1 to 8 year of prison. This change appears to be deliberately directed against any and all kind of social protesters and allows to initiate criminal investigations against them en masse. See Tlachinollan (2009: 72).
treason have been made so broad and vague that individual state officials now have a much greater leeway in applying them to the actions of individuals and organizations that resist and disclose abuses of state power.

In both Russia and Mexico the *executive* branch still remains the main environmental violator and the main center of state power. In Russia, many of the activists’ difficulties have to do with the fact that their allies from legislative bodies (parliament deputies) and the judges are often under great pressure from regional and federal executives. For example, Popova says that during the campaign against the chemical weapons destruction facilities in Mirnyi / Maradykovo the local deputies sided with the protesters, but they would not dare to go against the head of the district administration and so helped the protesters secretly and anonymously. Kayumov, the head of Dront Center, mentions a case of fill-in urban construction in Nizhniy Novgorod, in which the citizens decided to ask their municipal deputy for support. When they called his office, the secretary shouted in dismay: “don’t even bother calling us for help – Kuznetsov will never go against the governor, never mind that he is your deputy!” In this context, the behavior of two Krasnokamsk city deputies, who led the road blockade and the occupation of the city council, stands out as a notable exception, which shows that Perm still preserves some of the characteristics of a more pluralist region.

In Mexico, the dependence of the legislative on the executive seems to be less of a problem. For instance, the debates that took place about the Tetlama dump in the Congress of Morelos give evidence of diverse positions and the attempts of individual

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286 Popova, 28.08.2006.
287 Kayumov, 01.09.2006.
deputies (from different political parties) to pursue the interests of their constituents. However, the judges and the prosecutors are still under significant pressure from the executive, especially in the more authoritarian regions. Thus, at the height of La Parota controversy, governor Torreblanca personally and publically attacked the State Human Rights Commissioner, who was trying to do his duty and investigate the human rights abuses against COCEP members.\textsuperscript{288} The dependence of the judiciary on the executive is harder to eliminate than the imbalance of power between the executive and the legislative, because it is not directly related to the process of political and electoral democratization.\textsuperscript{289}

6.3.2 Strength of the Social-Environmentalist Campaigns

It is worth noting that the Mexican cases contrast with Russia not only in terms of the availability of pre-existing bases for grassroots mobilization, but also in terms of the greater diversity of professional activist allies involved in each case. It is especially striking that none of the professional social environmentalists involved in the Russian cases are converts from other kinds of social activism (SSEs), while in Mexico this type constitutes the backbone of the professional activist support.

In cases of strong campaigns, there is a clear \textit{division of labor} between professional and grassroots activists. For example, professional activists from Perm understand that they cannot substitute for the grassroots leaders like Popova, Rozhina, or Ogloblina in the task of resident mobilization. They see the limitations of individual

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\textsuperscript{288} Tlachinollan (2009: 69).
\textsuperscript{289} See also Schedler (1999).
\end{flushright}
grassroots activists in their ability to organize people, but limit themselves to helping them when they ask for help rather than telling them directly how they should be acting.

Grassroots activists, because of their pragmatic outlook, are often more willing to make cross-thematic alliances that professional activists are unwilling to make for reasons of ideological purity. To strengthen their environmental campaign Popova, Yushkov, Ogloblina, and other Perm environmental activists have started “gathering together” many kinds of other urban and social initiatives. According to Fedorov, this should have been the main purpose of the Social-Ecological Union (SEU) – to create a nation-wide network of social-environmentalist organizations, to provide an umbrella for bottom-up citizen resistance. SEU proved both unable and unwilling to carry out this task, but it is beginning to be accomplished at the regional level.

The **framing stage** is the crucial time for the formation of the grassroots-professional alliance. Grassroots resistance (with or without pre-existing mobilization bases) begins with people feeling that they have been (or are about to be) wronged in a major way by state and/or corporate agents. The first reaction is: “they are cutting down the forest, building in front of our windows, dumping garbage nearby, building a dam or an oil pipeline on our land and we can not allow this to happen, because it threatens our immediate environment, health, and way of life.” They then need to create an argument justifying to the outside world why this must not be tolerated. The frequent first step is to figure out which laws and rights are being violated. Since there are usually multiple legal
violations associated with such projects,\textsuperscript{290} the grassroots activists can choose which violations they are going to emphasize, that is, whether resistance will be framed primarily in terms of due process, public health, property rights violations, environmental damage or some combination of these environmental and social justice components. At this stage, professional activists (environmental and not) who advise the grassroots leaders have a lot of influence. Grassroots activists are never “pure environmentalists”: their primary concern is to protect the people from the ensemble of risks associated with the development projects. If professional environmental activists get involved, they can frame these concerns in environmental terms. The precise nature of the framing depends on their notion of what can be most easily proven in court, or what they can make the strongest case about in the media and during protests.

Grassroots activists begin with social justice; how much “environmentalism” gets added to that depends on their and their advisors’ perceptions of how to best frame the issue. Professional-grassroots alliances often shift to challenges about civil liberties and due process when they are unable to make purely environmental or public health arguments. Professional activists might chose to do that, if they start off with pure environmentalism\textsuperscript{291}; grassroots activists are opportunists – they will accept any framing that works. Averkiev argues that in the case of urban land-use change the environment is often used only as packaging. He cites the Gaiva case as an example: “It would have been difficult for the neighbors to simply claim the forest as ‘theirs’ – many [potential allies

\textsuperscript{290} Environmental laws, land, forest, and building codes, due process and public information provisions, constitutional rights to land, natural resources, and environmental quality.

\textsuperscript{291} This is the case for the GMO campaign of Greenpeace-Mexico, which argues that multinational companies and large agro-industry are undermining subsistence agriculture.
and sympathizers] would not have accepted such an approach. By contrast, ‘defending [urban] environment’ is a better way to put it. Yet the main pathos, emotion behind this movement is the injustice: this was our communal forest, and now the local rich came and plan to build in it. This is unjust, unfair.”  

6.3.3 Campaign Success in Averting Environmental Threats

Many social-environmental campaigns do not really “end” at the time when the state or the developer announces the cancellation of the project. Russian and Mexican experiences in opposing nuclear and hydroelectric plants, toxic-waste producing and processing facilities, and projects related to mineral extraction and transport show that projects abandoned in the times of intense social mobilization and protests tend to reappear once their powerful proponents think that “the people have calmed down.” Thus, the definitions of “success” and “failure” with respect to averting a particular environmental threat can be reversed and depend greatly on the time scale that one chooses for the analysis. For example, it is not yet certain that the La Parota story is really over: this project has been around since the 1970s. Similarly, the story of missile destruction in Perm is likely to continue for a long time yet. More missiles have been burned after 2008, and the activists are planning a new attack, armed by their five-year experience.

Among the Mexican cases, at least three campaigns had achieved their main objectives: La Parota dam has not yet been built, the Colgate-Palmolive factory installed

292 Averkiev, 28.08.2006.
pollution prevention equipment and returned the street to the public, and the construction project in Santuario de los Remedios was cancelled. In Tetlama, the outcome is much more ambivalent: remediation has been taking place, but the dump has not been closed, and the residents are denied the right to monitor what is going on.

Among the Russian cases, only Krasnokamsk can be considered a success, because construction has been stopped. In Akulovo, Gaiva, and missile campaigns, the projects took place in spite of all the protests (although in the case of Gaiva the residents managed to significantly delay and slow down the logging). The lack of success is especially striking in Perm, both because of the strength of its social-environmental alliances and because of its relatively more favorable regional environment, compared to the rest of Russia. Yet, even the unsuccessful campaigns do make a contribution to the social democratization process by “snatching a little of the government’s decision-making monopoly, of taking away the discretion and arbitrariness with which [the government] is able to administer the law, of obliging the government to listen to the view coming from society.”293 Social environmentalists cannot always make the powerful actors shift away from social and political authoritarianism, but they are the only type of environmental activists who explicitly try to do so.

6.3.4 Contribution to Social Democratization

I am interested in how much social-environmental campaigns can change the rules of the power game. These changes are not always permanent, but at least for the

duration of the campaign the people force the powerful actors to treat them differently, in ways that they have not been accustomed to treat them before. It is an experience that neither side is likely to forget; whether or not it gets institutionalized and generalized is a different question.

6.3.4.1 Contentious Action as a Tool for Strengthening the Public Dimension of the State

Contentious action is extremely important in authoritarian settings, because public protests and other displays of “people power” are the only way to make the state take “the population” seriously in cases, when it is not interested in them either as voters or even as clients. Through protests, the citizens are reducing the enormous power inequality that exists between them and the state/corporate alliances. In authoritarian contexts, citizen protests often result from the initial refusal of state agencies and developers to inform the people and to let them participate in decision-making. A vicious circle then forms. The state begins it by violating citizen rights to information and participation during the preparatory stages of controversial economic projects. Once citizens do find out what is going on, protests begin. What the protesters demand first and foremost is a chance to negotiate with the state and with the developer: they want to be told exactly what is going to happen and how it will affect them; they also want their opinions and preferences to be considered as the project is being prepared. The state and the developer refuse to inform the citizens and to negotiate with them in good faith: they try to win citizen support with

294 Tlachinollan, 2009, p.69.
false promises and conceal the information that will surely make the citizens demand the cancellation of the project. As the citizens discover that they are being cheated and manipulated, protests escalate. If the citizens were included into the decision-making process early on, many projects could be modified in ways that would make them acceptable. But when the authorities refuse to treat citizens as legitimate parties to decision-making, citizens respond by demanding an unconditional cancellation of the project. When \textit{dialogue with the authorities} fails, protesters are forced to go to court, and the issue passes from the sphere of negotiations to the sphere of \textit{legal demands}, complaints, and lawsuits.

The post-transition Mexican state is much more experienced in dealing with social protests than its Russian analogue. To put it simply, the Mexican state \textit{expects} social protest, while the Russian one \textit{does not}. The main reason for this difference is that even during the PRI times the Mexican state recognized that social protest was both an important form of state-society bargaining and a valuable feedback channel that provided the state with crucial information about those that it governed.\footnote{I am grateful to Guillermo Trejo for this insight.} Therefore, the Mexican strategies of dealing with social protests are more sophisticated and varied. In post-PRI Mexico, repression continues to remain “the last resort”\footnote{Quote from Castañeda (2000: xiv).} in dealing with social protest, to be used either when all other strategies fail, or when the protest movement in question appears to threaten the very foundations of the political system. The evolution of state reaction to the series of environmental campaigns in Perm shows that at least some parts of the Russian state are learning to deal with social protest better. However, the overall
experience of the past decade\textsuperscript{297} shows that the Russian state is growing more violent and inflexible in the face of social protests. Repressions have been escalating, and there has been no attempt to prevent future protests through clientelism and cooptation. In other words, the current version of the Russian state is not nearly as interested in turning its opponents into allies and clients as the Mexican state has traditionally been.

Nevertheless, even a cursory overview of recent social-environmentalist campaigns in Russia and Mexico makes it evident that powerful state and business actors are not accustomed to consider the reaction of the population in planning their projects. Even in Mexico, the default strategy is to keep the publically available preliminary information about the project to the bare minimum, so that by the time the affected citizens become aware of what is going on, the project is already so advanced that it becomes very hard to stop. In Russia, in places with no previous history of citizen protests and no existing grassroots associations, the first contact between developers and residents almost always takes the form of an open confrontation: the developers proceed as if the residents did not exist and their opinions did not matter in the slightest, and the residents respond with protests and other forms of contentious action. These protests bother the developers and the state authorities, who are eager to restore public order and might agree to negotiate in order to achieve it.

However, the two sides view negotiations very differently: when the residents ask for negotiations, they are really asking to be included into the decision-making process –

\textsuperscript{297} I am referring in particular to the nationwide police campaign of activist intimidation, harassment, and preventive detention before and during the G-8 summit that took place in Saint Petersburg in July 2006 and to the brutal treatment of protesters that took part in the “Marches of those who disagree” organized by OGF and Other Russia in 2007 and 2008.
if there is no way to cancel the project, they want to at least ensure that it is carried out in ways that minimizes harm to them. By contrast, the developer and the authorities often see negotiations and other legally mandated forms of public consultation purely as a means “to ease social tensions.” By painting a positive and unrealistic picture of the project, they attempt to persuade the residents that their fears and doubts are ungrounded. Yet, because the residents take the negotiations much more seriously and come to them much better prepared, they can usually see through this game, and it antagonizes them even more. When public consultation procedures are not taken seriously by the state and the developer, they make the residents lose their trust completely and make the confrontation escalate.

In all the case studies that I analyzed, the powerful proponents of controversial projects underestimated the residents’ capacity for resistance and self-organization. They tended to treat the activists with the arrogance of those whose power has never been challenged from below. This refusal “to take the people seriously” infuriated the residents and the activists even more than the legal violations associated with the project. In Russia, many first-time grassroots activists reached the point of no return and lose their fear precisely when they realized that the powerful were not merely committing an injustice against them, but also expected them to swallow it all quietly, without resistance! Neglecting and dismissing the possibility that “the people” might not agree made the confrontation more acrimonious.

Contention has its uses, but it also has its limits. What can be achieved through protest campaigns is not letting a controversial project to be carried out without public
participation and consent – making noise in the press and being a thorn in the side of the state agencies that have vested interests in the project. In the Perm missiles, Krasnokamsk, La Parota, Tetlama, and Dzerzhinsk cases, the state reaction to such protest campaigns was focused on getting rid of the conflict and of the contentious situation, but \textit{not} by giving the activists a role in shaping the project. Significant levels of grassroots mobilization can force the state to negotiate (in addition to using repressions), but the officials who conduct these negotiations usually just try to calm people down, often by telling them very obvious lies and making completely unrealistic promises. The activists saw through this game, but were unable to find a way to force a real change of behavior on the part of the state. The net result was that although the state and the developers did talk with the protesters, they then went on to do what they were planning to do anyway, without including representatives of the organized public into the decision-making process. In the two garbage dump cases, the protesters forced the state to accept that something had to be urgently done about the waste issue, but were not allowed to participate in the formulation of the solution. In Tetlama, the efforts of the local executive to find a new way to attack the problem were more genuine; in Dzerzhinsk, there was little change in the status-quo.

In most of the cases that I consider, the activists felt that in order to truly move forward on the underlying environmental issues – organization of environmental monitoring, waste minimization, remediation of industrial pollution, etc. – they needed the state to be willing to see them as partners that are worth working with. In order to achieve this, social environmentalists needed to shift the balance from contentious action
and confrontation to more “constructive,” cooperative forms of interaction. Such a change is inherently very risky for protest movements, because unless the activists count with strong autonomous support bases, they are forced to simply switch to speaking the language of power. Since they need the state more than the state needs them, the state can usually manipulate and cheat on these agreements with impunity – it is very hard for social activists to enforce informal deals with the state.

Grassroots organization is usually based on a complex mixture of motivations that include both the desire “to manage without the state” and the awareness that the state has a lot of resources to distribute, if only the right kind of pressure could be applied. The balancing of autonomy- and clientelism-related considerations is something that the Mexican grassroots activists have long been familiar with, but it is also beginning to show in Russia. Thus, the residents of Pushkino-Babushkino first organized in order to demand access to certain municipal services from the state. They successfully lobbied Dzerzhinsk city government to extend garbage collection services to them. This is a model of community organization that is very similar to the reivindicaciones of Mexican popular urban movements – pressuring the state to deliver basic urban services to which the residents feel entitled.\(^{298}\) At the same time, the residents did not expect the state to do all the work for them: they asked the state for resources that they could not provide through self-organization. This mirrors the organization of Xoxocotla residents around the provision of drinking water (see Chapter 5). If the residents do not go beyond demanding goods and services from the state, the resulting relationship is clientelistic. If

\(^{298}\) Haber (2006).
they do, their organizations acquire greater autonomy. These two experiences (Pushkino-Babushkino and Xoxocotla) demonstrate that associations that begin as clientelist can evolve towards a more autonomous position vis-à-vis the state if they feel that their state patrons can no longer deliver the needed goods and services in an adequate manner or are otherwise failing to respect the contract.

6.3.3.2 Rule of Law

The courts in both Russia and Mexico are subject to state and corporate pressures. Both activists and their opponents often use them as a diversion and foot-dragging device. For activists especially, miring the adversaries in lawsuits and delaying the commencement of projects is often the best tactic, because they cannot achieve the outright cancellation or closure of projects. The powerful actors often use a similar tactic to distract activists from direct action.

The legal challenge is often the only form of resistance initially available to first-time grassroots activists who, while they are extremely motivated “to set the wrongs right,” are for whatever reason incapable of securing the high enough level of commitment from the affected residents to sustain various forms of direct action, which require a much greater collective action potential. However, as first-time activists acquire litigation experience, they realize that even the most blatant and clearly documented violations do not necessarily make the courts decide in their favor. Apart from the possibility of stopping or delaying the project, the lawsuits are also important for showing to the offenders that the affected citizens choose not to swallow abuses and illegalities quietly, to establish a precedent for resistance and for calling state agencies and
corporations to reckoning in places where they have never been held accountable before. When judges are pressured from above by state officials and corporations, activists have to compensate this with pressure from below, which comes from media campaigns and direct action.

On its own, litigation does not work for the environmental activists in either country: even if decisions in their favor are made, they are usually not enforced. An environmentally and socially harmful project might be declared illegal, but that legal decision either does not stop its execution or comes after the construction is completed and the irreparable damage is done. When the legal process works, it is undergirded by sustained and strong direct action campaigns that require significant levels of grassroots mobilization, active involvement of activist elites (professional environmental activists and NGOs), and strong links to other, non-environmental types of social activist networks and organizations. In such cases, which are optimal for the development of social environmentalism, the activists can use a wide variety of strategies, including litigation and negotiations, supported by strong direct action and media campaigns.

Mexican activists, who can draw on pre-existing mobilization bases do not dismiss lawsuits altogether, but do not put much store by them either. As Guadalupe Saguayo from Alpuyeca explains, “it is not that we doubt the laws, but we do not trust those who implement and enforce them.”299 In Mexico, when the choice is between direct action and legal challenges, the balance tends to be much more heavily shifted towards the former than in Russia. There is a stronger sense that the legal system will not defend

citizen rights on its own, that the legal and other institutional processes will only produce favorable outcomes if the people can increase their power through organization, durable mobilization and protest. In Russia, the same approach is chosen by activists that are able to muster a high enough level of participation (Gaiva, Krasnokamsk). The more secure the activists feel in their ability to mobilize a significant number of people, the more they prioritize direct action over legal challenges.

The weakness of social forces capable to engage in sustained contentious action contributes to the weakness of formal democratic institutions in general and of legal institutions in particular. The strengthening of citizen associations and their networks that are capable of direct action strengthens formal democratic institutions.300

6.4.3.3 Liberty of the Press and Citizen Access to Information

La Parota and Perm missiles cases show that the actions of conscientious journalists and social protesters can be mutually reinforcing. High and sustained levels of protest activity make it easier for journalists to present pluralistic information in conditions when media is tightly controlled by a combination of political and economic forces. For example, in Perm, environmental activists created an environment, in which journalists could present points of view different from that of the strong political and economic interests. On the other hand, when individual journalists and media outlets who give voice to activists are persecuted, activists rise to their defense. They form durable alliances to help each other defend their civil (and sometimes human) rights.

300 Vorozheikina, 25.10.2009.
Public denunciation of illegality and violations committed by state and corporate agents is the first step toward overcoming rule of law problems. In all the cases, the least that the activists and the sympathizing journalists were able to achieve was to prevent the authorities from carrying out illegal and harmful projects quietly.

6.3.3.4 Respect for Human and Civic Rights of the Disenfranchised

Criminalization of social activism and protests is a huge problem in both Russia and Mexico: those who defend and exercise their civic rights are branded to be criminals and subversives. Criminalization of social-environmental protest and NGOs in Russia is still not as bad (Guerrero, Atenco), but we seem to be rapidly headed in the same direction. All cases include accusations of espionage, extremism, links with anti-systemic actors, etc., levied by powerful actors against social activists. The active and critical stance of activist organizations and their advisors is seen by the authorities as incitement to public disorder aimed at generating political instability. The actions of those who exercise their right to protest are described as radical and intransigent.

In all cases, grassroots mobilization is triggered by the evidence of direct or implied redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich: in Tetlama and Igumnovo, rich (urban) people’s garbage is dumped on the (rural) poor. Akulovo and Gaiva forests are expropriated from the public by local and regional elites for luxury housing construction. In Yugo-Kamsk, the region’s most powerful economic actor (Lukoil) causes tremendous environmental and public health damage by spoiling the pond and the land around it and by essentially destroying the municipal drinking water system. La Parota case also has
this aspect: the land is being expropriated from rural communities to provide electricity for far away large urban centers.
Chapter 7: Conclusions

7.1 The Limits of the Russia-Mexico Comparison: Time Lags and Long-Term Path Dependence

In Chapter 1, I established the basis for comparing the political systems of Soviet Russia and PRI Mexico by referring to authors who describe them both as mobilizational and inclusionary non-democratic regimes. At the same time, I drew attention to the fact that the totalitarian experience was fundamentally distinct from all kinds of authoritarianism, including the Mexican variety. While both systems had their origins in social revolutions and incorporated the lower classes through party-state structures, in the long run they created profoundly different conditions for social activism. The mechanism that ensured the survival and longevity of the PRI system was based mainly on the combination of regular elections with an institutionalized system of mass support based on “vote buying and clientelistic government transfers.” By contrast, the Soviet system had no in-built elite-rotation mechanism comparable to the Mexican no-reelection principle and did not use electoral clientelism to ensure mass support. While the PRI party-state did resort to electoral fraud and force in order to remain in power, it was significantly more benign in its effects on associational autonomy and mobilization than the Soviet system that relied much more heavily on ideological and repressive mechanisms. The clientelist mechanisms that did form within the “mature” Soviet system


and have significantly extended its lifespan were different from the Mexican ones not only because they were not tied to the institution of elections, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, because they had a much more atomizing effect on society. Since the PRI depended on its clients’ votes, Mexican clientelism enabled diverse social groups to make collective demands on the state, and these demands have eventually spilled from the socio-economic sphere, in which the PRI was trying to contain them, into the political and electoral ones. Soviet clientelism produced no such unintended side effects, because it reinforced the authoritarian domination-subordination pattern of state-society relations instead of providing an alternative to it.

These differences in the nature of the two non-democratic regimes have affected both the character of the transition and the shape of the post-transitional political systems. As Magaloní argues, the Mexican transition to democracy was a “fundamentally electoral [process], in which mass political parties and voters … played the central role.”3 By contrast, the mechanism that brought the Soviet party-state to its end was not electoral, and this end was a collapse rather than a gradual transition. Suffices to say that the end of the Soviet system went hand in hand with the disintegration of the country over which it ruled; the end of the PRI party-state produced no comparable political cataclysm. Moreover, while the PRI still remains one of the three main players in the Mexican party system, the KPSS has ceased to exist as an institution in 1990, and whatever continuity may exist between KPSS and its successor KPRF it is not nearly as great as the

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continuity that exists between the PRI of 1986 – the time of its last major split – and the PRI of 2009.

The Russia-Mexico comparison has clear limits if one tries to match the two countries chronologically over the post-transition period, and so I find it useful to return to the lagged comparison that I have proposed in Section 4.3.2. Where the state of electoral institutions is concerned, it might be useful to think of present-day Russia as Mexico in 1978, when elections existed as a formal institution, but were controlled and manipulated by the central state and largely ineffective as a mechanism for keeping the state accountable to society. As far as the relations between political parties and social movements go, Russia falls even further back in Mexican time, because its true political opposition is currently denied access to the electoral process and registration in the form of political parties. Its most radically anti-authoritarian components exist in the form of broad coalitions, such as United Civic Front (OGF) and Other Russia (DR), which are currently closer to social movements than to political parties. I see it as a very hopeful sign that, since about 2005, these actors have begun to form links with grassroots and professional environmentalists. Their attitudes towards grassroots associations and ways of engaging them deserve to be the subject of a separate study – I am currently not in the position to evaluate this phenomenon systematically. Finally, with respect to state attitudes towards social protest, I would locate the present-day Russia in the Mexican 1960s and no closer to the present than the year 1967, because Russia still has not had an

\footnote{I thank Guillermo Trejo for pointing this out to me.}

\footnote{Karine Clément, the head of the Moscow-based Collective Action Institute (IKD), is the researcher who has so far made the most serious and systematic effort to study the post-2004 grassroots protests and their links with the new political opposition. Her work can be found at the Institute’s website: \url{www.ikd.ru}.}
equivalent of the Mexican 1968 – the episode of powerful and broad-based social mobilization that is met with disproportionate repression and makes the state realize that tightening the screws and cutting feedback channels to society is a dead-end, the road to its own demise.

Given these differences in the long-term trajectory of political development, the task of overcoming authoritarian power relations and the general dependence on the state is formulated differently for Russia and for Mexico. In Mexico, it takes the form of breaking away from various forms of clientelism – some that are more and others that are less authoritarian – and dealing with the authoritarian enclaves that remain at subnational and institutional levels. It means, among other things, that the grassroots associations have to learn how to get what they need from the state and the political parties without losing their autonomy. In Russia, it is a question of breaking the circle of domination and subordination, in which the state is not interested in bargaining with the population at all and feels threatened by almost any kind of autonomous organizing. The grassroots experiences analyzed in Chapters 5 and 6 show that this circle can be broken under particular macro-level conditions – when the state destroys the long-term social support structures that the population came to depend on and begins to act explicitly in the name of private interests rather than any conception of the public good.

Grassroots mobilization is an indispensable condition for overcoming state dependence in Russia. In contrast to Mexico, where such mobilization can proceed from a variety of pre-existing organizational bases, in Russia much of it currently takes place in the absence not only of such bases but even of the social networks that serve as their
precursors. As Clément’s research shows, these networks are slowly beginning to emerge in the form of autonomous labor unions, radical student and youth groups, urban housing and environmental protest initiatives, Soldiers’ Mothers’ Committees, and other associations of the disenfranchised and marginalized groups, such as Chernobyl veterans, disabled persons, and refugees. One of the major tasks that fall to researchers and professional activists in this context is to figure out how to increase the chances of success for the exceptional individuals who dare to take the step from an individual rebellion against an “anti-social” state to the organization of collective action to resist its abuses. The stakes against these first-time grassroots leaders are currently raised very high, and Russia’s long-term ability to overcome political authoritarianism depends on their ability to survive and endure.

As I compared Russia and Mexico over the past twenty years, I felt drawn in two opposite directions. Mexico is now playing a new, democratic game, and the scholars who study it endeavor to analyze how this new game is developing and how far it can be taken. If I were writing about environmental activism just in Mexico, I would not be focusing on the past so much: I do it because I am from Russia. My approach in this study was to emphasize that we (both Russians and Mexicans) must deal with the authoritarian heritage of the past before we can move forward and start a new game. Mexico has accomplished more of this work than Russia, yet much still remains to be done. In part, my approach is the reaction to the writings of many US researchers who
study Russia as if it truly were playing a new, democratic game. Their tendency is to exaggerate the current potential of the formal political institutions; I argue that these are quite hollow by now and that the main impetus for change must come through other channels. I consider social protest and autonomous self-organization in the name of a wide variety of goals to be among the most important processes that can take Russia towards democratization. Social environmentalism is but one of the many forms that these processes can take.

7.2 Origins of Social Environmentalism: Comparison of Possible Pathways

One way in which professional activists in Russia and Mexico can contribute to social democratization is by becoming social environmentalists. The historical and contemporary data that I have analyzed in this study gives evidence for the existence of at least three major pathways through which social environmentalism emerges. Needless to say, this list is not exhaustive: these pathways are simply the most common and typical ones that I have been able to distinguish so far. The most notable feature of the original social environmentalists (the OSE pathway) is that they can appear both when strong pre-existing social mobilization bases are available (Mexico) and when they are not (Russia). As Chapter 3 shows, the Soviet system was not able to destroy all engendering environments for social activism in the intellectual sphere, and professional social environmentalists were able to emerge from them, as the system began to collapse. Meanwhile, the main trigger of grassroots environmentalism in Russia has been the

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6 See, for example, the works of Balzer, Brown, Bunce, Hale, Ruthland, and Reddaway.
individual and collective refusal to continue adapting to authoritarian power relations. This refusal is the reaction to the situation when a traditionally paternalistic state divests itself of its customary social obligations, cuts most of the feedback channels that tie it to society, and demonstrates that it is not interested in its citizens either as voters or as clients.

In post-1968 Mexico, there was a much greater variety of engendering environments from which original social environmentalists could emerge. As the democratic transition advanced, the issue of electoral accountability became an increasingly important trigger for the emergence of social environmentalist campaigns. At the grassroots level, such campaigns are often triggered by the frustrated hopes that the citizens place in elections as a mechanism for ensuring accountability of state officials and citizen access to information and decision-making processes. As the cases from Morelos and Guerrero show, citizens did place high hopes on the transfer of power in the regional and municipal executives from PRI to PAN and especially PRD, which has cultivated the image of the political party with strong links to the social Left. While in Russia first-time grassroots environmentalists rebel against the state that no longer cares about them at all, in Mexico people rebel against politicians who cheated them after they were elected. PRD’s and PAN’s standard campaign promise has long been to change “the way politics is made” – to move away from the tradition of non-transparent, clientelist, informal arrangements and to create effective, public, and inclusive channels for citizen participation. Social environmentalists claim that these promises are not fulfilled and that their concerns and preferences stop mattering once elections are over.
So far, the conversion of social activists to social environmentalism (the SSE pathway) seems to have been the predominantly Mexican road. The main reason for this is the enormous difference that existed between the Soviet totalitarian system and the Mexican authoritarian regime with respect to the availability of autonomous spaces for collective action and the level of intellectual freedom. The much greater ability of intellectuals with social science and humanitarian training (as well as engineers and architects) to engage in social activism and work with grassroots associations and social movements in post-1968 Mexico resulted in an incredible diversity of individual pathways that took them from professional work, research, and teaching first to activism aimed at fighting social injustice and then to social environmentalism. In Russia, where social activism that brought the educated elites closer to the poor and the disenfranchised had only started to develop during perestroika, there is yet no critical mass of professional social activists that could become social environmentalists through the mechanisms similar to those found in Mexico. This pathway gives very robust and diverse manifestations of social environmentalism among both professional and grassroots activism, but it requires strong pre-existing bases of social activism and mobilization as a precondition.

The gradual evolution of conservationists and reform environmentalists towards social environmentalism (the ESE pathway) is something that I have found much more frequently in Russia than in Mexico. I think that this is the case precisely because Russian social activism is not yet mature enough for the SSE pathway to become widespread and viable. It seems logical that most conversions to social environmentalism during and after
the transition take place from whatever base of professional social activism that was strongest at the time when transition began. In Russia, environmentalism was one of the strongest bases for professional social activism inherited from the Soviet times. It must be noted that social environmentalists very rarely have conservationist roots: so far, very few Russian biologists and advocates of classical nature protection have been able to expand their concerns to issues of social justice. Thus, the majority of environmental activists in Russia that have been making an evolution towards social environmentalism are reform environmentalists, who have strong original links to the conservationist DOP movement and to scientific environmentalism. Such an evolution is easier for reform environmentalists to achieve, because they tend to have a more anthropocentric and politicized outlook than conservationists. Since the late 1990s, when the federal state began to renounce the environmental obligations that it undertook during the previous decade, reform environmentalists have been increasingly pushed into the ranks of political opposition. Their fundamental concern with the functioning of political and economic institutions leaves them no safe niche to retreat into the current authoritarian period, akin to the one that protection of rare animals and remote territories has traditionally provided for conservationists. The evolution towards social environmentalism is one of the ways in which Russian reform environmentalists have been responding to this challenge.

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7 I have personally met one notable exception to this rule: Yuriy Roshchevsky (17.08.2006) – a former DOP leader from Samara region who has made a conscious turn towards protecting nature with people after 30 years of “protecting nature against people.” Over the past decade, he has been working with rural intelligentsia on the creation of a natural-cultural park in the Krasnorechie area of Ulianovsk region.
The major advantage of the ESE pathway for Russia is that it makes growth of social environmentalism possible in contexts where the traditions of social activism are generally weak, but those of environmental activism are relatively strong. It is helpful to know that it is one of at least two pathways currently available in Russia. While the evolution from reform to social environmentalism in Russia has so far been very cautious and gradual, the availability of this pathway could in the long run have very important consequences for the process of social democratization. The most significant impact of this development might not be its contribution to the overall number of social environmentalists or to the effectiveness of social-environmentalists campaigns – my analysis shows that the most vigorous campaigns of this kind have so far been organized by original social environmentalists, whose number has been steadily increasing over the past decade. What seems to matter more is the effect that the adoption of social-environmental goals and strategies has been having on Russian reform environmentalists. As they sense the increasing need to move closer to the people, they are forced to gradually shed their own authoritarian habits of thought and action and to democratize themselves, which is the first step to democratizing the society in which they live.

My analysis of post-transition Russia might leave an impression that the return of political authoritarianism is actually beneficial for the development of social environmentalism. I do not necessarily think so: the comparison with Mexico shows that the more authoritarian is the general political context, the harder it is for social environmentalists to function and succeed in their campaigns. In fact, of the three kinds of environmental activists, social environmentalists are the least effective in achieving
their *environmental* objectives in authoritarian contexts, precisely because their demands are so strongly tied with social democratization. Since they depend most heavily on direct action and grassroots mobilization, social environmentalists are the main target for authoritarian repressions and much more likely to be seen as threatening, intractable, and subversive radicals than reform environmentalists or conservationists.

However, the good news that comes from places such as Guerrero and Perm is that social environmentalism can survive and become gradually stronger under authoritarian conditions, even though its growth will be significantly slower than in more democratic contexts. Yet, this survival and maintenance of social environmentalism through authoritarian times depends on the presence of an underlying current of general social mobilization. In other words, one should not expect social environmentalists to be able to do much if there is little grassroots activism, because people do not dare to engage in collective action for fear of repressions or are unable to do so because they lack “horizontal voice.”

What can help social environmentalists to endure and fight authoritarianism is a strong general tradition of grassroots activism that persists in spite of political authoritarianism, as it happens in Mexico, or the emergence of a new wave of popular discontent and protest after a long period of passivity and social quiescence, as in post-2004 Russia.

Because of its borderline position between environmental and other kinds of social activism, social environmentalism is a very versatile and diverse current. It can have both urban and rural social bases, in contrast to reform environmentalism and

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conservationism which are driven almost exclusively by urban dwellers, even though they are concerned with “wild and remote places” much more than with cities. In Mexico, rural social environmentalism is currently the main experimental ground for alternative development modes: professional social environmentalists see peasant and indigenous traditions of self-government and natural resource management as the major sources of innovations and the main engines for making Mexican society as a whole advance to a more environmentally sustainable and socially just future. The urban component of Mexican social environmentalism is also very diverse and vibrant, because it draws on strong traditions of urban activism that runs the entire spectrum of collective action forms (from interest groups to social movements) and thematic concerns (from the provision of housing and basic services to the preservation of urban environment).

In Russia, the rural aspect of social environmentalism is infinitely weaker than in Mexico, because of the extremely destructive impact that the Soviet epoch had on the rural bases for social mobilization. However, I can currently see two major sources from which rural social environmentalism could develop in the future. One is the growing levels of protests among Russia’s indigenous groups that live in areas of mineral and natural resource extraction that began in the late 1990s. The other is the effort of rural intelligentsia – teachers, librarians, specialists in local history, geography, and culture (kraevedy) – to revive local life. This effort usually includes an environmental component and could serve as the basis for non-peasant rural social environmentalism. This new current is currently being investigated by Oleg Yanitsky, who sees it as a nationwide

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10 This current is briefly mentioned in Section 4.3.3.
phenomenon, a growing number of isolated attempts to save and validate local knowledge and to improve citizen access to local decision-making processes in places with traditionally low levels of civic activism. Yanitsky argues that this form of activism creates sustained interactions between grassroots and intelligentsia on the one hand and between them and the local state structures on the other. While it is still unclear whether these isolated efforts will gradually grow and become interconnected enough to form a new kind of social movement, this phenomenon is important to keep in mind when one hears that the Russian countryside is completely dead.

So far, those who have reflected on the current character and state of environmental activism in Russia have paid very little attention to social environmentalism, which is usually not even mentioned as a separate stream within the “Russian environmental movement.” It is true that in Russia the main bulk of environmental activism is currently found within conservationist and reform environmentalist NGOs, and that the social environmental initiatives occupy a much smaller niche relative to this mainstream than they do in Mexico. However, this marginality of social environmentalism is not the reason to dismiss it: the Mexican experience clearly shows that it can have a very significant impact on the overall quality of environmental activism and its better integration into the broader social movements for democracy and social justice.

If one focuses attention predominantly on the mainstream and ignores the contribution made by the social environmentalist minority, one is likely to come away

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12 See, for example, Yanitsky (2002), Larin et al. (2003).
with a much more somber and pessimistic vision of environmental activism in Russia. In his series of books and articles about the Russian environmental movement, Yanitsky has made an eloquent case that the potential of the conservationist and reform-environmentalist mainstream to contribute to social democratization in Russia has so far been very limited, because it has inherited many birth-stains of Soviet environmental activism and relies too heavily on authoritarian mechanisms in its dealings with state and society. However, the picture becomes much more hopeful, when one admits that DOP and Soviet natural scientists have not been the only carriers of environmentalism in post-Soviet Russia. The eco-anarchist networks and the Union for Chemical Safety have kept the socially-oriented current of environmentalism alive through an incredibly difficult period between 1993 and 2004. Since then, a new and diverse wave of social environmental initiatives began to emerge, and these new social environmentalists think and act in ways that are very different from anything that scholars of Russian environmentalism have seen before. In some ways, this new urban environmentalism is picking up the battle that was left unfinished by the informal urban movement of the perestroika. In many ways, it has already gone far beyond it.

### 7.3 Persistent Authoritarianism and Varieties of Environmentalism

The comparative analysis of the three main approaches to environmental activism provides very interesting answers to the question about the ability of intellectuals and professional social activists who live in societies permeated by authoritarian power

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relations to overcome this heritage. Some environmental activists are consistently able to do it better than others, and this ability has as much to do with individual personalities and characters as with the stream of environmentalism within which they operate. Overall, the task of overcoming dependence on the state and reliance on authoritarian mechanisms is hardest for conservationists, because their main goal – protection of natural territories and communities – is very hard to achieve without the significant involvement of the state. This is why the third pathway towards social environmentalism in Russia has so far been mainly walked by reform environmentalists. The comparison of Mexican and Soviet conservationists shows that totalitarianism makes conservationists especially aloof from social concerns, because it forces them into extreme biocentrism as the only space where they can escape repression and preserve some autonomy. Since they were not able to form connections with the people that would not be mediated by the state, Soviet conservationists became quite authoritarian themselves in their attitudes towards and treatment of the general population. This attitude, so clearly manifested in the operations of the Nature Protection Brigades (DOPs), did not disappear with the fall of the system that produced it and still endures in many environmental NGOs, staffed by DOP veterans.

Worldwide experience of transitioning from “pristine nature reserves” to “natural parks with people” over the past two decades shows that conservationists in many different countries do manage to learn how to incorporate elements of social environmentalism into their work. While Russian conservationists do have a rather unusual and extreme heritage, there is no a priori reason as to why they cannot study and
use the experiences of their colleagues in other countries with strong authoritarian traditions.

Since they place so much importance on reforming political and economic institutions from within, reform environmentalists have an extremely fine line to walk in authoritarian contexts. If they earnestly try to change the rules of the power game as they lobby for the environment, they risk being seen as too confrontational by the powerful and not achieving their environmental goals. If they accept the existing rules of the game in order to maximize their environmental impact, they themselves risk becoming part of the mechanism that perpetuates authoritarian power relations. Because they rely so heavily on institutional levers of influence, reform environmentalists find themselves in an extremely ambivalent position when the formal institutions are rendered ineffective and hollow by the actions of the elites that control the access to both political power and private property. They are much criticized by social environmentalists for making unacceptable compromises and going “too far over to the other side” and respond to these criticisms by arguing that they are the ones who do all the dirty work of “saving nature,” while “the radicals” are enjoying themselves protesting in the streets. In Mexico and Russia, these two approaches coexist in an uneasy balance. Most activists on both sides of the divide ultimately accept that their efforts are complementary: both “radical” and “constructive” strategies are needed in order to halt the weakening of environmental institutions caused by the state-business alliances.

Since reform environmentalism has been the dominant approach of environmental NGOs since the transition, the overall impact of environmental activism on social
democratization hinges in no small measure on the behavior of reform environmentalists in the face of persistent and diverse manifestations social and political authoritarianism in Russia and Mexico. Thus, they should take the questions asked by social environmentalists very seriously and avoid letting the achievement of particular environmental goals come at the price of upholding the political and economic system that by itself presents the major environmental threat.

Although professional social environmentalists are a minority among Russian and Mexican environmental activists, the brunt of the fight against authoritarianism falls on them. They are usually in the best position to keep the environmental activist community as a whole in contact with other sectors of social activism. Their personal networks tend to reach into anti-war and anti-globalist communities, peasant, indigenous, and urban grassroots associations, human and labor rights groups, as well as radical Leftist groups and parties. By joining forces with these actors, social environmentalists can not only strengthen particular campaigns, but also broaden their grassroots bases and become better attuned to diverse social demands.

Social environmentalists can also play an extremely important role in making environmental issues more understandable and accessible to “the general population.” While environment might well be no more than a convenient “wrap,” a framing device for many protests against social injustice, professional social environmentalists can and do push the grassroots to think harder and deeper about environmental problems. As Tetlama and Dzerzhinsk anti-dump campaigns show, the natural tendency for grassroots activists in such cases is to focus on their local, particular issue and to frame the
campaign as a confrontation with the state that has in some way violated their rights or neglected to perform its duties. The professional activists have the difficult and often thankless task to take the grassroots several steps further. They usually have little trouble persuading the grassroots of the need to form networks within their region or with groups that work on the same issue. What is usually more problematic is to make the grassroots see that their own behavior is part of the problem, that the environmental threat cannot always be blamed on powerful outsiders and will not disappear completely even if the state is forced to do the protesters’ bidding.

In order to be able to take social environmentalism beyond a multitude of local confrontations about environmentally and socially harmful projects and transform it into a movement in search for environmental sustainability and social justice, professional activists have to keep turning back to their ideological foundations and rethink them in the light of grassroots experiences. In Mexico, such work has been going on with respect to peasant and indigenous experiences in local autonomy and natural resource management. In Russia, it is less clear, on what store of popular experiences the eco-anarchists could draw, but the effort to “domesticate” social-environmentalist ideology and to link it with the everyday lives of Russian people must continue.

7.4 Social and Reform Environmentalists: Two Complementary Approaches

The ideological and strategic rift that formed between two socially-oriented currents – reform and social environmentalists – during the transition remains one of the most important features of environmental activism in Russia and Mexico. It often takes
the form of the debate between the “unpaid enthusiasts” – members of informal groups and social movement networks – and the “eco-mercenaries” who staff environmental NGOs. This debate seems to be a never-ending one in any society. The choice between formal and informal mobilizational and organizational structures is a characteristic dilemma for environmental activists. This choice has bearing on the public dimension not of the state, but of the activist groups and organizations themselves. Registered activist organizations (NGOs) are not necessarily any more public and transparent in their operations than the state and business structures that they confront. Neither can most of them claim to “represent” anyone outside of the professional activist community. Although environmental NGOs often portray themselves as “representatives of civil society,” most of them do not perform the function of aggregating the interests of a particular social group and cannot be held accountable by members of the general public.

Organizations (mostly social-environmental) that choose to remain informal do so for a variety of reasons, both pragmatic and ideological. Since they tend to attack the most intractable and controversial problems, they have very few regular members and find it hard to mobilize enough support from the general public and to secure regular funding, which puts running and maintaining an NGO outside their reach. Informality also gives them some protection against attacks by powerful adversaries: if you have no money, offices, or property, these cannot be confiscated. Finally, their leaders often have ideological reasons to believe that the work they are doing cannot be paid employment,

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14 Hochstetler and Keck (2007: 101) describe the Brazilian version of this debate as that between the “ecology of protest” based on “small-scale, local, voluntary model of organization” with a high level of “ethical commitment” and “the ecology of results” – the “pragmatic” pursuit of environmental objective by NGOs.
lest its members lose the sense of social service, vocation, and moral values. However, informality and absence of permanent organizational structures puts significant limitations on the ability of informal groups to function outside of emergency situations. One often finds the more active informal organizations to have some kind of symbiotic relationship with formal organizations that do receive regular funding.

Activists who emerged from within the non-democratic system (as did the majority of Russian environmentalists) suffer from a very peculiar syndrome: while in the system, they used its money and resources for their own goals and earned their living by being state employees, but at the same time considered themselves to be quite autonomous as activists. Since activism was something that they did “in their free time”, on the top of work duties, they considered themselves “volunteers”: they “did not work for money,” but for self-fulfillment, out of the sense of civic duty, etc (see Yanitsky, 1991 and Weiner, 1999). They, therefore, considered themselves to be on rather high moral ground: they were doing things the state did not ask or command them to do; they were doing it for themselves and by themselves. They felt that they “could do things on their own,” but seemed to forget that, since the resources and the money they used were not theirs but the state’s, their activism would become impossible if the state suddenly claimed it all back, because it was not being used “for official purposes.” In the words of one activist from Nizhniy Novgorod (Gor’kiy), “we did not have to think about money and fundraising then – the enterprises gave us all we needed.”

15 Kolpakova (01.09.2006).
By 1987, this state of affairs was so normal and ubiquitous that it was taken for granted: the ability to rely on state resources (which came in many different forms) allowed the activists to focus on their “alternative” goals and visions without preoccupying themselves with the financial sustainability of their organizations. In this situation, those who acted “out of sheer enthusiasm” would look with contempt on those who tried to make money through their activism. Once the Soviet economy began to fall apart in 1989 and especially once the state withdrew its support from universities and research centers, as well as the “official social organizations,” which served as resource bases for so many activists, the “informals” were suddenly and painfully thrown into the harsh reality of fighting for “their own resources.” For obvious reasons, many Soviet-bred activists entered this period with complete lack of skills “to provide for themselves”: I have repeatedly heard from my interviewees that they were “not the kind of people who are good at getting money,” that “hunting money” was “not their thing.” At the same time, these individuals were persuaded that, since they were doing something that was highly necessary and useful “for the society, the country, and the public good,” someone (with money) had to understand it and give them what was “minimally necessary.”\(^\text{16}\)

Foreign grants started to become available around the same time and this created a deep division between those who, for whatever reasons, could not get access to this funding source and those who did manage to get funded. The former often made a virtue out of their “honest poverty,” arguing that they “departed from the problems on the ground” and blamed “the grant eaters” for selling their cause and idealism, changing their

\(^{16}\text{Fedorov (27.07.2006, 09.07.2007).}\)
agendas to suit those of the donors, and becoming salaried bureaucrats, to whom “real problems” no longer mattered. The latter paid them back in kind by pointing out that getting grants was a lot of hard work that “problem-oriented activists” were incapable or unwilling of doing. Interestingly enough, when “problem-oriented activists” needed money, they often turned for help to the very “grant-eaters” that they so ardently criticized. This division between “money grabbers” and “true activists” is present in Mexico as well.\textsuperscript{17} It can be argued, that it is a product of the paternalist state system, on whose resources these activists originally lived.

It is evident that if the \textit{survival} of the activist community as a whole is to be ensured in what is a very “hostile context,”\textsuperscript{18} some organizations capable of resource procurement \textit{must} be maintained. But this pragmatic consideration does not altogether resolve the question of whether environmental activists should have clear ethical and moral limits on “the money that must not be taken.” Some activists consider this question to be superfluous, because they do not believe in the existence of “clean” money: “The folly of our green brothers is manifested in the fact that they cannot take oil industry money [for moral reasons]. But then, to be consistent, neither should they take money from the regional administrations that are financed by the oil industry.”\textsuperscript{19} From this perspective, the source of any money is “dirty,” if one goes far enough back in the money-giving chain. Hardly any fortune from those that provided the basis for charitable foundations around the world was made through activities that did not damage the

\textsuperscript{17} Lopezllera Méndez 06.10.2006, 11.10.2007; Peón Escalante (24.09.2006); Bustamante (08.10.2006); Padilla Massieu (13.11.2006).
\textsuperscript{18} Yanitsky (1999).
\textsuperscript{19} Schwarz, 22.12.2005.
environment in some way. But there is a different issue at stake as well: different types of donors attach different “strings” to the money that they give to environmental activists. In this sense, there is a marked difference in the requirements (both formal and informal) that the activist organizations have to comply with, once they take the money from a state bureaucracy, a business corporation, or another NGO – whether each of these donors are foreign or domestic.

7.5 Effects of Social-Environmentalist Mobilizations on Social Democratization

7.5.1 Activist Engagement With the State and Political Participation

However rigged and manipulated elections are in present-day Russia, they are still present as an institution, and this provides a certain opening for social activists, because it gives them a chance to mobilize around the issue of electoral fraud. In Mexico, such mobilization was one of the levers that have eventually opened the road to political democratization.\textsuperscript{20} Indeed, the past few years give evidence that Russian political opposition that has been all but completely excluded from the electoral process since 2007 (Yabloko, SPS, OGF, Other Russia) is beginning to use the issue of electoral fraud as one of the main bases for building cross-sectoral alliances with diverse grassroots movements and social activists. Most recent examples include the elections of Moscow City Council deputies\textsuperscript{21} and of Astrakhan’s mayor.\textsuperscript{22} For environmental and social

\textsuperscript{20} I thank Guillermo Trejo for this insight.
\textsuperscript{21} Not a single one of SPS and Yabloko’s candidates (including those from the Green Russia environmental fraction) was even allowed to register.
\textsuperscript{22} Oleg Shein, who was one of the candidates, has been supporting Astrakhan’s grassroots environmentalists, and they have become his electoral constituency. However, he was unable to use this
activists who live in regional capitals, mayor elections have now become a particularly important battlefield both because they are no longer able to elect their governors and because many important decisions about land-use change and other urban environmental issues are made at the municipal level.

Social-environmental campaigns alternate between two modes of action. First, they confront the state and protests against state and business violations. Second, they try to elaborate long-term strategies needed to address pressing social and environmental problems. The activists in Russia and in Mexico do not yet count with a state that allows them to do the second.

Infiltration of the state agencies and other non-public, covert ways of influencing the political and decision-making processes have been a time-honored tactic of both Mexican and Russian environmentalists during the period before the democratic transition. The initial opening of the political sphere to environmental activists (Mexico 1982-1994; Russia 1989-1993) was the time when they have greatly enlarged their use of public channels of influence: election campaigns, environmental lawsuits, official government posts. After this brief period, the importance of non-public tactics begins to grow again, because many of the public participation channels become blocked or lose their effectiveness. This process has gone ahead much farther and faster in Russia than in Mexico – this difference is due to the greater strength of Mexican democratic institutions at the macro-level. Note that in both countries the activists usually have a huge disadvantage, when they use non-public, covert channels of negotiating and interacting electoral support effectively, because of the highly manipulated nature of the electoral process. See Shein (21.10.2009).
with the state: more often than not, the state does not observe agreements achieved through backroom negotiations.

Activists in both countries find themselves in a constant dilemma: until what point is it worth it to use state-sponsored or state-accepted forms of participation, given that the state makes no sincere effort to take activists’ opinions into account in its decision-making? Since the laws that environmentalists could use to achieve their goals very rarely work on their own, many come to depend on personal connections with sympathetic politicians, but the number of such politicians has been diminishing steadily over the last decade. The activists in both countries do their best to preserve informal, personal links with state officials and agencies, even when the state overall becomes hostile towards them, because there are many kinds of information that they can only obtain from the state – they simply cannot gather it themselves or even with the help of their allies in the NGO and academic worlds.

On the other hand, “autonomous organizations” that appeared in Mexico in the 1970s-80s from non-corporatist engendering environments sooner or later found it necessary to make claims against the state. Rural producer associations and urban settler groups found that there were issues which they could not entirely resolve through self-help. They saw access to state institutions and resources as their right. In all but the most extreme cases, such as the Zapatista autonomous communities in Chiapas, 23 their main goal has been not to create a self-sufficient community, isolated from state and market institutions, but to secure access to these institutions on more equitable terms, to be seen

by the state as social actors with power, worthy to be treated as partners, not as subjects to be manipulated. Grassroots organizations want to have jurisdiction over matters of immediate concern to the community and to be treated as legitimate players by state and economic actors, those that are included in decision-making at larger scales. This need is what ultimately drives the democratic state reform.

7.5.2 The Rule of Law and the Violations of Civil and Human Rights

The courts in both Russia and Mexico are subject to state and corporate pressures. Both activists and their opponents often use them as a diversion and foot-dragging device. For activists especially, miring the adversaries in lawsuits and delaying the commencement of projects is often the best tactic, because they cannot achieve the outright cancellation or closure of projects. The developers use a similar tactic on activists: in Russia the new Law on extremism allows them to bring lawsuits accusing activists of subversive behavior. Also in Russia: FSB (former KGB) has initiated investigations against those activists and researchers, whose environmental work greatly bothers vested political, military, and economic interests. In the case of megaprojects sponsored by the central state, such as large dams, the law is often used as an arbitrary, selective, and punitive device against the activists.

Police and extra-legal violence is used in both Mexico and Russia to scare and silence environmental activists and their supporters. In both countries, police violence mostly affects grassroots protest groups and their allies (especially Leftist and anarchist youth and environmental organizations). In Russia, since late 1990s the work of key professional NGOs (environmental and not) has been disrupted through tax police and
FSB raids, investigations for economic crimes, confiscations of materials, etc. In cases, where the state or economic agents think that they can make a connection between environmental activists and another “national security threat” (such as EZLN or other guerrilla organizations in Mexico or “foreign spies” in Russia), state-sponsored violence and repressions are completely disproportionate to the activists’ actions. Even in cases of relatively small construction projects, private developers often have the ability to use state repressive machine (primarily the police) for their purposes.

Interestingly enough, so far a greater number of environmental activists have been assassinated in Mexico than in Russia, where this kind of repression is focused primarily on human rights and anti-war advocates that are associated with Chechnya, such as the recently murdered Politkovskaya, Markelov, and Estemirova. This difference might have to do with the fact that the Mexican authorities seem to be especially threatened by rural socio-environmental protests (such as those against the La Parota dam project in Guerrero or a more borderline case of May 2005 repression in San Salvador Atenco), which it routinely links to the Zapatistas or other guerrilla organizations. In Russia, where the environmental protests are almost exclusively urban, the only murder of an environmental activist that has occurred so far was that of Ilya Borodaenko, a member of a Libertarian Socialist group “Autonomous Action” (AD) who took part in the ecological protest camp in Angarsk (Irkutsk region) in the summer of 2007.

One particularly debilitating impact of state repressions on social and environmental activists in Russia and in Mexico is the legal impunity of the police and

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military who commit human rights abuses. Activists find that not only are their actions criminalized, but also that the courts refuse to accept their complaints against those who abuse them. This creates an atmosphere of insecurity and vulnerability for all those who engage in the defense of citizen rights.25

7.5.3 The Fight for Information

Russian social environmentalists offer two contrasting perspectives on this issue. Some argue that few exceptional individuals can manage to gain access to information by using all public and non-public channels at their disposal and then spread the news to other activists and the general public. Thus, Yablokov gained access to information by becoming an insider in the Russian presidential administration. Fedorov argues that he does not need the Aarhus convention (1998), because he can get all the information he needs anyway, and the state will never give it to anyone willingly. By itself, this is not enough, because their channels for spreading the news outside the activist community are very limited indeed (limitations of freedom of press). Fedorov does all he can to make sure his books get into regional libraries, but he cannot produce enough information for every grassroots group in his network – they must have their own ways of getting it.

On the other hand, there are activists like Karpov, who consider the Aarhus convention to be a way of establishing citizen rights in the process of urban land-use change – it can be transposed into federal, regional, and municipal laws, which will give citizens additional legal channels for pressure. His organization feels the need to teach

grassroots activists how to make best use of all available legal channels for obtaining information.²⁶

Fedorov considers the fight for information access to be more the function of available foreign funding than of real necessity: “It became a commonplace [among activists] to talk about access to environmental information and due process. People fight for the ratification of the Aarhus Convention as if it gave us that right to information. But I can prove that the current Russian laws are quite sufficient to ensure both environmental protection and industrial safety. I can write whatever I want, and FSB cannot hook me, because of Article 7 of the Law on State Secrets: environmental information cannot be classified. I am working in the sphere where the state had always hid things from [the public] and will always continue to do so. If you want information, you must do the hard work it takes to get it – no state official will ever give it to you willingly.”²⁷ He argues that he personally does have the freedom of speech, since he had managed to publish all his books throughout the 2000s, and that it is not his job to fight for the freedom of press.²⁸

Fedorov has a very categorical stance: the citizens who need environmental information from the state must strive to obtain it, using the existing laws. His personal experience shows that this strategy can be very successful when used by a well-educated professional with an insider’s knowledge of the system: apart from being a chemist, Fedorov spent several years in the army and has 33 years of Communist Party

²⁶ See Bereginya (6/2004: 3).
²⁷ Fedorov, 27.07.2006.
²⁸ Fedorov, 09.07.2007.
membership. He learned how to open individual breaches in the system. However, his experience does not do away with the more general problem: “concerned citizens” like Popova and Rozhina are unlikely to have the knowledge and resources required to do the detective and data-mining work that Fedorov did, yet they still need environmental information from the state. Some of this information, such as emissions monitoring data, cannot be produced by grassroots activists – they have no resources to do chemical analyses of air, water, and soil samples and depend on the relevant state agencies or university-based research laboratories for this data that is often essential to their struggle. In other cases, the information that the grassroots activists need consists of documents produced by the state agencies that they refuse to release to the public, even though the existing laws state that it must be done.

7.5.4 The Drivers of Self-Organization: the NIMBY Syndrome and Beyond

The unique feature of social environmentalism is that it is based on the alliance between grassroots and professional activists. The two parties of the alliance make different, but equally important contributions that make it into more than simply the sum of the two parts. What the grassroots contribute is the original motivation for mobilization and the spontaneity and vigor that cannot be substituted for anything that professional activists and other outsiders can contribute. Grassroots environmental campaigns are not strategically planned and premeditated: grassroots activists do not have the luxury to choose their battles. They rise in response to the sense of an immediate threat to themselves and the place in which they live. This sense of urgency and
immediacy can limit such campaigns, giving them a narrow and parochial outlook, known as NIMBY – “not in my backyard.” In other words, if they are left to develop on their own, such campaigns might go no further than local protests framed by the slogan: “take this threat or undesirable land-use away from here and leave us in peace!” What transforms a grassroots NIMBY-style campaign into a social-environmentalist one is the involvement of professional activists, who place the local and immediate issue into broader context and push the grassroots to make the link between their particular predicament and larger, systemic issues. Professional activists can play a wide variety of beneficial roles in social-environmentalists campaigns: they help to inform the residents and to bring their case to the attention of the media and of the broader activist communities; they are often the ones who frame the campaign by adding an explicitly environmental dimension to its original social justice concerns; they link grassroots groups with those who can provide them with necessary resources – material, legal, and organizational – and to broader activist and social movement networks and to key allies within political parties; finally, they often act as mediators between grassroots and their powerful economic and political adversaries – they help to organize and conduct negotiations, to prepare lawsuits, and to defend them in court. Nonetheless, their efforts are not a replacement for the sense of urgency and solidarity that is required for grassroots to maintain long and difficult campaigns in hostile conditions.

The NIMBY overtones – we are not against such facilities in general, but “not in my backyard,” please – is present in almost all local protests against polluting industrial units all over the world. Yet, the counter-argument equally often used in such case by the
authorities – that “these facilities must be located somewhere” – is usually not made in good faith. Researchers who study the issues of environmental justice in the US show that such facilities are preferentially cited in those places where political resistance is not expected, due to the “vulnerable,” “marginal,” or “disenfranchised” characteristics of the local population. For this reason, the citing usually occurs in violation of all existing laws, and the facilities tend to be operated using outdated technologies and equipment that also violate existing environmental standards.29 Thus, while the people who protest against such projects, whether in the US, Russia, or Mexico, do attempt to defend themselves against changes, they simultaneously defend the principle of universal application of laws.30

As my respondents repeatedly emphasized in the interviews, it is hard to expect residents to be willing to negotiate and compromise with those who are stronger and who have never kept their word in the past.31 Conflict arises precisely because those who intend to make changes expect to do it completely on their own terms, without taking the residents into account at all. The fact that residents defend the status quo means that they fear any changes to be changes for the worst (and they are usually right). This does not mean that such forms of collective action do not have any democratic potential. By not accepting what is imposed on them by private developers who are more often than not in league with state officials and use the police as an instrument of repression the residents are challenging the dominant type of power relations: domination-submission. Both in

31 Karpov (09.08.2006), Kuchurina (10.08.2006), Popova (28.08.2006), Ogloblina (30.08.2006); Carranza (01.10.2006), Buerba (15.11.2006), Barkin (05.10.2007).
Russia and in Mexico, but also in the US, the so-called NIMBY movements are the recourse of the “socially vulnerable” – those who do not have access to institutional channels and therefore cannot negotiate, for whom any large-scale change can be threatening, because their material and social well-being is insecure.

The ubiquitous NIMBY syndrome makes it too easy for a researcher to throw out the baby with the bathwater and to dismiss any kind of bottom-up, grassroots and local self-organization against environmental risks as the parochial grudge of those who do not want any change of the status quo. Incidentally, this is precisely the rhetoric that the powerful economic and political actors use to justify their harsh treatment of such grassroots groups. While the parochialism the narrow conception of interests are indeed at the core of such protests, it must be noted that people who have no experience of self-organization are never capable of organizing themselves in the name of some abstract “social good.”

In addition, the citing of facilities with high environmental risk in socially vulnerable environments (as well as other actions that radically worsen the environment in such neighborhoods) are a symptom of a more general problem: that of the residents’ lack of “voice” and civil rights. Field research in Russia and Mexico shows that once the self-organization begins and the people realize that their local problem is by no means unique, they begin to form horizontal associations and structures – networks, coordination committees, councils, etc., – which with time begin to advance more general and broadly relevant social demands. Some of them advance to the level when they form the base for new social movements.

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Professional activists with democratic orientation cannot afford to dismiss these grassroots initiatives as “too selfish and parochial,” lest anti-democratic political and social forces take advantage of them instead. At the time of its emergence, grassroots environmentalism constitutes an unclaimed base for political mobilization. For instance, the new urban movements in Mexico and Russia do not always assume a particular political outlook or ideology. As Yanitsky points out, “grassroots civic initiatives are not ideological in nature. Their main objective – self-government – remains unfulfilled in the post-totalitarian Russian society.”

This objective is equally important to their Mexican counterparts. In principle, grassroots mobilization is a base for social activism that could be used by activist elites with any ideology. The link to eco-anarchists and other kind of social environmentalists is only one of the many possibilities. In Russia, the main oppositional political party – KPRF – and the nationalist political movements and parties in general do not seem interested in mobilizing this potential. In Mexico, a much tighter connection can be observed between this urban base and PRD on the one hand, as well as a host of smaller Trotskyist, Maoist, and Socialist parties and political movements on the other.

Nevertheless, these initiatives are still “available for grabs” – depending on what kind of activist elite pays attention to them, their strategies and actions can be framed differently: they can veer in the direction of a human rights movement, mainstream environmentalism, or become full-fledged protests against the retreat of the state from the

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35 Fedorov (09.07.2007).
social sector. It is in the interest of democratically-oriented professional activists (environmental, human rights, etc.) to try to turn these grassroots efforts into strong support bases rather than neglect them and risk their turning into a powerful adversary under the direction of nationalist and statist forces.

In contexts where there are no strong traditions of autonomous self-organization, one cannot expect first-time grassroots mobilization to occur in the name of general democratic principles. Instead, people begin organizing around the everyday problems that immediately affect them. These “pragmatic solidarities” are often dismissed by researchers as somehow inferior to the “generalized solidarity:” it is assumed that unless people explicitly include the defense of democratic values and institutions into their goals their mobilization will not have a positive effect on the democratization process. The common attitude of Russian researchers and activists towards the first-time grassroots activists, who cannot mobilize the broader public and, therefore, cannot form horizontal solidarities outside of those immediately affected is that of disdain. Such an attitude is not justified and is based on a very idealized view of where democracy comes from: mobilization based on “pragmatic solidarity” is the necessary, indispensible first step towards pro-democratic mobilization in contexts with no strong pre-existing mobilizational bases. Under such hostile conditions, autonomous self-organization can only occur in the name of defending one’s own interests, not someone else’s vision of general social change.

7.6 Overcoming Path-Dependence in Russia

The historical comparison of Russia and Mexico makes it clear that Russian society suffers from a set of long-term deficiencies in its capacity for autonomous self-organization. These deficiencies are only partly due to the impact of the Soviet totalitarian system: the autocratic style of government and the unity of power and property originated within the Russian imperial state, and these long-term patterns reemerged under the revolutionary regime, albeit in new guises. One of my original motivations for comparing social activism in Russia and Mexico was to see whether looking at the Mexican experience could provide any clues as to how the extreme power asymmetry between state and society could be compensated in Russia.

One issue that looms particularly large when Russia is compared to Mexico is the near-absence of rural bases for autonomous organization. Given the current state of the Russian peasantry, this problem might have no solution in the short term. If one turns to the Mexican experience and asks where the contemporary peasant movements came from, one answer that emerges is resistance to land expropriation and overexploitation of natural and mineral resources. As Chapters 2 and 6 explain, Russian peasants cannot effectively resist the take-over of rural land by agri-business and developer companies, because they do not feel the land to be theirs: the Soviet system has succeeded in destroying communal and private property in the countryside, and there are few people still living who remember what peasant life was like before collectivization. Moreover, in the European part of Russia, the rural commune that had succeeded the institution of

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38 Section 6.2.3, footnote 255.
serfdom was not an autonomous self-government institution, but an extension of the central state that served primarily its military and fiscal purposes. Thus, one cannot expect Russian peasants to rise and defend their lands in the same way that peasants do in Morelos or in Guerrero.

The second impetus for rural mobilization – resistance to natural and mineral resource extraction – is a more realistic one for Russia. Since the late 1990s, when large-scale oil, mineral, and timber extraction resumed after the economic crisis caused by the fall of the Soviet Union, resistance campaigns have multiplied in Siberia and the Far East, where the extractive efforts are concentrated. The “small indigenous people” play a key role in these campaigns and begin to form new networks and alliances with professional environmental activists. However, one characteristic that makes these campaigns less effective than their analogues in Mexico is the much lower population density in the affected zones. Compared to the 1 million hectares of larch forests to be flooded for the Evenkiyskaya hydropower station project, the 17 thousand hectares of La Parota seem small indeed. Yet, La Parota project threatened to displace 25 thousand people and indirectly affected another 75 thousand in what is a densely populated and very productive agriculture and forestry zone. Meanwhile, the entire Evenkiyskiy autonomous district of Krasnoyarsk region has less than 16 thousand inhabitants, of which the dam would affect about 7 thousand. Nevertheless, grassroots resistance to resource extraction and hydropower projects is on the increase in Russia and is likely to remain one of the major aspects of social environmentalism as long as Russian economy

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continues to rely so heavily on the production and exports of energy and natural resources.

Can urban grassroots mobilization that has been recently gathering momentum in Russia compensate for the weakness of autonomous self-organization in the countryside? When the issue is seen from the social-environmentalist perspective, the contrast with Mexico is drastic. In Mexico, both rural and urban bases for social environmentalism are relatively well-established by now, whereas Russia is barely beginning to develop the urban and the indigenous grassroots bases. The fact that three quarters of the Russian population lives in the cities and the uniqueness of the current political situation, in which the erosion of the population’s dependence on the state is proceeding faster and reaches deeper than ever before, makes the recent upturn in urban mobilization too important for the environmental activists to miss.

The growing interest towards urban grassroots protests felt by social and reform environmentalists and by the political opposition is a very hopeful sign. In my view, now is the time for the entire environmental activist community to reconsider the balance between biocentrism and anthropocentrism in their work. It seems to me that Russian environmentalists (even conservationists!) can simply no longer afford to place the main focus on defending nature in places “where people do not live.”¹⁴¹ The main reason for this is that the politically authoritarian state based on the unity of power and property currently constitutes the major threat to the natural environment, and fighting authoritarianism is the only viable way to counteract this threat in the long-run. Since this

¹⁴¹ Schwarz, 27.07.2006.
task cannot be accomplished without significant and sustained levels of social mobilization, it is essential to link the problem of environmental degradation to the everyday problems encountered by every Russian citizen whose rights are being routinely violated. To paraphrase Fedorov, if the environmentalists work with people, they can save nature, but nature cannot fare well in places, where people are abused and exterminated by their own state.\footnote{Fedorov, 09.07.2007.} In Russia and in Mexico, the fight for political pluralism, citizenship rights, and organizational autonomy can and does reinforce the struggle against environmental degradation.
Appendix 1: List of Interviews

Russia


Agakhanants, Polina Feliksovna. Coordinator of public participation and expertise, EKOM. St. Petersburg, 8 August 2006.


Chernyi, Ernst Isaakovich. Managing Secretary, Committee for the Protection of Scientists. 7 September 2006.

Chebotareva, Olga Vasilievna. Lawyer, Dront Center; Secretary, Nizhniy Novgorod Association for the Defense of Human Rights. Nizhniy Novgorod, 1 September 2006.


Karpov Aleksandr Semenovich. Director, EKOM Center. St Petersburg, 9 August 2006.


Krylov Fedor Fedorovich. Member, Zelenyi Mir (Green World). Dzerzhinsk, 3 September 2006.


Nikitina, Bela Anatolievna. Instructor, Samara State University; Center of Environmental Management and Education. Samara, 16-18 August 2006.

Ogloblina, Valentina Viktorovna. Grassroots activist, Akulovo, Perm; Member, Union for the Protection of Perm Residents. Perm, 30 August 2006.

Pautova, Tatiana. Member, Zelenyi Mir. Dzerzhinsk and Nizhniy Novgorod, 3 and 4 September 2006.


Popova, Lidia Stepanovna. Head of regional chapter, Union for Chemical Safety; Member, Union for the Protection of Perm Residents. Perm, 28 and 29 August 2006.


Simak, Sergei Vladimirovich. Chairman, Samara regional chapter of Socio-Ecological Union. Samara, 16 August 2006.


Sretensky, Vladimir Anatoliyevich. Researcher, Biology Department, Perm State University; Perm Forest Station. Perm, 29 August 2006.


Mexico

Árias Chávez, José. Coordinator, Energy Program; Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México. Mexico City, 11 November 2006.

Ampugnani, Gustavo. GMOs campaign coordinator, Greenpeace Mexico. Mexico City, 4 December 2006.


Buerba, Cármen. Researcher, CIECO (UNAM); Member, Observatorio Urbano. Morelia, Michoacán, 15 November 2006.

Bustamante, Luis. Director, Union of Mexican Environmental Groups (Union de Grupos Ambientalistas de México, UGAM). Mexico City, 8 October 2006.


Díaz-Barriga, Yañes Andrea. Student, Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí (UASLP); Member, Colectivo Ramonas. Mexico City, 9 October 2007.


Peón Escalante, Ignacio. Professor, National Polytechnic Institute (Instituto Nacional Politécnico, INP); Founding member of ATA, PGE, and RMALC. Mexico City, 26 September 2006.

Perlasca, José Luis. Logistics and research coordinator, Greenpeace Mexico. Mexico City, 10 November 2006.


Verduzco, María Isabel. Professor, Colegio de México. Mexico City, 5 December 2006.

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Igor V. Averkiev, 28.08.2006. Perm Civic Chamber; Personal interview; Perm, Russia. [Аверкиев Игорь Валерьевич, Пермская Гражданская Палата]


Andrés Barreda, 18.11.2006. Speaker at the Community forum on Tetlama dump; Alpuyeca, Morelos, Mexico.


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