

CHEMICAL WEAPONS AND TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITY: A HISTORY OF THE FOX CITIES-KURGAN SISTER CITY PROGRAM

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A paradox of the end of the cold war is that the peace American and Soviet citizens long strived for has actually brought with it increased instability for some. Cold War “securityscapes” required the creation of towns to produce, manage, and store the weapons that were instruments of the mutually assured destruction policies of the US and USSR (Gusterson 2004, 1998). At the end of the cold war, these two countries and an anxious global community faced the question of what to do with nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. The Chemical Weapons Convention and other documents focused on what to do with the weapons, to the exclusion of considering the socio-economic and health-related impacts on local communities. In this article I focus on the village of Shchuchye and an international partnership between two sister cities that is building a local, participatory model of development.

As a signatory of the Chemical Weapons Convention, Russia has pledged to destroy their stockpiles of chemical weapons by 2012 (extended from the original 2009 deadline). One of the many challenges facing Russia in this transformative period is the high costs of construction for chemical weapons destruction facilities and economic security in the surrounding communities. Russia’s economy lacks stability, with the majority of households combining subsistence, pensions, wages and side work in an informal mixed economy (for examples see Burawoy et al 2000, Caldwell 2004, Crate 2003, Humphrey 2002, Metzo 2001, and Pesmen 2000). Burawoy (2001) refers to this process in which subsistence and economic multitasking have become the norm, as economic involution.

This article centers on one rural area that has the added burden of being center stage in Russia’s efforts to eliminate its stockpile of chemical weapons. Shchuchye is located in Kurgan Oblast¹³³ and while it housed less than 15% of Russia’s chemical weapons in the Soviet era, it will be responsible for the destruction of approximately 80% of Russia’s chemical weapons stores (Russian Munitions Agency 2003). The United States pledged financial support for the construction of the facility, but the community was expected to play host to this increased burden without socio-economic guarantees from the Russian government. Contrary to what one might expect under such circumstances, Shchuchye

residents were actively involved in development planning. Their participation in what were essentially international negotiations between the US and Russia were facilitated and enhanced by the participation of US and Russian members of the Fox Cities-Kurgan Sister City Program.

The cities of Kurgan, Russia and Appleton and the “Fox Cities” from Wisconsin had been active sister city partners since the early 1990’s. Here, I sketch out the history of the Fox Cities-Kurgan Sister City Program focusing in greater depth on the transnational activities that have propelled this program into the international development spotlight since 1998. I examine the formation and evolution of the Fox Cities-Kurgan relationship because it makes a particularly interesting case study and a potential model for overcoming the typical problems of Western aid to Russia (Creed and Wedel 1997). Unlike programs that discursively re-create Russia as “Third World,” and dictate how money must be spent, the Fox Cities-Kurgan Sister City program demonstrates how locally embedded, socially responsible involvement can be achieved by a transnational community.

Development and post-socialism

Throughout the twentieth century, development has been wedded to a modernization discourse. The West has set itself as the benchmark for “progress” toward which others nations ought to aspire (Escobar 1995). International aid has tended to be framed in terms of problem-solving where, as part of the justification for aid, the recipient country is portrayed as underdeveloped, though this representation and the identification of the problem to be solved rarely incorporates local input (Escobar 1995, Ferguson 1994). As Escobar (1995:41) writes: “Problems were continually identified, and client categories brought into existence. Development proceeded by creating ‘abnormalities’ . . . which it would later treat and reform.” Problem identification focused narrowly on a single project, such as a highway, or in this case a chemical weapons destruction facility, to the neglect of related socio-economic concerns (see Ferguson 1994 for an example).

Russia’s position within the global economy shifted from a socialist donor nation to a post-

socialist, recipient nation, creating additional development tensions. "The Russian threat is no longer seen to be a well disciplined 'evil empire' but a poverty stricken, chaotic state that cannot defend its old sphere of influence and which threatens to spew nuclear materials among the second tier nations and to sub-national terrorists, as it struggles to reorient itself" (Gusterson 1998:2). No longer a superpower, Russia's economic future was now tied to the decisions of first world donor nations. Leaders and scholars involved in Soviet era development, however, still held advanced degrees, had many years of direct experience with administering aid in "third world" countries and often lamented their loss of autonomy (Creed and Wedel 1997). One Bulgarian specialist states, "the IMF gives us money but says 'this is exactly what you have to do with it.' Not what we want or need, but what they say. Is this democracy? What kind of help is this?" (Creed and Wedel 1997:255). Within their criticism of the West they point out the authoritarian way in which aid is distributed to fledgling democracies, who are left out of the planning process. The resulting lack of trust and the perception of Western condescension dismantle the "suggestive power" of aid as "help" for those less fortunate (Creed and Wedel 1997:254).

While participatory models of development have been gradually emerging since the 1950s (see Tax 1958) and renewed calls have been put forth to engage in "locally meaningful modalities of participation" (Clark 2002:135), aid to Russia has been an outright rejection of local expertise and community participation. Wedel (1998:7) identifies three stages of East-West relations in the transfer of aid to Eastern Europe and Russia. Initially there is a euphoria Wedel terms "triumphalism," which is inevitably followed by disappointments created by the disconnect between donor and recipient nations, a stage she calls "disillusionment." Finally, as each side begins to understand the needs and motivations of the other, a final stage of "adjustment" occurs. Russia has arguably been the least successful in adjusting to the reality of donor-recipient relationships and translating that into widely beneficial assistance.

Caldwell's (2004) ethnographic study of a soup kitchen in Moscow suggests a second source of tension between state, citizen, and international donors. Soup kitchen recipients received aid based on demonstrated need, including a hot meal and sometimes packaged foods to take home. Some of the elderly recipients who were born and raised within the Soviet Union see the aid, "as an appropriate return on the work they provided to the Soviet state during their younger days" (ibid: 90). The source of

the assistance (the US or EU, public or private donors) is less important than the fact that social support in their retirement is an entitlement that they have *earned* through years of service. In this sense, aid is seen as closing the loop left open by the collapse of the socialist planned economy, completing a cycle of reciprocity between state and citizen.

It is within this complex socio-political terrain that a nascent partnership emerged between the two communities of the Fox Cities-Kurgan Sister City Program to assist a third community, Shchuchye. This partnership avoids some of the shortfalls highlighted in Creed and Wedel's (1997, also Wedel 1998) research. As laypersons, exchange participants are not entrenched within the historical neo-liberal development discourse. Rather, they start from the premise that they are not so very different from one another, a notion fostered by the idea of sister city programs.

Why Sister Cities?

Sister city programs have not been examined as a serious topic of inquiry by social scientists to date (Zelinsky 1991). Inquiry into sister city relationships and socio-economic development may seem unnecessary, given that many of the links are between cities of similar socio-economic status. In cases, where wealthier cities are matched with poorer cities, the aid that is provided tends to be sporadic and not part of ongoing and structured planning. Further, with most programs linkages tend to be strongest between individuals and rarely are entire communities invested in the outcomes of exchange activities. But when sister city programs are engaged in systematic development initiatives and international diplomacy, it is worth our attention.

Sister cities generally come together through a formal match process, such as the service provided by Sister Cities International (SCI), in order to promote cultural sensitivity and peace through education and experience with others. Typically, school children become pen pals, mayors visit to meet their counterparts, choirs and theater groups give performances, and in some cases, cities in affluent countries provide limited forms of material aid to cities in less affluent countries, such as medical supplies, food, and disaster relief. SCI calls itself a "citizen diplomacy network" and the scope of opportunities they outline on their website are far broader than the understanding that most people have of sister city arrangements (SCI n.d.).

The Fox Cities-Kurgan Sister City Program illustrates this kind of action and diplomacy. Though

the group itself, like most, is small, the response on the part of both communities to the planned construction of a Chemical Weapons Destruction facility in Kurgan Oblast demonstrates a different model for understanding the potential role of sister cities as diplomatic networks. What follows is a brief history of the program and its transformation into a community development project.

The formation of the Fox-Cities-Kurgan Sister City Program (FCKSCP)

Like many of the sister city relationships that were established between Russian and American cities in the period of glasnost, the FCKSCP began as a peace initiative in the mid-1980's, aimed at raising cultural awareness. Originally, Appleton was working on a match with Piatigorsk, Russia. In 1990, on Appleton's third try, SCI successfully matched Appleton, Wisconsin, a city of about 70,000 with Kurgan, a city of over 350,000. Neighboring towns in Wisconsin expressed interest in the sister city match throughout the process and quickly the towns of Kimberly, Neenah, and Menasha officially became part of the partnership, leading to the revised name, Fox Cities-Kurgan Sister City Program.

Kurgan is the capital of Kurgan Oblast, a region long renowned for its production of dairy products, mirroring Wisconsin's reputation as "America's Dairyland" (Ustiuzhanin and Bukreev 1993). Like many cities in the trans-Urals region of Russia, Kurgan was founded during the 19th century and was originally populated by workers on the trans-Siberian railroad and political dissidents who stayed on after their exile ended. Though the rural areas are primarily agricultural, urban areas like the city of Kurgan are centers of heavy industry. During the Soviet period, Kurgan produced tanks, buses, and steel bridges. As part of military strategy during World War II, the Soviet government relocated much of its heavy industry to the east of the Ural Mountains. The population increased rapidly during and immediately after WWII as a result of the development of this industrial base. Because of these militarily sensitive industries, Kurgan was a "closed city," meaning foreign visitors were not allowed until after Perestroika began in the mid-1980s. Industry has slowed, but successful factories thrive because of foreign investment.

Learning to interact with their new partners was not easy for either side of the Fox Cities-Kurgan exchange. After a request for basic medical supplies from the Kurgan side, the Fox Cities communities arranged for a US Air Force plane to take a load of donated medical supplies to Kurgan. The donated supplies did not fill the plane so, based on news

reports of food shortages, the Fox Cities members decided to accept additional donations of food. In the end, Kurgan residents received several tons of valuable medical supplies including pain relievers, bandages, and other single use supplies as well as food supplies that included hundreds of bottles of salad dressing. This seemingly innocent act caused tensions within the fragile, young relationship in part because the Russians had no idea how to use the salad dressing. Many in Kurgan interpreted this mistake as an example of the West "dumping" unwanted, unhealthy, or even expired products on their Russian partners. Food shortages were not felt as acutely as was represented in the media because many Kurganites had maintained or intensified the use of their dacha (garden) plots for food production, a common strategy throughout Russia (see Caldwell 2004, Zavisca 2003, Crate 2003, Metzko 2001). The fact that people were not starving made the perceived insult seem even more condescending.

Tensions created by early mis-steps eased as Appleton and Kurgan initiated exchanges between Kurgan State Pedagogical Institute (now Kurgan State University) and Lawrence University (and later between KSU and Fox Valley Technical College, as well). The student and teacher exchanges continue to be one of the strongest programs. American exchange students have often returned to Kurgan as teachers. During the first three years, 62 Kurgan delegations visited the Fox Cities and 61 Fox Cities delegations visited Kurgan. Annually, an average of seven delegations from each side of the Atlantic visit their counterparts. As a result of these frequent and often repeat visits, several strong relationships and partnerships have emerged. Notably, the medical exchanges between a consortium of Fox Cities physicians and physicians in Kurgan have resulted in the remodeling of a maternity hospital on an American model and the construction of a primary care clinic.

Chemical weapons and the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program

Just as the program was getting off the ground, the Soviet Union collapsed and "it appeared that 'peace had broken out' with Russia" (FCKSCP, n.d.). As a consequence of communism's collapse in Eastern Europe, interest in Russia declined as did enrollments in the Slavic department at Lawrence University, the foundation for the semester and year-long student and teacher exchanges. Nevertheless, exchanges continued and the core membership of the Fox Cities group remained undaunted. By the mid 1990's however, a new threat to the people of Kurgan oblast emerged. With assistance from USAID,

Russia was in the planning stages for a Chemical Weapons destruction facility¹³⁴ near the village of Shchuchye.

Russia signed the Chemical Weapons Convention in January 1993 and ratified it in November 1997. The sections concerning the disposal of chemical weapons can be found in the "Verification Annex." Briefly, the Convention requires that all countries with chemical weapons declare the location of storage facilities along with inventory of scheduled and unscheduled chemicals (part IV [a], A). Countries also need to develop a general plan for the destruction of chemical weapons. This plan must include, "plans and programmes for training personnel for the operation of destruction facilities" and, "any issues which could adversely impact on the national destruction programme" (part IV [a], A, 6). These two components are particularly important when we examine the case of Shchuchye and the FCKSCP.

Until the early 1990's, the Plavony Chemical Weapons Stockpile, containing one-seventh of Russia's stockpile of chemical and biological weapons, was kept secret even from local residents in Shchuchye, located approximately ten kilometers from the site. The Plavony facility houses 5440 tons of organophosphate nerve agents, including Sarin, Soman, VX-gas, and phosgene (RMA 2003). With the drafting of the Chemical Weapons convention, discussion shifted to the destruction of this and other stockpiles in the US and Russia. Under the CWC, destruction of chemical weapons means irreversibly converting chemicals into a form that is unsuitable for use in chemical weapons (IV [a], C, 12).

Shchuchye itself is a small town of 10,000 residents, approximately ten kilometers from the border with Kazakstan. It is also only 200 kilometers from the Mayak nuclear facility near Cheliabinsk, where a long history of dumping radioactive waste into adjacent rivers and disasters has resulted in high atmospheric pollution (see Peterson 1993). This geographic position, the planned destruction facility, as well as the volume of weapons grade chemicals makes Shchuchye the number two security priority in Russia's elimination of chemical and biological weapons (RMA 2003). Including the surrounding administrative region of 2858 square kilometers, there are approximately 29,000 residents near the Plavony facility. These residents in the past depended upon the defense industry and centralized agriculture for employment, but today, because of the collapse of the economy, only 3250 of 6250 eligible work age adults have jobs (Zaikov 2003). Galina Vepreva, a local leader in Shchuchye, explains that

due to radiation levels produced at Mayak facilities, the local community has a high level of congenital defects among newborns. Parents, however, seldom report this, as their children would be taken from them and sent to special schools. (FCKSCP, 1998b).

Shchuchye region is considered a high risk area for illegal activity because of the high level of unemployment, poverty, and accompanying health problems and nutritional deficiencies. The security risks at this facility were highlighted during a visit to the stockpile in 2000 by a delegation of Russian and American political leaders, including senator Richard Lugar (R-IN), who demonstrated the ease with which weapons could be smuggled out of the area by placing an artillery shell with sarin gas in his briefcase (see: <http://lugar.senate.gov/photos/nunn-lugar.html>).

Just before the final public meetings on the Chemical Weapons Destruction Facility in Shchuchye in July 1997, hundreds of local citizens protested outside the meetings with signs that read, "no construction without social guarantees" (EcoBridge 1998:2). Upon learning of the existence of this stockpile and the plans for the construction of a US-funded destruction facility, which at that time was expected to cost six hundred million dollars, Russian and American sister city program members reached out to each other. For local residents as well as for members of the FCKSCP it was clear that reducing incentives for smuggling by meeting the socio-economic needs of the population was one way to help ensure the security of the facility. The United States was not planning on funding any projects "outside the fence," that is outside the walls of the weapons facility itself. Maintenance and improvements to local infrastructure near the facility was to be the exclusive financial responsibility of the Russian Ministry of Defense. Both Russian and American citizens feared that the necessary money would not be invested into the local community.

Capacity Building and "Security through Stability"

Fox Cities residents felt a moral obligation to help their counterparts in Kurgan Oblast obtain the necessary financial, technical and social support, but they questioned precisely what their role should be in the process. One of their greatest fears was "about the potential failure of this endeavor if the Pentagon does not fully investigate all the concerns surrounding it, and consider previously unaddressed issues" (KFCSCP 1998a). They knew that their Kurgan partners had the knowledge and skill base to answer questions about socio-economic concerns and health status. Ultimately, the Fox Cities group went

ahead with two tracks, including a “federal” track to link resource persons together, including members of congress, non-governmental organizations, and local Kurgan and Shchuchye leaders, such as Galina Vepreva, a retiree who became director of the NGO-funded Center for Community Development in Shchuchye. The “local” track worked on establishing special programs in Kurgan Oblast to support the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program. These projects were primarily grant-driven and included the construction of a primary care clinic in Shchuchye, opened in 2001.

An early attempt at “capacity building” in Kurgan Oblast came in the guise of the Partnership in Community Development which was jointly created by FCKSCP members, International Green Cross, Eco Bridge, and other NGOs committed to environmental and social concerns that arise out of weapons reduction initiatives. This working group devised a five-tiered plan for developing local leadership and meeting the basic social needs of the area. The first tier is to continue the existing sister city relationship with the Fox Cities as well as create new ties with communities in the US, which are also in the process of chemical weapons disposal, such as Tooele, Utah. The second tier is “leadership development” which includes training other community leaders, like Galina Vepreva, to design and carry out community development projects, which is the third tier. Mini-grants would be provided for projects ranging from recycling programs to park renovation to opinion surveys. The goal of tiers two and three is to empower the local community and to teach people planning and implementation skills as well as conflict resolution skills and other community development tools. The fourth tier is that, “decisions on the fate of Shchuchye and Kurgan Region should not only be made in Moscow, but in close cooperation with local leaders” (EcoBridge 1998:5). The final tier is health and medical partnership projects which would be specifically headed by the Fox Cities-Kurgan Sister City Program because of their demonstrated leadership in this area prior to 1997. United Health of Wisconsin, which took the lead on assessing the health status of local residents, identified two main foci: maternal-child health issues and emergency medical services. In relation to the second objective, local Kurgan doctors have developed a “needs list” of urgent medical supplies.

In 2003, the activities of the FCKSCP reached a climax. In January, money that had been held up in the US Congress for the construction of the chemical weapons destruction facility in Shchuchye was finally released. The revised

estimate of the costs of the facility is 880 million dollars, a 32% increase from the original estimate. In October 2003, the FCKSCP sponsored an international conference in Appleton, Wisconsin called “Security through Stability: International Community Partnerships.” One of the goals of the conference was realized as the participating sister city programs formed a non-profit corporation centered in La Crosse, Wisconsin, called “Communities for International Development, Inc.,” to provide a structure for collaboration and resource development to support future work between the U.S. and Russian partners (World Services of LaCross 2003).

The coalition of sister city programs takes as its mission improving the quality of life in cities near nuclear and chemical weapons facilities in the former Soviet Union (World Services of LaCross 2003). The conference report cites the example set by FCKSCP as a model program for this initiative. In addition to airlifts of supplies, doctors from the two areas have been traveling back and forth to learn about each other’s daily practice and community needs. As a result of these exchanges, the director of Maternity Hospital #1 in Kurgan received a grant to modify facilities and created several family birthing rooms on the model of American maternity hospitals. Since its opening in December 2001, more than 2,300 patients have been treated at the Shchuchye primary clinic (FCKSCP n.d.).

Mikhail Gorbachev (2003) served as the keynote speaker of the October 2003 conference. His opening night speech set the stage for the event, but I mention it here, at the end of this account, because it raises an underlying concern with development as a practice to be carried out in a former superpower. He acknowledged his role and that of his predecessors and US counterparts in perpetuating the arms race that served as the basis of the Cold War. The emphasis on weapons elimination, particularly aided by a former enemy and the attendant shift in focus on the alleviation of poverty is no easy task.

“Rebuilding our thinking, changing our thinking, is particularly difficult in our country, a country that went through many hardships during the Mongol domination, during the many years of serfdom and slavery and then during the years of the Communist system where there was total control of even the thoughts and not just of the economic and social developments” (Gorbachev 2003:1).

Historical legacies make it difficult for the two sides to work together and they have not taken full advantage of “opportunities” created by the end of

the cold war. At the same time, Gorbachev suggests that citizens must take a leading role in change. He remarks that universal development models are inappropriate as they ignore ethnic and regional diversity, suggesting an explanation for variability in post-socialist socio-economic status and raising a gentle critique of US-led development, which has treated Russia as both homogeneous and third world. "I say that [universal development models are] a utopia not unlike the communist utopia, the utopia that [we] were trying to impose to make people happy and maybe the new utopia is even worse" (Gorbachev 2003:8). Finally, he reinforces his message by calling on potential donors to attend to the local specificities—community needs, infrastructure, health, character, and culture.

Trans local/trans national communities

Anthropology has long sought out meaningful ways of improving local participation in the development process (Tax 1958, Chambers 1983). The experience of the FCKSCP suggests that grassroots development is strengthened by the personal relationships of this unique type of transnational community. Members of the program suggest that the personal relationships built up and sustained by cultural exchanges and small, grassroots development projects creates a level of accountability on both sides that is not common in traditional development models. This accountability is due in part to the existence of relationships prior to the initiation of international aid. It is not uncommon for Kurgan and Fox Cities residents to talk about these relationships using kinship terms, as hosts become siblings or cousins to their guests of similar status and students in homestays become "children" to local "parents." Participation in the Shchuchye project was urgent, yet the ongoing discussion between fictive kin about local needs for Kurgan meant that this iteration of participatory development was in many ways tied more organically to the local community.

Clark (2002:123) notes that international aid, as a process of globalization, overvalues, "universal and technical criteria and undervalues local values, persons, and consequences, reducing local cultures to depoliticized remnants of local music, dances, foods, and design motifs." This critique echoes related discussions (Escobar 1995, Ferguson 1994) about how the overvaluation of the technical leads to the neglect of social considerations and secondary impacts of specific forms of technical assistance. International assistance based on the transnational partnership outlined here played a crucial role in activities both "inside" and "outside"

the fence. Lobbying efforts on both sides were aimed at ensuring the safe and timely construction of the weapons destruction facility with attention to the socio-economic needs of the community. What made the lobbying efforts of this partnership unique was their ability to incorporate local values and individual strengths into the development process. The non-governmental agencies with whom FCKSCP partnered in the US were driven by issues but lacked local connections while the sister city partners perceived Shchuchye as an extension of their own communities. Thus, the sister city model is more culturally sustainable in the sense that this partnership has integrated "locally meaningful modalities of participation" (Clark 2002) that were lacking in many of the other types of aid projects going on in Eastern Europe and Russia in the early 1990s (Creed and Wedel 1997). The sister cities model affords participants with a wider range of possibilities for action than seem possible under conventional project-based aid relationships.

The relationship that local residents in Shchuchye have to the state parallels the "biological citizenship" that defines citizen-state relations in post-Chernobyl Ukraine (Petryna 2002). Petryna (2002:6) describes this type of citizenship claim as, "a massive demand for but selective access to a form of social welfare based on medical, scientific, and legal criteria that both acknowledge biological injury and compensate for it." In this case, each citizen makes a claim that can be documented, but a distrust of the government along with uncertain results leads citizens to simultaneously seek out other remedies (see also Phillips 2002). Chernobyl was an international disaster that garnered global media attention, while the illnesses that plague Shchuchye residents are the result of more chronic neglect on the part of the government. Parents often fail to report congenital defects in their children in fear that the government will take the children away (FCKSCP 1998b). Thus, the appeal Shchuchye residents make to the government is collective rather than individual. Individual relationships to the state are based on a historical relationship to the Soviet state in which the actor has faithfully carried out his or her duties and obligations and feels entitled to the rewards and social guarantees that were linked to this historical relationship, particularly in light of contemporary socio-economic hardships (see Haney 2002 and Caldwell 2004).

Thus far, I have focused on the potential advantages of the sister city partnership. As successful as this sister city model has been in valuing and facilitating local participation on local terms, the relationships remain unbalanced. On the

one hand, by identifying and cultivating the expertise of Kurgan and Shchuchye specialists and teachers the result is a participatory development where locals feel empowered and their contributions are valued. The “help” is more genuine than some of the failed efforts described by others (Creed and Wedel 1997) because needs were identified locally, then matched with strengths of community leaders in the US and Russia. Nevertheless, financing comes from the West, setting up an imbalance. Returning to Mauss’ theory of the gift, there is no such thing as a free gift. Charity makes the receiver subordinate to the giver. “The unreciprocated gift still makes the person who has accepted it inferior, particularly when it has been accepted with not thought of returning it” (Mauss 1990:65).

Gifts of charity can quickly reveal the ineptitude of the giver, as in the case of airlifting salad dressing into Siberia. Members of the Kurgan side of the exchange were not shy in pointing out this *faux pas* to their American counterparts. Both sides persisted in developing this partnership. If the goal is to establish a long-term relationship with counterparts in another part of the world to build cultural understanding, participants must become more adept at interpreting each others’ cultures and mediating misunderstandings. At an individual level, participants built up their relationships through somewhat regular visits and the exchange of small gifts of hospitality and friendship. The larger gifts of aid became more appropriate to locally identified needs over time, but the imbalance remains.

As the receiver of charity and aid, Shchuchye and Kurgan residents have accrued an unrepayable debt. One might argue, as members of the FCKSCP do, that the resulting security provides a global service in the form of protection against the theft and use of weapons of mass destruction. What has motivated Fox Cities residents to act is their empathy, even pity, for the poverty and hardship they see in Kurgan and Shchuchye. They see the residents of Kurgan as members of a shared community, making the moral impulse more pressing. In a way, this partnership, which began as a peace initiative, had come full circle, but now they built and expanded their transnational community on the foundation of an imminent global threat. The core group of members involved in planning on both sides is relatively small, though exchanges and projects include much larger numbers of people. This raises the concern of how the sister city program itself will be affected as the chemical weapons destruction facility is built. If participation and success are dependent upon the empathy of Americans, what happens as compassion fatigue sets in? Will the personal relationships created through a decade of

exchanges help the FCKSCP build and maintain a sustainable development model or will this “toxic community building”¹³⁵ process deteriorate the foundations of the sister city partnership? In other words, how long does charity persist before imbalance undermines the relationships established through exchange? The next several years will provide some answers to these questions. In the meantime, it is noteworthy that the sister city program successfully facilitated linkages between other actors in the development field. The depth of experience on both sides supported the effective communication of goals and priorities, as Kurgan residents had learned to be assertive and precise in their requests and Fox Cities residents had learned to be less ethnocentric, listening rather than thinking they had the answers by virtue of their economic superiority.

Conclusion

Paradoxically, peace has brought decreased stability to residents Shchuchye. Not only were local residents facing economic chaos and increasing reliance on diverse livelihood strategies, they were confronted with the betrayal of the state which now put them at risk of terrorist threats and continued environmental hazards. This community has benefited from the efforts of a partnership between the Fox Cities in Wisconsin and Kurgan, Russia. The kind of grassroots model developed by members of the sister city project has avoided (after some growing pains) many of the problems that have plagued Western development efforts in the former Eastern Bloc (Wedel 1998, Creed and Wedel 1997). Participation has drawn on the work of community leaders like Vepreva in Shchuchye and physicians and teachers in both Russia and the United States to create meaningful and effective ways to meet the social, health, and to a lesser extent, economic needs of the Shchuchye population. While this development model is not easily replicable, the experience of the FCKSCP suggests that NGOs might partner with existing exchange programs to build participatory models on the foundation of pre-existing relationships in order to broaden overall participation and strengthen accountability within the international aid community.

Notes

¹³³ An administrative area similar to a state.

¹³⁴ The facility is commonly referenced as a “destruction” facility, but according to the information on the Russian Munitions Agency website and other sources, the technology is a two-

step “neutralization” technology that creates non-threatening gas and a “salt brick” by product.

¹³⁵ This is a term Hugh Gusterson coined in discussing an earlier draft of this paper.

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