A Primary Eco-Structure: the Concept and its Testing[1]

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Abstract. The paper aims at theoretical comprehension of the process of functioning of an environmental activist in globalising context. The interdisciplinary concept of a primary eco-structure is offered. Its main function is to convert a "global into local", and by means of this to allow to an individual and/or micro-group to cope with the growing pressure of global world, accumulate, select and organise optimally his/her social capital and make maximally efficient its public activity. In short, an eco-structure represents a workshop (or a node of networks), resource store and "a cocoon of basic trust" (Giddens) of an eco-activist. His/her past, present and future exert a substantial impact on his/her relationships with the outer world and mode of activism. Two main models of eco-structure functioning, normal and mobilisational, are analysed and compared with the one usually employed in the western sociology. The paper ends with the discussion on the role of dialogue between eco-activists and sociologists for the achievement of mutual understanding in professional realms and political practice. The paper is based on the results of empirical testing of the above concept based on the materials of in-depth interviews with the leaders and activists of Russian environmental movement (EM) in the 2000s.

Keywords: environmental activism and its time dimensions, interdisciplinarity, mobilisation, plug and unplug, primary eco-structure, resources, Russia

Introduction

At present, when analysing an individual's activism, we usually stress his/her activism in the past. This is necessary, but insufficient. One should focus on a whole individual "machinery" which enables him/her to be an activist. The interdisciplinary concept of a primary eco-structure as a set of inner and outer networks is offered. Its main function is to convert a "global into local", and

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by means of this to allow to an activist to cope with the growing pressure of the globalised world, accumulate, select and organise optimally his/her social capital and make maximally efficient its public activity. In short, an eco-structure represents a workshop (as a node of networks), resource stock and "a cocoon of basic trust" (Giddens 1990) of an eco-activist. His/her past, present and future exert a substantial impact on his/her relationships with the outer world and mode of activism. This inner context is as much important as the outer one. The latter context may be of two kinds: normal (even friendly) or hostile (Gamson 1990; Yanitsky 1999, 2009, 2010). Therefore, the model of reproduction of a primary eco-structure may be of two types respectively: normal and mobilisational. In turn, each mobilisational situation has several stages, namely: preparation and discussion, decisive and after-effects and follow-up actions; at each of them the regime of eco-structure functioning may be varied. Finally, the empirical testing of the concept confirmed the thesis set forth by U. Beck (1992), A. Irwin and B. Wynne (1995), according to which the perceptions of a particular environmental conflict of scientists and activists are different.

The outline of the concept of "primary eco-structure"

In terms of methodology, the concept of a primary eco-structure developed in my earlier works (Yanitsky 1982, 1984) later has been tested and refined in the run of the secondary analysis of about 400 in-depth interviews with Russian eco-activists. By means of this analysis the substantial factors in their past, present and future that exert impact on their primary eco-structure building were revealed. Then, I carried out a pilot research by the method "interview after survey." After that, based on the same material, I revealed some substantial differences in the functioning of an eco-structure of Russia's environmental leader in normal and mobilisational situation. Finally, the major context differences in the West and Russia which condition the behaviour of a western and Russian activist have been compared.

The principal functions of the primary eco-structure include: mediating the interaction between global context and the actor, ensuring the optimal correlation between the plug and unplug (embedment – disembedment) to provide for the greatest efficiency of the socio-reproductive process (Abul'khanova-Slavskaya 1980, 79), accumulating various vital resources and their integration into a single "reproductive workshop" and intensifying the accumulation of a social capital. On the whole, the primary eco-structure may be depicted as a network-machine of self-regulation of the vital activities of activists. The role of primary eco-structures should not be confined to sociology: it calls for a more integrated interdisciplinary approach (Yanitsky 1982).

In terms of economy, the primary eco-structure may be interpreted as an element of organisation of the process of reproduction of the intellectual force, and of increasing its knowledge and know-how potential as an indispensable condition of production of new knowledge and know-how. The formation of an eco-structure is a method of accumulation of consumer's wealth, which is indispensable today not only for the nature protection, but also for spiritual reproduction of society by man and of man himself.

From the sociological viewpoint, the primary eco-structure is an organisational form of the vital activities through which an actor both adapts himself to a social and more wide environment and transforms them to meet his growing demands. If the way of life of an activist is an intrinsically unified system of stable and repeating types of vital activity, the eco-structure can be defined as a workshop of this activity. Within the framework of social psychology, this structure serves to lend stability and psychological comfort to activists in their social practice by means of mutual understanding and support, which give a sense of calm and protection. The other side of the coin is that the collective activity requires both intensive contacts between an individual and other people and a certain degree of his autonomy with respect to society. This intra-individual conflict is a stimulus for the development of various human needs.

From the cultural viewpoint, the structure in question is an individualised cultural world (world of meanings) created by an individual in conformity with his reproductive demands and group values. Becoming involved in various cultural spheres and diverse cultural milieus, an activist constantly forms a certain cultural space for his/her activity (i.e. micro-subculture on which mutual trust of activists is based). It should be noted that under the rapidly changing conditions of contemporary social life, an activist conceives this individualised cultural world increasingly often with an eye to the future of his children, family and social group, and of society as a whole (cultural mapping of the world future). I see this permanently recurrent process of creation and recreation of the eco-structure by an activist as the manifestation of the dialectic unity of his two basic values, the brevity and infinity of his existence.

The principal feature of these different functions of the eco-structure is their focus on the personality. The eco-structure is a system built on a multi-dimensional criterion. It conforms to the methodological premise that a system is not merely a structured combination of elements, but a dynamically organised evolving entity. It is worthwhile to recall that the term "ecological" stems from the Greek word "oikos" meaning home. The eco-structure is actually a home where the past, the present and the future of an activist are tightly and effectively interconnected by networks, shaping an integral but permanently changing whole.

Finally, as it has been mentioned (Yanitsky 1999), the context may be of two kinds: normal or hostile. Therefore, the model of reproduction of a primary

eco-structure may be of two types respectively: normal and mobilisational. The major characteristics of these, focused on the Russian eco-leader's activity, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Some Characteristics of Functioning of a Primary Eco-structure of Russian Eco-leader in Normal and Mobilisational Situation

	Normal situation	Mobilisational situation
Mode of functioning	Balance of plug and unplug	Unbalanced
Time rhythm	Without excessive efforts	Pressed (time limits)
Resource exchange	Balanced input – output	Mobilisation of all accessible resources
Source of resources	In the past and present	Immediately accessible only
Balance of reflection and action	Depends on the task, but usually balanced	All resources concentrated for an action
Type of networks	Periodically reciprocal and switching	Predominantly instructive and "vertical"
Use of internet	For accumulation of an individual's social capital	For exerting impact on decision-makers
Language of communication	Usually professional	Understandable for all

Past, present and future shaping the networks of an activist

Networks are not only immediate ties. The networks of eco-structure penetrate in the past, are based on the present and take into account the future. That is why I have investigated these contacts separately and in detail: which past definitely? As it has already been mentioned, a past cannot be reduced only to the past social activism, let us say, to participation in some protest actions. Past is a much more comprehensive notion, and doing something, an activist activated only some fragments of his memory stock. Past means not only direct contacts with elderly or landscapes of cultural value, but inner "dialogues" ranging from the family past (via letters and oral histories) to "dialogues" with the country's past (via scientific and memorial literature, archives and reminiscences of eye-witnesses). I included in this type of network an individual's reflection on his own past as well. In Russia, especially in remote provinces, the past presents a cultural milieu shaping an individual's core values and view of life. An individual's extended family, school-friends and place of living and work played a key role in it. Love of and attraction to this milieu or, on the contrary, negative stand towards it are also rather important. To some degree, the structure of the past served as a model of future environment.

What kind of networks compose an activist's present? I divided them in three categories: bilateral exchange, and two one-sided ones: "plug" and "unplug" into the web of networks. It is clear that bilateral exchange (of transactional or identity-building character) serves for accumulation of his/her social capital and maintenance of status in a professional or activist community. Plug usually means a promotion of the ideas or the results of the "inner work" of an eco-activist into the outer world (presentations, promotion of mass campaign results) and thus enlarging its social capital. The unplug is an unavoidable state in the functioning of the eco-structure. Unplug is a rather important mechanism in the process of accumulation and capitalisation of his/her social capital (knowledge, experience, know-how, friendly ties). There are two key means of its accumulation: practice, or more precisely, participation in socio-ecological conflicts and the EMs, and then reflection. Silence is its important precondition. The modern environmental activist becomes less "practitioner" and more thinker and analyst. Therefore, silence and solitude of activists as well as of their parties does not mean waste of time. Rather, it means the state of preparedness to unknown condition and sudden changes of context or of disposition of forces. Contrary to corporation parties usually considered by its members as a time for relaxation, parties of environmentalists and other actual activists present a very important space for the exchange of ideas, for testing accumulated resources and know-how and gaining new ones, and the correction of their own dispositions.

As to contacts with future, I divided these into "thinking about it" and "actual deeds" for the maintenance the eco-structure in foreseeable future. The former presents various forms of consideration about future ranging from thinking on his/her family, close friends, prospects of career to prospects of the country's evolution in a global context and transformation of an EM in it. In the final analysis, such thinking means the establishment of new ties and networks. "Actual deeds" represents various activities for the maintenance of an eco-structure (in Russia it often means an individual's oscillation between institutionalised and informal organisations) and practical realisation of his/her personal goals and the "individual life project" in general (see Table 2).

Table 2. Typology of Contacts of an Eco-activist with the Past, Present and Future

The past	The present	The future
1) discussion about the EM's past with the old generation of envi-ronmentalists 2) study of works and practice of the elderly 3) actual ties/links with former activists 4) "dialogue" with previous professionals 3) "dialogue" with the family past (via archives, letters, oral histories) 4) reflection on the society's past (via communication with like-minded people) 5) reflection on the society's past (via scientific and memorial literature, archives, oral histories) 6) reflection on the own past (via writing a diary, compilation of family archive, etc.)	**I. Bilateral contacts** 1) for targeted professional dialogue 2) multisided cultural exchange for self-maintenance as personality 3) with professional community for his/her status maintenance 4) with other participants of particular eco-conflicts 5) desirable but not realised contacts **II. Unilateral contacts (plug)** 1) looking for information and knowledge (on the internet, etc.) 2) promotion of own research results 3) looking for extra job 4) daily life-support communications **III. Reflection (unplug)** 1) thinking over/drafting ideas 2) estimation of the results of own works 3) activity concerning the future of a personality works 4) reflection on how to disseminate the achieved results	**I. Mental contacts with future** 1) thinking/writing about the future of the Russian society 2) thinking/writing about the Russian EM's future 3) thinking about own family's future **II. Actual deeds for maintaining his/her future** 1) reconsideration of an individual life project 2) discussion with like-minded people on EM's prospects 3) putting in order personal archives 3) writing the memoirs 4) writing/publishing text books 5) teaching and training 6) upbringing of young successors

Comparing the methods of study of the participation of individuals in socio-ecological conflicts developed by western and Russian sociologists

As a rule, any primary eco-structure of an environmental activist is included in a particular socio-ecological conflict (protest action, mass campaign) by a set of ties or networks. To clarify the differences of the above approaches to the problem of individual participation we have chosen the work of F. Passy, which has accumulated the views of the majority of western scholars on this problem (Passy 2003). Passy has used the three steps model of engagement of an individual in a conflict.[2] Let us compare the actual situation of the individual's public participation here and there in detail.

Firstly, the approach offered by Passy: "one individual – one organization (protest action)" may be called as an "in vitro." "Social networks do matter in the process of individual participation in social movements […]. Interpersonal ties have also played a key role in more radical forms of protest, such as terrorism." (Passy 2003, 21.) As Diani puts it, "I defined social movements as networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups or associations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of shared collective identity" (Diani 1992, 13; see also, Diani and McAdam 2003). It seems a much more adequate approach.

"In vivo", that is, in Russian context an individual intended to become an environmental activist brings about much pressure from different sides and of various strength and character. Actually, the following should necessarily be taken into account: 1) existence of core group of activists, mainly professional and interdisciplinary-trained; 2) Russian environmental activists are socially and politically diversified – they form at least seven groups (Yanitsky 2005), so an individual should choose which group he intends to plug in; 3) a "periphery" consists of a lot of other movements and counter-movements, not all under the green banners; 4) NB various attitudes of government, business, academics and media towards the Greens' activity. Recurring to Passy, we would say that the process of public participation never has the "beginning" and the "end". That is possible in vitro, only. All calculations related to the cost and risk of participation begins far before the beginning and becomes permanent, since both a man and the circumstances are permanently changing.

Secondly, Passy's stand seems somewhat distilled and not environmentalist: various contexts are not taken into account. Diani vs Passy: "[We should investigate] how network concept […] may be used to generate a more nuanced account of key elements of the relationship between SMs and the broader

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2   On some details about the differences between the EMs in Russia and in the West see: Yanitsky (1991), Usacheva (2008) and Usacheva and Davydova (2009).

political process, such as role of elites (Broadbent), the configuration of alliance and conflict structure in political system[…]." D. McAdam "has also provided a possible bridge between research on social movements and broader controversies in social sciences" (Diani and McAdam 2003, 299). Therefore, we see our shared task in bridging the gap between research on SMs and broader controversies in social science. Therefore, it seems to me that my approach is more realistic: analysing "individual – movement relationships," at least three types of contexts must be taken into account (local, regional and national-global) – keeping in mind that each of them has its natural specificity and particular social composition.

Thirdly, according to Passy, "participation is beyond a political regime." It is suggested that the process of the individual's involvement in public activity is free of political influence. "Social networks also enable individual participation in non-democratic regimes when there is a window of opportunity" (Passy 2003, 21). In Russia, the Greens are constantly under the pressure of the regime. Therefore, the degree and form of participation (action repertoire) depend on: 1) degree of general hostility of the context; 2) correlation between law and unofficial rules (ponjatija) established by corrupted groups and criminals; 3) division of electorate into system opposition, not-system opposition and extremists, in general into "we" and "they"; 4) "a window of opportunity" means nothing without concrete cost of this opportunity; and 5) nearly all democratic movements are considered as adversaries of the existing political regime.

The fourth principle could be labelled as "Democracy for All!" Even the state deals with extremists, the latter have access to public arena, and have a right to say. In Russia, access to public arena is reserved only to those who are loyal to the elite in power. Hence, networks are divided into legal (permitted) and illegal (prohibited) ones. The other side of the same coin is the "one way" (finalist) character of Passy's model: it is supposed that the individual will be necessarily accepted by a SMO irrespectively of the outcome of the conflict. Russian practice of public participation showed that the feedback model is more adequate: an individual could be either partly or fully accepted, or totally neglected by a SMO or a group of activists.

Fifthly, the approach under consideration suffers from reductionism: any social action, including decision-making as well as the *context* within which it realised, can always be reduced to a system of networks. We think that social action, including decision-making, can be provoked by material and environmental factors and/or by sheer force (calamity, poisoning, etc.) as well. Then, there are contexts which cannot be reduced to social networks (for example, all kinds of fluid or liquid substances and their possible harm to man and nature). Excellent examples of the context approach were presented by Whyte (1977, 1984),[3] Tenner (1996) and Murphy (1997, 2010).

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3   I am greatly in debt to professor Anne Whyte, Canadian social psychologist, with whom we
     worked in the frames of the UNESCO's "Man and the Biosphere Program" in the 1970–80s, and
     from whom I learned a lot in the field of interdisciplinary analysis in environmental sciences.

Sixth is the type of everyday life as a basic precondition of participation. In western democracies everyday life, especially that of the middle-class, is usually stable, well structured and organised. At the same time, this view seems to me a bit static, which does not take into account the phenomenon of "liquid modernity" (Bauman 2000). As Passy stated, socialisation functions of networks create "an initial disposition to participate" (2003, 24). In Russia, we permanently observe a "socialisation-in-action". In the run of this process an individual by means of networks would develop its disposition, while a social movement could either extinguish, or transform its network web, or achieving its aims shift to another problem or conflict. The way of life of the majority of Russians is usually mobilising, tense, conflicting, and therefore uncertain. Therefore, in Russia the suddenly changing context is the main force urging an individual to take extra-efforts (protests, blockades, open clashes with the police and other enforcement structures).

Seventhly, we would say that Passy and her followers maintained a somewhat simplified and definitely not consistent model of the individual's move to participation. We mean here three successful phases of this process: socialisation, structural connection function and decision to participate (Passy 2003, 30). Our view is the following: 1) to begin with, these three phases have no common denominator; 2) the process under consideration is not linear: the key factor is an event (conflict), the transformation of an individual into an environmental activist and vice versa is going on in the run of the conflict; 3) all three variables are dependent on resources at hand, on the success of the past actions of a particular SMO or initiative group; 4) an irregularly attending activist may be of crucial importance if he/she supplies SMO with money or relevant information; 5) the problem of free riders is not considered; and (6) last but not least, in Russia, but not only, decision to participate is mainly a collective decision.

Eighthly, considering participation in environmental movements we cannot miss the issue of *time*. One is *historical time*. Possibly, the division into old and new environmental movements are well enough for democratic societies. But in the transition period the context of these movements varied rapidly: (1) during the democratic upsurge (1990s) all appeared green; 2) in the 2000s the belonging of an individual to old or new movements was conditioned by age and well-being of protesters, particular way of life and place of living, by access to state and local media, by a common working or green past, access to the internet, and first of all by acceptance of insurgents (full legitimation and co-optation) and non-acceptance (pre-emption and repression) by the state or municipal administration (Gamson 1990, 154). The other is *an individual's time* of recruiting to a movement. As Passy stated, the process of an individual participation has a beginning, a middle and an end (Passy 2003, 24-25). It means that there is no time pressure: individuals can choose between being subscribers, adherents and activists, that is, supposed that they always have *enough time* to move step by step.

Hence, Passy actually considers a normal flow of events: there is a particular problem and an individual has enough time to decide to participate or not in its resolving. It is a rather important conclusion. In Russia, everyday life and public participation in actions and the rhythm of these have nothing in common. The latter is the race with the devil. The degree of necessity of action of both parts should be taken into account. Each designer of a transnational pipeline has financial and time limits. Each participant of the clash has its schedule and time limits. Let us say, to stop this pipeline construction, local population must take a set of legal steps, which have definite time duration (acquaintance, expertise, public hearings). And it is on the paper only. Actually activists are always under time pressure.

In Russia, the situation can be labelled as oscillating and uncertain because the state of mobilisation is permanent, but varied in degree. During these exhausting long-term conflicts some people associate with the EM, others drop out, still others change their status and role in the environmental movement. Once again: the duration of participation is defined not by an activist's will but by the *context pressure* (financial, political, social) and capability of an activist to resist.

Ninthly, somehow the problem of networks as resources and resources transmitted by these networks was not mentioned. Passy stated that "social networks play a key role in individual participation in social movements" (Passy 2003, 41). In our view, networks are primarily a cumulative result of individual attempts of self-maintenance and self-identification. As a rule, individual decision to participate in a particular movement is defined by many things: his/her involvement in other social activities, the individual's past as a social capital including the experience of past and present contacts with allies and adversaries, influence exerted on an individual by the ideologues and agitators, and resources at hand.

Then, there are at least four aspects of the problem: temporal model of activity as a resource; past as a resource; cultural orientation of individual as a resource; and frames as a resource. Let us consider one by one. Under temporal model of activity we understand a rhythm and pace of "an individual – movement" interaction. The motto of Passy's discourse may be presented as "Step by Step Move toward Activism". That is, individuals always have enough time to pass through the abovementioned three successive steps. In Russia the situation is quite different "All and at Once!" – the motto of Russian activists who are always under time pressure. They are forced to combine a set of activities, including those not directly connected with given conflict or mass campaign.

Now, on the past as a resource. In western sociology of social movements past as a resource gave significance to past activism. If one was an activist in the past, it is more probable that he or she will be participant of SMO's activity in present. It is correct, but seems to us too narrow and one-sided yet. Our comprehension is more diverse and multi-sided. An individual's activism in a SMO or a SM depends on his/her family roots, immediate natural and social

milieu and activism at school and university, on one's life story and meeting with outstanding movement leaders, on the type of settlement and national character, etc. In Russia, these impacts in the times of democratic upsurge (1989–1991) and in the 2000s were quite different. It is right that the "cultural orientation of individual develops in a web of social interactions" (Passy 2003, 23). Nevertheless, this interdependence seems to us not sufficient. First, a cultural orientation is the product of the past. Second, it not only develops, but reorients, restructures and even changes. Third, culture shapes a web of social interactions. Finally, on frames: Passy stated that the "networks are universal tool" – if "individuals once integrated in networks, it enabled them to define and redefine their frames, facilitates their identity building" (Passy 2003, 24). Yes, networks do matter, but they are not universal tool. First, which frames does Passy mean: master frames, frames of action, etc.? (See Gerhards and Rucht 1992.) Second, an individual frame is actually the function of public opinion, type of the particular conflict, etc. as well. Third, since in Russia there is no public arena for frames competing, each organisation involved in a conflict tries to impose on the individual its interpretive frame. Fourth, under "liquid modernity" the web of network is fluid as other components of this modernity: new problems emerge and new frames should be constructed by EM-leaders. I would say that the master frame is more or less stable, whereas the frames of particular collective actions are different.

Finally, about the role of trust and especially of meanings in the involvement of an individual in a collective action. Of course, "trust […] is a key concept in the explanation of why certain types of social ties are more important than others for individual" (Passy 2003, 41). But trust is a complex and not eternal phenomenon. To trust somebody does not necessarily mean that you and they will participate in a collective action hand in hand. Trust gives confidence, but does not guarantee success. In Russia, trust is shaped by the individual's past, his long-term interactions with a close circle of like-minded people, the individual's comprehension and estimation of political opportunity structure and resources at hand. Trust is a *social capital* which permanently changes in our uncertain and "liquid" social world.

As to meanings, Passy referring to White's (1992, 67) postulate that "a social network is a network of meanings" stated that networks are "islands of meanings" which "shape the individual preferences and perceptions that form the basis for the ultimate decision to participate" (Passy 2003, 23). It seems that Diani is more correct maintaining that "identity is built on the basis of interpretation of *narratives* which link together in a meaningful way events, actors, initiatives which could also make perfect sense (but a different one) if looked at independently, or embedded in other types of representations" (Diani 2003, 301). The concept of meanings "prompts on the reflection on the relationship between the social networks and the cognitive maps through which actors make sense of

and categorize their social environment and *locate* themselves within broader webs of ties and interactions" (Diani 2003, 5; my italics). Some clarifications are needed here, yet. There are two phases of the conflict: normal and mobilising. In a normal state an individual is able to think over the situation, to build a cognitive map of his/her living environment, and then to make a rational decision. In a mobilising state (more often in the state of emergency) an individual has no such possibility because of the stress, the break of the majority of his/her habitual ties and the total destruction of his cognitive map.

Anyhow, a meaning is a rather complex and mostly localised phenomenon. It is an *amalgamation*, in the activist's consciousness, of his personal and group experience of the past, acquired knowledge and know-how, beliefs, estimation of situation in situ by his/her closest allies and shaping on this basis the stand when facing a conflict (to be a bystander, free rider, formal member or an active participant).

Sociological research as promoter of eco-structure development

Such a long "preface" was needed because this was not a usual survey. I realised that in the questionnaire I touch some intimate sides of an activist's life. But it was necessary, if one wishes to embrace the whole machinery of eco-structure work. For this an environmental sociologist needs the detailed reflection of an activist offered him (by questionnaire) by a particular structure of decomposition of his/her life and activity. The matter is that being permanently active as public figures, experiencing time pressure, such activists have little time and not very comfortable milieu for personal reflection and self-estimation. The list of possible activities offered to them by the questionnaire gave them a chance to try on themselves the list and evaluate it critically. Thus, we, sociologists, received a feedback with explanations of what is right and wrong, what is impossible by using an ordinary questionnaire only. Of course, it was a time-consuming method but it gave me in-depth understanding of how an activist oriented in a conflicting social space and chose his position and action repertoire.

I have not been prepared that the answers to the questionnaire will be transformed into dialogue between sociologists and activists fruitful for both (we call this method interview after survey). The dialogue was sometimes very tense and tough because interviewer and respondent discuss every question point by point. In the final analysis, this turned out a rather fruitful and promising method because after a short period (1987–1991) of all-embracing trust in sociology as a lever which would enable the Soviet Union to rapidly transform into a

democratic state (in that time sociologists together with environmentalists were the intellectual driving force of reforms), a long period began, after the collapse of the Union, when the public weight of Russian humanitarian intelligentsia was diminishing and its impact on the society's deeds disappeared. At the same time environmentalists with the support of western funds and sister organisations turned out capable to maintain their networks and organisations. As sociologists, except for some small academic units and independent institutes, acquired a servile character, they also met a negative attitude from the part of the EM's activists who continued their struggle for nature protection by all means. For a decade (2000s), Russian environmentalists used to reject to participate in any public discussion with sociologists. Having in mind my long-term experience of participation in multidisciplinary projects, national and international during the 1980–90s, I became convinced that a restoration of trust and mutual understanding with environmentalists should be going on bottom-top, that is, by means of interpersonal contacts, first of all with those eco-activists who had known me already for 20–30 years. Of course, it was an ambitious task but I saw no other way out. That is why I launched this project investigating a primary eco-structure with hope that the study of its networks with their past, present and future would inevitably lead me to the understanding what sociological and political knowledge the environmentalists are still in lack of.

To be more accurate, they have already acquired this knowledge in pieces and fragments, but they still need both more systematic and more applied social knowledge. Paradoxically, environmentalists knew the social machinery of our society much better than some sociologists due to the environmentalists' insider position burdened with numerous conflicting contacts with power structures, business, natural scientists, academic community, lawyers, etc., but except for a very few of them, they had little contact with the local population because of their standpoint that they knew better, and with sociology because, as they were convinced, it was subjected to the state. Only quite recently have they realised that they need a dialogue and mutual understanding with local population, on the one hand, and with humanities, including sociology, on the other.

In the run of such a dialogue environmentalists and sociologists do achieve mutual understanding in professional realms; to translate our joint aims and programmes into political language, of no less importance is that we jointly develop the language understandable to lay people and therefore gain the possibility to exert impact on public discourse now mainly shaped by media showmen; we find topics and points where we can be useful to each other, in particular, we learn to develop social technologies for achieving nature protection goals in alienated and even hostile context; finally, we began to overcome the barrier of mistrust and mutual alienation. This, in turn, leads to self-criticism on the side of the eco-activists in order to make their activity more efficient from the point of view of nature protection

efforts and more comfortable and satisfactory for themselves. Environmentalists are actually active persons, but not all of them are militants, fighters. They periodically need change of activity and relaxation. We realised that this method meant a deep intervention into an individual's life with its dark sides. But if an activist trusted us, this clinical method, used by T. Parsons and E. Goffman, gave us deeper comprehension of how they built the strategy and tactics of their public activism.

Major research findings related to practice

The intellectual milieu formative for an eco-structure of the recent past was the Russian academic and local *intelligentsia* (scholars, school and university teachers, wildlife reserve workers, doctors, professionals, and artists), defending the interests of civic society and nature. The key components of social capital of its members were and still are knowledge, ability to communicate in diverse social and cultural environments, trust and sense of responsibility.

The essence of eco-leaders' altruism consists in prioritising the common good, that is, the interests of nature as a whole and the interests of numerous human communities that support, protect, and reproduce natural resources. Practicing such altruism means permanent efforts to disseminate what one has learnt or designed for the benefit of other groups of activists. The civil sense of this altruism is in *giving a way* to knowledge and know-how necessary for environment protection practiced by others.

The authority of such leaders and core groups is based on their intellectual potential, their incessant hard work, their unselfishness and commitment to wildlife protection ideals. In this respect, these activists are like doctors, guided by the "do no harm" principle. Only such a person takes care not of individual patients alone but of their habitat as well, and works to ensure people's life in the future rather than just their recovery today. It is social medicine, in particular health and hygiene that the activity of eco-activists resembles the most. Hence his knowledge is special. It is a milieu-based interdisciplinary and intersectoral knowledge-for-action. This knowledge can perhaps be also termed *situational*, meaning not provisionary, nor imperceptibly changing, but that in every given situation an eco-activist has to be simultaneously plugged to many different networks (different in terms of the direction of the communication as well as of the skills of those involved in it) and be able to put together the information received in order to define the action repertoire. Eco-activists are people who not only know a lot but know how to do many different things practically. Their main skill is to live *simultaneously* in a number of different social and cultural milieus and to *translate* the knowledge of one group into the language of another. That is why we labelled the eco-structure, as "workshop" of practitioners.

Whereas the elite of a consumer society is, according to Zygmunt Bauman, characterised by instant social *action* based on the "hit and run" principle without taking any responsibility for the consequences (Bauman 2004, 18), *mutual assistance* is typical to those who protect the environment, since they need local populations' trust and support. And where there is no population at all, they have to struggle with agents of consumer society advancing their mega-projects using green networks all over the world. The types of social communication they practice differ from each other, too. Whereas a PR-manager, a designer, a couturier, or a showman works with the masses imposing patterns of consumer behaviour and fashion onto the public's mind, an eco-activist works with concerned people and regards it as his goal and his duty to convince them that environment protection means protecting their own lives and those of their children and grandchildren. It is, therefore, not for nothing that ecological education and enlightenment take the central place in the activity of Russian EM leaders. While the masses are trained to live on credit, eco-activists educate people and teach them how to economise resources and protect themselves and others.

Contrary to the ruling elite who always want to have their own, *private* nature, eco-activists are preoccupied by the problem of biosphere sustainability and saving centuries-old landscapes or local ecosystems; they think in historical and systemic categories, and they feel responsible. They cherish *reflection* and discussion of environmental problems with their peers as well as with local population. They are people whose souls are permanently working. For the consumer elite, a national motif it just a hit for another model, while for environmentalists it is a local relic, a reminder of the connection existing between them and the vanishing history and cultural diversity of an endemic people. In the final analysis, Russian eco-activists always belong to the opposition, and they mostly conduct rearguard fights. Nevertheless, they believe in the success of their hopeless cause.

Conclusion

The paper started out with some critical remarks on the concept of the relationship between "an individual – a social movement", relation which seems to me too simple since it overlooks a complexity of the notion of an individual actor – that actually represents a rather intrinsic web of mental processes and real deeds. To grasp this complexity, the concept of primary eco-structure has been introduced.

The eco-structure is an interdisciplinary theoretical construct which has a practical meaning. It depicts the ties between the inner life of an eco-activist and his/her activity and shows how gathered, accumulated and practically used his/her social capital is. Its main function is to convert a global into local, and allows

an activist to cope with the growing pressure of the global world, accumulate, select and organise optimally their social capital and make maximally efficient their public activity.

The principal functions of the primary eco-structure are as follows: mediating the interaction between the global context and an activist, ensuring the optimal correlation between the plug and unplug for an activist to provide for the greatest effectiveness of the socio-reproductive process, accumulating various vital resources and their integration into a single "reproductive workshop" and by means of that to intensify the accumulation of a social capital. On the whole, the primary eco-structure works as a network-machine of self-regulation of the vital activities of practically-oriented actors. It enables them to maintain their sustainability in an uncertain and rapidly changing global world.

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