Maria Tysiachniouk
and Antonina Kulyasova

Preliminaries look at the influence of Russian health philosophy and environmental ethics organizations on food preferences

The formation of food preferences in Russia since 1992 occurred under conditions of developing market reforms. As more and more diverse food products became available in the market, the opportunity for the realization of food preferences also became available to the population in recent years. Along with the processes of political and economic transformation, Russian society has become more and more open and democratic.

The process of democratization promoted the distribution of new ideas, which before Perestroika would not have been allowed. Democratization has also supported the development of new social movements which mobilized the population to new initiatives in many areas. Ideas about both healthy lifestyle and new environmentally friendly consciousness penetrated into peoples' minds. Today these ideas, distributed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), are playing a tremendous role, filling the vacuum which appeared when the former Socialist public ideology was destroyed. Today, the amount of NGOs and number of people participating grows constantly. For example, in St. Petersburg in the period from 1991 until 1995, 2905 NGOs were registered (The Directory 1997, p. 5).

Our research group determined that, among the NGOs, in the St. Petersburg region there are around 150 organizations whose activities can be considered as environmental. Around 25 of these organizations are unusual in that they focus their activities on biospheric ethics, spirituality and holistic understanding of the planet and universe. They are grounded on three main topics: cultural enlightenment, non-standard ideas of child development and education, and environment and health aspects (including nutrition). Each type of association is based on certain theoretical backgrounds, which determine the attitudes of its members. These organizations originally formed as an interest groups. However, presently they are interested in spreading their ideas into society. This paper will focus on how the theoretical backgrounds of these organizations influence the nutritional behavior of their members and how these ideas influence food preferences in the society.

Previous studies of food preferences have focused on certain ethnic groups or on certain territories in the former Soviet Union. The main directions of available research were: the influence of nutrition on the human

These papers analyze the connections of peoples' attitudes to their nutritional behavior, as well as historical traditions, which determines food preferences to some extent. However, the direct influence of the theories on nutritional behavior has not yet been highlighted in these papers. The nutritional behavior of the members of these newly established organizations have not been studied yet by Russian sociologists. Therefore, we decided to study the food preferences of the participants of eight organizations, located in St. Petersburg and Vologda, in which nutrition plays an important role.

We studied the social structure of participants of organizations, analyzed motivations for food preferences and how ideology, doctrines, and beliefs influence nutritional behavior. We also analyzed how nutritional recommendations based on theory correlate with actual diets. Special attention was given to study the extent that ideas of organizations influence food behavior of the population.

For a better understanding of the survey, an analysis of the data of the social structure of the participants of organizations was carried out. We assessed limited population data of each member of an organization who responded to our survey. These data, the number of years in the association, gender, age, education, and wealth, were analyzed. Some of our respondents joined the organization in 1987, at the time when Perestroika started. At that time the organizations represented already-formed social groups called «Informal Groups». The organizations received the opportunity to be registered according to the law only in 1991.

The registration procedure was rather difficult at that time, because of the post-Soviet bureaucracy. Between 1987 and 1991, 1/10 of our survey respondents joined their organizations. Since 1991, the number of organizations has continued to grow. Between 1992 and 1995, 1/5 of the respondents joined organizations. In 1995, a new law simplifying the procedure for registration was enacted. Between 1994 and 1998, 2/3 of the respondents came to the organizations.

Thirty six women and 9 men answered the survey questions. The majority of the respondents are of middle age, around 46 years old. Three quarters of all women respondents were from 37 to 72 years old. Most of
the men are in the 25-36 age category. Contrary to the women, there were no men in the age brackets of 13-24 or 73-84.

Most of the respondents have had a higher education. Only 1/3 have no university degree. The level of wealth of the respondents is relatively low. Half of the respondents assess their level of wealth as low, the other half as average. Only one respondent said that he is rather wealthy.

As we already mentioned above, members of the organizations are under the influence of certain theoretical concepts. Each of the organizations studied encourages their participants to reorient themselves primarily to live on the basis of spiritual values. The integrity and unity of people with their environment and the universe is one of the main focuses of the participants' value systems. The members of the organizations are concerned about how the whole of humanity and the planet will survive in the future. The theoretical concepts emphasize people's harmony with themselves, balancing their physical, psychological, and spiritual feelings.

They emphasize healing the body, methods of maintaining health, promoting a healthy lifestyle and a healthy diet. Most of the members of these organizations, after participating for a long time, usually conform themselves to these attitudes regarding their physical and spiritual condition. They forgo smoking, drinking and other unhealthy habits. They understand their own individuality and develop a new love for themselves as a part of the planet and universe.

Collective actions in these organizations are usually educational and enlightening. They organize talks, meetings, workshops, seminars, conferences, environmental camps, outdoor schools, and organize eco-villages. They never use protest as a form of action to achieve their goals. On the contrary to the other types of environmental organizations, these «spiritual» organizations are focused not around a certain environmental problem, but rather around certain ethical ideas.

The peculiarity of this type of organization is the existence of the world view system, which is usually written by a teacher and published in special books. Books and journals serve the guidelines for members of these organizations in changing their lifestyle, in maintaining health, and choosing nutrition.

This grounding in a world view is why beliefs and theories play an important role in food preferences of our respondents. The survey demonstrated that the «ideas» are the most important factor in food preferences. The weakest motivations for food preferences are traditions. Members of the organizations usually follow the recommendations of their organizations and prefer food other than ordinary traditional Russian food.
However, theoretical background is not the only thing that motivates the members of organizations when they choose their diet. Food choice is also influenced by the conditions of the participant's health and determined by prices. The respondents added to the proposed answers eight more motivations: wishes, minimum time for preparing food, food habits, mood, obstacles, needs of the organism, low calories, rationality.

Most participants of the organizations grow food, buy food, and prepare food themselves. Ninety percent of respondents are actively involved in one or more stages of their food procurement and preparation. Only 1/10 of the respondents were passive with the design of their diet.

Health is a big motivation for most of the respondents. Members of the organizations value health, trying maintain it and practicing different ways of improving it. Almost 4/5 of the respondents indicate that their food choices are motivated by their understanding of taking care of their health; 56% believe in a healthy lifestyle, 22% believe in culture of health and human existence. Many of the respondents connect the health of their body with the health of the environment. The second and third most common reasons for food choices, each at 27%, were the doctrine of transformation and a belief in human evolution.

Many believe that the vegetarian diet is essential for the right way of human spiritual evolution. In the interviews many respondents indicate the necessity of vegetarian diet for the further spiritual life (after physical death). Many believe that the vegetarian diet makes spiritual evolution easier.

Sixteen percent indicated that the most important reason for making a food choice is the balanced food die where environmentally safe products are used. Sixteen per cent of them emphasize animal rights and indicate these rights as the motivation for using vegetarian food. Four per cent indicate the importance of corresponding nutrients with alliance of the universal rhythms for food.

Within other ideas that guided food choices, respondents indicated additional concepts, such as the «influence of the quality of food on the energy centers and chakras». «Food can influence the co-feelings with the planet, it can determine changes in consciousness, can change person's perceptions of inside and outside world». Some respondents indicate that food can help in «becoming saint and space body», which, according to an esoteric doctrine, is the next stage of human evolution. A respondent mentioned «Eating fresh, raw food according to God's commandments», given to people and written in Bible (Exodus), Chapter 1-29 «I gave you different grasses, which gives seeds, and each tree, which gives seeds». 

214
Despite the difference in doctrines, there are more commonalties than differences in nutritional recommendations of different organizations. The organizations usually divide products into those that are recommended and not recommended.

In the survey respondents most frequently mention vegetarian food as recommended. These are seeds, beans, fruit, vegetables, juices, herbal infusions. In the second place is soft vegetarian food which accepts dairy products, honey, and eggs. The foods that were indicated as not recommended by respondents are: meat, eggs, alcohol, coffee, sugar, salt, chocolate, white bread, pasta, cakes, potatoes, and imported products. The respondents also indicated as not recommended food with preservatives, or that was sterilized, or smoked, or grilled, or products with hot spices.

Almost all the respondents are familiar with the recommendations of their organizations. However, some of them take into account not only the recommendations of their organizations, but listen the recommendations of their medical doctors, healers, information picked up from the mass media and personal communication.

Let us try to analyze the recommendations given by organizations and the real food preferences of the members of organizations. In the survey question «What kind of products are you using the most frequently?», respondents indicated: grains, vegetables, fruit, berries, and dairy products. Ninety-three per cent of the products belong to soft vegetarian and 78% to the strict vegetarian (only plant food). Meat was indicated only by 7% of the respondents. In the organizations studied, people who make their transition to vegetarian food often use soy products as meat substitutes.

Although it is recommended to eat locally grown food, most of the people in the interviews use a lot of products which are grown outside their local area. This became possible because of the development of market economics and studying the lifestyle of other cultures. The rebirth of old Russian kitchen takes place today. From the category of foods which are new for Russia, the most frequently used is soya. Many people prefer tropical and subtropical fruit and vegetables, marine cabbage, wild grasses, products of wheat grain.

From the question about the list of drinks, the most often used are black tea, herb tea, juice and coffee. Milk and water are also often used. The list of herbs used as tea expands and many people began using herb teas from different kinds of leaves and berries, which they make themselves from local plants that they gather. The list of plants used in food in Russia is gradually increasing.
The representatives of the organizations are vegetarians (most of them soft) or try to become vegetarians. However, the most of them do not follow the recommendations exactly. The most of the respondents explain that they do not always follow the recommendations because of different psychological circumstances such as «There are too many psychological pressures from the outside world that get in the way of spiritual enlightening;» «I eat junk food (meat) sometimes to ground myself, to get in balance with low matters and consciousness». Other respondents indicate: laziness, self weaknesses, skepticism, low self-discipline, lost motivation due to the lack of imagination, temptation, old habits, lack of appropriate products in the market, lack of time. It is interesting to note that the respondents are almost all very short in money, however no one indicated that they do not follow the diet recommendations because they do not have enough money for that.

When people join the association, they go through changes in their diet. Everybody individually goes through the same phases, but over different time periods and with differing degrees of difficulty or ease. They start with soft and later to go to hard vegetarianism. Almost all the respondents indicate that they began to feel much better because of this. They feel better both spiritually and physically. In general, they are becoming healthier as they change their lifestyle (by giving up smoking and drinking), and improve their relationships with the surrounding people.

In the survey, 33 people (from a total of 45 total) indicated that their spiritual health has been improved, 20 of them indicated that their physical health also has been improved. Members of the organizations who changed their diet to vegetarian try to insert their new approach into society. People outside the organizations look at these ideas differently: they range from rejecting these ideas to following them.

More then 2/3 of the respondents spread the ideas of their new diet in individual talks with relatives and friends. Many converse about themselves and their cases, others suggest books to read and give out copies to of the books. Some give talks and lectures to a larger audience. The interviews highlighted some other ways of spreading the information. Community of Spiritual Revival opened a vegetarian cafeteria. The respondents retells: «Not only members of our communities come to us, people come from other organizations, we have discounts, plus we give free coupons to those who helps us, those who are active. We continually have participants from other organizations. People like how we cook. People became familiar with the vegetarian food... We have recipes on display windows, many people became interested, we give recipes to people who are interested». Members of Ivan's Hundred Thousand Brothers distribute soya products to the people.
of the town of Viritsa, to different companies, and to the population. «We bring 4 to 10 sacks of soya food, and people buy soya fast».

The Macrobiotic Society is conducting three seminars per month on macrobiotic nutrition. Different kinds of macrobiotic food is available to purchase. Many of the St. Petersburg's vegetarians buy food there. Ivan's Hundred Thousand Brothers, the Macrobiotics Society, and the Community of Spiritual Revival publish papers regarding nutrition.

We consider the influence of the organizations' members on their own family as a part of its influence on society. Food preferences of the members of organizations are received differently by their own family members. We can see the opposite cases. «There is no family, that I know, where the problems do not occur. The nicest, most well brought up, the most cultural, intelligent, and educated people do not find common language with those, who changed their ordinary diet». In other cases, there are no problems, «In our family we set it in such a way that who ever has prepared food has the opportunity of a choice, others should just eat. What I prepare everybody eats. Father, mother, and I have the same principles regarding food, so there is no tensions in the family because of food». Some respondents said that there was no influence of their food preferences on their families.

These people either live alone, or prepare food separately, or the family is accepts everyone's the right to choose their own food. We allocated several types of influences, a) the skeptical attitude, b) the ironical attitude: «They are laughing at me but do not prevent me from eating what I want», «My family is teasing me, when I do not feel well they say that this is because I do not eat meat», c) misunderstanding: «My family can not understand why I am doing this», d) soft rejection: «My family does not confront me directly, but there are some internal wishes, and suggestions. My relatives are concerned and look negatively on my vegetarianism. Each time all conversations at our meetings are reduced to that sore question «Why are you a vegetarian?», they suggest, «Maybe today you would eat some meat?», «My relatives and friends love meat, but I hate it!», e) negative: «Differences in food preferences lead to my separation with my mother, we even separated our finances», or, «We have two camps in the family - my wife and I do not eat meat, our children eat meat - but not too much. Some relatives followed our example and stop eating meat».

In the authors' opinion, the organizations which we studied can be related to a special category of environmental organizations, which are mostly involved in the propaganda of environmental ethics and consciousness. Such movement towards alternative lifestyles has not been incorporated into sociological theory in Russia. However, this movement exists
and is realized through interest clubs and organizations. We assume that this kind of movement can be conceptualized in the frame of new social movements. The new social movement paradigm was developed by A. Melucci (1985, 1989), A. Cohen (1985), E. Zdravomyslova (1993) et al.

Almost all new movements (environmental, feminist, peace, civil rights) are oriented towards post-industrial values, establishing a new identity and new relationship with the self and the environment. It seems that these Western new values are contradictory to the values of the population of a society in transition and have different meaning in Russia. Nevertheless, the type of organizations we studied, contrary to the other Russian environmental NGOs, have many similarities with those in the West. Both Russian organizations which we studied and most of the Western new social movements try to promote the new relationship of humans with nature, with themselves and their social environment. In the new Russia, new relationships are controversial to the values of utilitarian society which are characteristic for both pure market economies and socialist planned economies.

However, the historical and cultural context of these new movements differs very much. If Western social movements are based on the post-industrial values, organizations in Russia are developing under conditions of the destruction of industrial society. If, for the Western societies the most important thing is the lifestyle of individuals, their autonomy and independence, for the Russian, the collective mentality still dominates. That is why many of the representatives of the studied organizations have difficulties with their diet when they live in the family structure, which does not allow too much independence.

Russian families do not accept special nutrition or a different lifestyle within it. However, new nutritional attitudes are spreading in the society and are already influencing the food market. Our study demonstrated that there is an increasing tendency in the number of people who follow the recommendations of the organizations and choose a non-conventional diet. More and more vegetarian food products including soya appear in the market. We can notice that participants in the organizations, who are almost all poor people, influence the food preferences of the people of higher income. They are interested in improving their health and became consumers of beans, soya products, and natural tea, both in St. Petersburg and Vologda, in our future research, we are planning to study these changes in the demand for green, environmentally safe products.
REFERENCES
Bikov, O.G. and N.M. Bikova. Teacher Ivanov: it is Necessary to Change the Flow of Consciousness of the People, St. Petersburg. 1994.
Sandrova, A. and Dimirov V. A Shield of Brothers. 1996.