

# Ukraine and Russia: Major InterNICHE outreach Training in Alternatives and Replacement of Animal Experiments

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## Summary

*During October 2005, InterNICHE National Contacts Anya Yushchenko and Lena Maroueva, and Co-ordinator Nick Jukes, began a large-scale promotion of alternatives across the Ukraine and Russia.*

*The InterNICHE outreach produced a number of positive results: presentations, demonstrations and training in alternatives to over 500 teachers and students; agreements at two institutes to replace harmful animal use in education across a whole department and faculty respectively; information gathering, and discussions with teachers about potential future replacement; reaching a massive audience through positive media coverage; and empowerment of campaigners, including InterNICHE National Contacts who successfully organised the majority of the activities.*

*To continue the successes, funds to enlarge the Russian micro-Loan System of alternatives and to make donations of alternatives to institutes are urgently needed. Support for broadening the InterNICHE impact across Ukraine, Russia and Asian republics through the distribution of translated literature, video, freeware alternatives and web-based resources is also required. Such activity not only supports the development of a progressive, humane education, but impacts positively on animal use in research and testing by creating an environment more conducive to alternatives in general. This is important now as animal testing laboratories consider relocating in or sub-contracting to ex-Soviet countries and in central Asia. New InterNICHE connections have already been made with Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan, and there are many open doors.*

**Zusammenfassung:** InterNICHE zeigt Präsenz in der Ukraine und in Russland

*Im Oktober 2005 starteten die nationalen InterNICHE Kontaktpersonen, Anya Yushchenko und Lena Maroueva, und Koordinator Nick Jukes eine großangelegte Werbetour für Alternativmethoden quer durch die Ukraine und Russland. Der InterNICHE Werbefeldzug zeitigte eine ganze Reihe von Erfolgen: Die Präsentationen, Demonstrationen und Übungen mit Alternativmethoden erreichten über 500 Lehrende und Studenten; mit zwei Institutionen wurden Vereinbarungen getroffen, auf belastende Tierversuche in der Ausbildung künftig zu verzichten, einmal war es ein Department, das andere Mal eine ganze Fakultät; Informationen wurden gesammelt, mit Hochschullehrern über künftig zu ersetzende Tierversuche diskutiert; die Publikumswirkung war durch eine positive Medienbegleitung enorm; die Tierschutzszene wurde massiv gestärkt, nicht zuletzt die nationalen Kontakte von InterNICHE, welche die Mehrzahl der Aktivitäten organisierten.*

*Um den Erfolg anhalten zu lassen sind nun dringend Spenden nötig, um das Russische Mikro-Leihsystem für Alternativen auszubauen und um einzelnen Institutionen auch Alternativmethoden schenken zu können. Ebenso ist Unterstützung vonnöten, um den Einfluss von InterNICHE auf Russland, die Ukraine und die asiatischen Republiken zu vergrößern: Literatur muss übersetzt werden, Videos, kostenlose Alternativprogramme und Web basierte Quellen müssen zur Verfügung gestellt werden. Solche Aktivitäten unterstützen nicht nur die Entwicklung einer fortschrittlichen, humanen Ausbildung, sie haben auch Einfluss auf die Verwendung von Tieren in der Forschung und bei Sicherheitsprüfungen, da sie generell ein Klima größerer Bereitschaft schaffen, Alternativmethoden zu verwenden. Dies ist gerade jetzt wichtig, da verschiedene Tierversuchslabor überlegen, in den Ländern der früheren Sowjetunion und in Asien wieder Fuß zu fassen. Neue InterNICHE Kontakte wurden mit Weissrussland, Armenien, Aserbeidschan und Kirgisien geknüpft, viele offene Türen gibt es dort zu nützen.*

**Keywords:** InterNICHE, Ukraine, Russia, humane education, alternatives, training, replacement, law, implementation



## 1 Bioethics and alternatives

The month of outreach began with the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Bioethics Symposium, held from 4-7 October in Kharkiv, Ukraine. This predominantly Ukrainian event was organised by Tatyana Shchegoleva of Kharkiv State University. InterNICHE's involvement included presentations and demonstrations of alternatives at the Pedagogical Institute, Zoovet Institute and the research-based Veterinary Academy. Nick Jukes gave a detailed overview of alternatives in education and the InterNICHE Policy, and Anya Yushchenko reported on the experience of three years of lending and implementing alternatives across the city.

The symposium produced a resolution that acknowledged the advantages of alternatives, and called for replacement of harmful animal use and recognition of a student's right to conscientiously object. The resolution also called for alternatives to be produced with a facility for easy translation, and for the creation of more Ukrainian and Russian language alternatives, in response to the current limitations of many software and video alternatives that are produced only in English.

Following this series of events, InterNICHE held a one-day "Seminar and Training in Alternatives in Education" on 8 October at the Department of Physiology of Kharkiv Medical University. Keynote speakers at the seminar were heads of department Mykola Makarchuk and Valerij Samokhvalov, who are pioneers in modernising physiology education in Kyiv and Kharkiv respectively. Both have fully replaced the animal experiments with multimedia software, videos and student self-experimentation with practical support from the RSPCA and InterNICHE (see end of article for full names of organisations). Seminar participants also received training in the use of a range of alternatives from the RSPCA/InterNICHE Ukraine Alternatives Library. Promoted through one-to-one contact with individual teachers, and complemented by donations of alternatives to a range of institutes, this library has already brought about some direct replacement in several departments in Kharkiv. It has also

created a student choice option there for conscientiously objecting students of some disciplines who are now able to learn using alternatives only.

Anya Yushchenko will now begin nationwide distribution from Kharkiv of printed, video and software resources and attend exhibitions at scientific conferences across the country to further promote the Alternatives Library and the message of replacement. InterNICHE resources are available in both Russian and Ukrainian languages to reflect the cultural diversity of the country. Promotion of alternatives also continues through the work of the Society for the Protection of Animals "SOS" in Kyiv.

## 2 Moscow presentations

Moving to Moscow, InterNICHE-Russia organised major presentations at several institutes in the city. Many new connections with institutes have developed in recent years, facilitated by the distribution of new printed resources, through a presence at the Annual International Veterinary Congress – a predominantly Russian and ex-Soviet gathering of several thousand delegates in Moscow – and through the launch of the Russian micro-Loan System. This small library of alternatives allows free borrowing of items by teachers across Russia, subject to strict guarantees, and has provided a crucially important resource for the InterNICHE volunteers to offer to institutes and to progress implementation.

Similar to the Ukrainian resource, the Russian micro-Loan System is one of several seed projects of the much larger international Alternatives Loan System, set up with support of Proefdiervrij to enable borrowers to familiarise themselves with the diversity and quality of existing alternatives, and to trial individual products. Co-ordinated by Monika Perčić from Slovenia, this project has made over 200 loans to 40 countries since the end of 2001, comprising over 4000 usages of individual alternatives. The success of this powerful international resource is mirrored in the Russian micro-Loan System and its sister project in the

Ukraine, which illustrate how much can be done with seed funding to support small-scale but highly effective and sustainable projects that are designed to facilitate real replacement of harmful animal use.

A presentation to over 100 students and teachers at the Veterinary Department of Moscow Academy of Applied Biotechnology was followed by demonstrations of alternatives and a lively discussion on the issue, with a majority in support for alternatives but also the one predictable invocation of Ivan Pavlov's "great" work. In favour of newer approaches, the students clearly want to learn, and were aware that alternatives can help them in that process. The spirit of the day also included much spontaneity, which in itself is progressive and exciting after decades of disempowerment and ideological pressure against individual action, and impromptu meetings took place with heads of department and with the dean.

In the Department of Clinical Diagnostics, clinical skills were being practiced on one cow, but this was very stressful and exhausting for her. After 8 years, therefore, she was retired, eaten and replaced with a younger cow. New arrival Milka seemed happy enough in her stall, but this presumably changes when she is repeatedly rectalised, and she faces years of such student practice. Teachers had filmed some clinical skills work, using personal funds, in order to use the videos for training. Further clinical skills and surgery alternatives, as well as those for zoology, are now required. By the end of the meetings, items from the micro-Loan System were re-borrowed, with the presentation having helped teachers to see alternatives "with new eyes" and increased enthusiasm.

As with all institutes, there are differing degrees of autonomy at each department or faculty with respect to curricular change, so while some can easily change the practical courses, others require initiative or approval from the rector (which may take years) or even a change in the government-approved curriculum (which may take decades). Head of the Department of Clinical Diagnostics, Tatyana Elisarova, is able to make some au-

onomous decisions, and is aware of the importance of animal welfare. The potential for implementing alternatives in one or more departments is therefore high.

InterNICHE presentations in Moscow also took place at the Veterinary Faculty of the Russian State Friendship University, where two student conscientious objectors and many overseas students are studying; and at a medical high school, where students introduced the afternoon by reading poetry about the spirit of animals, compassion, and the human-animal bond.

### 3 Resources and demonstrations

At all InterNICHE events there was widespread distribution of the first Russian-language booklet on alternatives, funded by FFVFF and IAAPEA and published in 2004 by InterNICHE-Russia and VITA, a general animal protection group established during the late 1990s. The publication features experiences and testimonies from Russian and Ukrainian students and teachers. The Russian text of the InterNICHE book "from Guinea Pig to Computer Mouse" (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2003) was also distributed, along with news of the 2005 InterNICHE Humane Education Award. Supported by Proefdiervrij, this worldwide grant program of 20,000 Euro is to facilitate the development or purchase of replacement alternatives. Russian and Ukrainian institutes were encouraged to apply: with almost no translated alternatives available, developing new software and videos could have significant potential for replacement by virtue of using the native languages and being designed specifically for the local curricula.

Teachers at the demonstrations were also shown draft Russian versions of two freeware alternatives, the translations sponsored by WSPA with a view to supporting the creation of a new generation of animal welfare friendly veterinarians and other professionals. The "CAL Pharmacology Compilation" software from Ramasamy Raveendran of JIPMER, Pondicherry, India, and the "Physiology Simulators" software from Gabriel Cotor

of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Bucuresti, Romania, will be widely distributed across Russia and Ukraine upon completion. The English versions were widely distributed during the outreach. Other alternatives demonstrated included "ProDissector Frog" from the Schneider & Morse Group, and a range of simulators and training mannequins such as "Critical Care Jerry" from Rescue Critics.

### 4 Battle for alternatives

While the introduction of alternatives can obviate potential problems between student and establishment, a battle continues at Moscow State University. Conscientious objector Roman Belaysov, a biology student with top grades, faces expulsion since challenging the university by openly criticising harmful animal use and requesting alternatives. For Roman, the problems are not so much with biology but with relevant Russian law and regulations, which either do not exist or have no power. Using what regulations there are, and quoting from the University's own regulations and from Soviet regulations still in force, he accuses the teachers of failing to adhere to their own commitments in terms of quality and nature of teaching. Roman is calling for humane alternatives – just for himself, and using his own money – and his right to an individual "study plan".

Some teachers are furious at his challenge to the orthodoxy, complaining that "alternatives and bioethics are causing nothing but problems". Although one alternative practical employing plant material rather than animal tissue was mutually agreed and successfully conducted, the physiology practicals from 2004 onwards have been major obstacles. Refusing to compromise – for example by rejecting offers to observe but not participate in experiments – Roman has been blocked from taking exams. He has also been told that he is no longer a student at the university – followed later by confirmation that he is after all.

Although the University is keen to avoid a scandal, a popular TV chat show has already featured his case, following a

2004 press conference organised by InterNICHE-Russia. And at a live studio interview with the rector in September 2005, the first phone call from the public was about alternatives. Many students and some of the general public in Moscow and further afield are therefore aware of the situation, even if Roman's style of challenge is not the same as theirs. Roman is now threatening legal action, using a civil rights approach, against the University.

Meanwhile, Russia's first Animal Liberation Front (ALF) actions have liberated animals from the University itself. This has hindered the existing campaign for change, and anyone who even mentions support for alternatives may now be suspected of involvement in the action. Even the progressive bioethics course introduced by biology teacher Anatoly Lukianov is now under threat. Roman is now trying to take an optional "academic holiday" – a year away from studies – but if not allowed this he may be forced into military service. InterNICHE will continue to try to negotiate and to convince the rector and others of the opportunities for a win-win solution to the problem.

### 5 Russian law

Russia has no animal welfare law. The Criminal Code addresses cruelty to animals, but in general only regarding companion animals. Endangered species are protected from extinction, but not from cruelty. A progressive draft "Federal Law for the Protection of Animals", which addressed animal experimentation, was rejected by President Vladimir Putin in 2000, having been influenced by teachers and researchers at the Department of Biology at Moscow State University who feared their "freedom" would be curtailed. The parliamentary deputies are still considering the law five years later.

The government department "Fauna", a new department that deals only with animal protection issues, designed a similar draft animal protection law in 2000, just for Moscow. With InterNICHE and VITA petitioning, one draft also addressed animal experimentation and





called for the use of alternatives in education, research and testing. After a series of rejections, however, the latest draft now focuses mostly on stray animals.

In 1978 the first legislative document to address animal experimentation in education, research and testing was issued by the Ministry of Agriculture (and signed by the Minister of Health). The "Rules on carrying out work with the use of laboratory animals" of 31 July 1978 call for limited refinement, addressing euthanasia and calling for sufficient use of anaesthetic for painful or other severe experiments. Between 1978 and 2005, three "Recommendation Letters" have been sent to institutes by the Department of Education at the Ministry of Agriculture, with reference to the 1978 rules and applying to education and postgraduate research only. The Recommendation Letters again call for limited refinement, but also for the abolition of a number of severe experiments. The 2005 Recommendation Letter, described below, superseded all others and has the most power, although along with the 1978 legislative document it carries few sanctions if not followed.

Recommendation Letter number 13032/358, "About modern alternatives to the use of animals in the educational process" of 22 February 2005, states that the 1978 rules about performing experiments should be followed. It lists 21 "inhumane" (their term) experiments that should be abolished – 14 from pathophysiology, 5 from physiology and 2 from pharmacology – which include freezing, heating and electrocution experiments. It forbids the decapitation or destruction of the spinal cord of frogs without the use of anaesthetic, and states that "appropriate termination of an experiment" must be done (the likely interpretation being that the killing of animals after experiments must be done only when they are unconscious). Finally, it recommends that computer-assisted learning should be introduced, and refers to software developed by the State Veterinary Academy in Moscow.

Teachers in many institutes are, however, unaware of the 2005 Recommendation Letter, and those who are may

choose not to follow it. Similar recommendations have been made before, with many experiments continuing, so limited or poor implementation is likely. There are also contradictions in the document, and room for interpretation of the text. For example, "inhumane" is explained as "without anaesthetic", perhaps leaving open the possibility to perform inhumane experiments as long as anaesthetic is used. At least in St Petersburg, one pathophysiology department that the InterNICHE team visited had received and acted on its recommendations, abolishing some of its severe experiments.

## 6 Replacement in St Petersburg

In the old imperial city of St Petersburg in northwestern Russia, the State Academy of Veterinary Medicine evolved from the animal divisions of the tsar's military units. It was the root of veterinary medicine that later grew right across Russia. Today, in the historical buildings, the departments struggle for funds to cover even basic needs. Often the animals, and the needed drugs and equipment, are no longer affordable.

Teachers have begun to use other approaches, including alternatives, to try to maintain the quality of education. In the Department of Pharmacology, through the efforts of teacher Tatyana Novosaduk and head of department Vladimir Sokolov, harmful animal use has already been halved in recent years by the use of basic charts and drawings, and clinical learning opportunities. This flexibility and creativity in terms of approach has been supported by the rector. Conventional teaching has also been combined with holistic approaches that can be useful for veterinary medicine, such as phytotherapy and homoeopathy.

Arriving from Moscow in a train compartment crammed full of second-hand computers, and preparing for the purchase of 15 new systems, the InterNICHE team made the first delivery of hardware to the Department of Pharmacology at the Academy. The donations, sponsored by IAAPEA, are part of a signed agreement that the department will not use any animals for students or for postgraduate research. The introduc-

tion of computers will contribute to a higher quality education for the students, and validates the work of progressive teachers. It also supports a department that already has a good reputation, and the prestige of international collaboration can benefit the whole Academy.

Using freeware and other donated alternatives, one of the remaining practicals on animals in the Department – anaesthesia of the rat – was replaced during the visit itself. The others will follow soon. With approximately 1000 animals originally used per year, the departmental use of animals in education was therefore reduced to zero. The Academy then became the joint first institute in Russia to replace 100% of experiments in a department, and to implement alternatives as part of a broader process of reform.

A meeting with the vice-rector included a discussion about strategies to "centralise" the shift to alternatives through building a network of users who could lobby the Ministry of Agriculture to take action. Others at the Academy, including anatomists and physiologists, also expressed interest in alternatives. Even in pathophysiology, a discipline that almost invariably involves severe experiments, some reduction had already occurred due to student complaints, and videos made at another institute had been introduced. Some practical classes listed in the pathophysiology curriculum, however, involve severe experiments such as heating animals that need not replacement but abolition, due to their lack of pedagogical value and their proximity to sadistic practice. Nevertheless, animals in the Academy suffered worse experiments many years ago, according to campaigner Tatyana Pavlova from the Centre for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (CETA). "It was impossible even to talk about animal protection or alternatives then. Times have really changed."

## 7 Velikie Luki

Fifteen hours by train from St Petersburg is the small city of Velikie Luki. The Agricultural Academy there trains stu-

dents who plan to enter the field of "animal production", such as farming. Although the students become animal technicians rather than qualified veterinarians after graduation from this course, they are nevertheless equipped with some veterinary skills, and particularly in small cities and towns some do practice.

With a clear commitment to the students and teachers from the new rector and pro-rector, the Academy had renovated buildings and provided a good library, computer labs and even small-scale internet access for students. An interest in alternative tools and approaches within the Faculty of Animal Production Technology is another result of the decision to modernise the Academy and its teaching. Such modernisation, combined with international collaboration, may also stand the Academy in good stead in terms of government assessment. This new direction for the Faculty had already brought some significant reduction: the vivarium, for example, is now a veterinary clinic, with the bath formerly used for keeping frogs now empty. Students can instead observe and assist in operations on animal patients, gaining experience in a more realistic environment - one that facilitates skill acquisition in a way that is more appropriate for a career with animals.

The implementation of alternatives has been supported by the opportunity for teachers to trial a number of high quality alternatives from the Russian micro-Loan System, and by donations made by InterNICHE. Feedback on the alternatives was already very positive. One physiology teacher had been using frogs for 40 years but said she would now give that up and replace them with multimedia software. She asserted that the programmes are far better for teaching anatomy and physiology than frog experiments, and include elements that cannot be shown at all on a dead or a living frog. There was also significant interest in clinical skills and surgery simulators at the Faculty, and recognition by all of the need to train the teachers in using the alternatives and the computers to ensure effective implementation.

During the InterNICHE presentation and demonstrations, pro-rector of the Faculty, Farhat Suleimanov, confirmed

the complete cessation of harmful animal use in education from September 2005, including the replacement of up to 500 frogs that were used annually in severe physiology experiments. Along with St Petersburg, the Academy therefore became the joint first Russian institute to confirm in public that it has given up animal experimentation and the dissection of killed animals - in this case in a whole faculty. And it may be possible for the Academy's future Veterinary Department, currently on the drawing board, to be completely free of harmful animal use too, particularly as the advantages of alternatives will be even clearer from many semesters' use.

Reflecting the Faculty's open-minded approach, access to the events had also been provided to biology teachers from local high schools. The donated alternatives will also be made available, thereby helping to prepare high school students both academically and ethically for entering tertiary education.

## 8 Issues of implementation

An interest in alternatives evidences a commitment to students and to the quality of learning. Resistance to alternatives in ex-Soviet countries, therefore, may be partly understood by looking at the nature of the student-teacher relationship and the priorities of the teachers. While these have certainly changed over the last decade, students may be treated as little more than servants in some departments. Those with low marks may still be required to catch frogs in the wild so that they can be used in experiments, a tradition common across Russia. And to enter prestigious universities and to study medicine, veterinary medicine, languages and law, personal connections or bribes are often necessary (except for veterinary students from the regions where there is a shortage of trained professionals).

Change is still very difficult to achieve in many institutes in ex-Soviet countries, but in the words of one Ukrainian campaigner, and as this report demonstrates, "the ice is moving". Often, the progressive views of a new (perhaps younger) head of department, or the replacement

of a corrupt senior official, may be the catalyst. And a growing minority of ordinary teachers are willing to take risks by stepping out of line to call for new approaches, including alternatives. Echoing the implementation of many alternatives in the west, following increased student protest and developments in technology, the impact of perestroika and glasnost meant that the resistance to change softened in at least some areas from the early 1990's on. Before that, according to Valerij Samokhvalov from Ukraine, "you'd have things thrown at you for suggesting something different". And not long before that, you wouldn't suggest anything different at all.

In general, when institutes face major funding challenges - as most in Russia and Ukraine do today - departments significantly reduce animal use. This funding vacuum and the "shortage" of animals provide major opportunities for the establishment of progressive, alternative teaching approaches. Providing resources to teachers to facilitate the implementation of alternatives, and supporting the production of low-cost Russian and Ukrainian language alternatives, is therefore crucially important. The positive impact of this investment in education will in turn limit the possibilities of a return to out-of-date, inhumane methods if funding ever returned.

## 9 Media coverage

One of the features of the outreach was the extensive and positive media coverage. A major InterNICHE press conference on alternatives held in Moscow on 17 October was covered by newspapers, agencies and 4 TV news channels, some reaching all of Russia, Ukraine and other ex-Soviet republics. A similar press conference in St Petersburg was also very successful, with an unprecedented interest from the journalists. At this event, the head of the Department of Pharmacology at St Petersburg State Academy of Veterinary Medicine, Vladimir Sokolov, reported on his decision to end all animal experiments in his department. He also called for a new way of teaching students: no longer the conventional Russian approach of "beating and reward-



ing", but instead evoking real interest. "The more enthusiasm the students show, the better they learn the subject", he said, adding that after the InterNICHE presentation at the Academy students were impatient to use the alternatives and asked when they would be available.

A transformation in the style of reporting about alternatives was apparent in the media. The typical message from the media on the issue – if covered at all – could be paraphrased as "The experiments are cruel and there are alternatives, but what can we do?" Instead, the message of many of the reports was now practical and optimistic with regard to change. The fact that there are now Russian and Ukrainian initiatives to break from the orthodoxy and to try new approaches made the issue newsworthy. The media success also reflected the many resources that have been made available to support replacement, the empowerment of the campaigners, and the strength of the alternatives message. The latter is supported by the clear multiple positive impact of replacement with alternatives – pedagogical, ethical and economic – and the excitement of being able to apply new technology to the learning process.

The impact of media coverage on the general public can be illustrated by the words of the train conductor on the Kyiv-Moscow train, following nationwide TV

coverage of the Bioethics Symposium in Ukraine. Seeing the InterNICHE team practicing intubation on Critical Care Jerry, he announced, "I know that dog – I saw him on TV." Later, Jerry visited Red Square for a photo shoot and some impromptu demonstrations of his skills to the public before leaving Moscow for St Petersburg.

## 10 Empowerment

Another achievement of the outreach was the empowerment of active students and campaigners after InterNICHE facilitated meetings between them and gave opportunities for them to engage in the international activity. This is important because of the relatively small number of campaigners and student conscientious objectors within Russia and Ukraine, and the absence or infrequency of international contacts. A small team from Moscow, including two veterinary student conscientious objectors and a computer expert working on alternatives, travelled to Kharkiv to participate in the InterNICHE Seminar and Training. This also gave the team the opportunity to meet progressive Ukrainian teachers such as Mykola Makarchuk and Valerij Samokhvalov, and to network with others in the field. InterNICHE then sup-

ported a Ukrainian student, Dmitry Leporsky, to travel to Moscow to meet others who are conscientiously objecting, or researching bioethics and animal rights. He was also invited to contribute at several InterNICHE presentations by giving demonstrations of alternatives, and by describing the progress of the draft animal protection law in Ukraine. Participating with responsibilities such as these can build an individual's capacity and lift his status, thereby supporting more effective action for humane education.

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Abbreviations: CETA (Centre for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), FFVFF (Fund for Animal-Free Research), IAAPEA (International Association Against Painful Experiments on Animals), InterNICHE (International Network for Humane Education), RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), WSPA (World Society for the Protection of Animals)