

Global Russians: Transnational Russophone Networks in the UK

PI: Professor Lara Ryazanova-Clarke, the University of Edinburgh

Stage 1 Report: Seed-corn funding (1 October 2016 – 31 December 2017)

The **objectives** of the seed-corn funding stage of the above four-year project were:

- 1) to identify and compile a register of Russian cultural entrepreneurs and institutions in the UK;
- 2) to build relationships with the field;
- 3) to begin data collection through fieldwork in a sample of Russian community's cultural sites in London;
- 4) to develop an international network of scholars around the project in order to establish a wider context for the study of Russophone transnational cultural activity in the UK and its narration;
- 5) to organise an international workshop on the topic.

1. Fieldwork (objectives 1-3)

Four research trips to London lasting between one week and 10 days each were made in February, June, August and October 2017. London was the focus of interest in the first year of the project. This is explained by the fact that it has the highest number of Russian speakers and is home to the most vibrant Russian-speaking cultural activities and networks. During this first year, we identified and engaged with over 50 organisations and associated networks and conducted 59 individual interviews with cultural community or enterprise leaders. The domains of Russophone cultural activity covered by the fieldwork include: media organisations (from the BBC Russian Service and the Calvert Journal to UK diaspora newspapers and Russian media correspondents in London); a wide variety of organisations and individuals engaged in promoting Russian culture and the arts in the UK; Russian supplementary schools and child-focused networks, events and organisations; ethno-cultural gastronomic enterprises and events; Russian business networks; political organisations (those of the Russian state and those of opposition groups).

We also carried out participant observation at a selection of Russophone public events, recording some of the discourses at these events. These included: the Russian New Year Ball on 13 Jan 2017 at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in Edinburgh; the Maslenitsa celebrations in Cadogan Hall on 24 Feb 2017; the Sunday events at the Cathedral of the Dormition of the Mother of God on 6 Aug 2017; and the Russian gastronomic and cultural experience event at the Mari Vanna restaurant on 5 Aug 2017 and Russian-speaking guided tours around London on 23 October 2017.

The total amount of fieldwork material collected to date amounts to around 64 hours of recordings (both interviews and events recordings). 7 hours of interviews have been transcribed thus far. An online database of Russophone cultural networks in the UK has been made available on the Dashkova Centre project webpages (<https://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/dashkova/research-resources/about>). Aside from data gathering, we have established fruitful contacts in the field that will inform work proposed for Phase 2, especially KE events. The fieldwork has also helped us develop impact pathways, which are likely to focus on work with Russophone media in the UK.

2. Research Assistant

The post of part-time (0.4) Research Assistant was advertised and filled. Dr Yulia Lukyanova was initially appointed for 6 months, from 29 March to 30 September 2017, but her contract has been extended for a further 3 months till 31 December 2017 to allow her to complete further necessary fieldwork and transcription (NB we were not able to appoint an RA earlier than March since the agreement with Manchester took longer than expected to complete).

As RA, Dr Lukyanova carried out the following duties:

- identification of Russophone networks and liaising with the potential fieldwork participants
- assistance in conducting fieldwork interviews in London and gathering recorded material
- transcription of the recorded material and assistance in primary data analysis
- assistance in the organisation of the international workshop 'Londongrad and Londongradians: Identities, Imaginaries, and Cultural Practices'
- development and maintenance of a project web page

3. International Workshop (objectives 4-5)

The workshop titled 'Londongrad and Londongradians: Identities, Imaginaries, and Cultural Practices' was organised and held at the University of Edinburgh on 16-17 June 2017. This event was vital to the development of a scholarly network around the project and for KE with stakeholders.

On the one hand, the theme of the workshop addressed the core research questions of the project, focusing on the notion of the 'Global Russian' and the identities and imaginaries of the Russophone community in the UK. On the other hand, the workshop complemented the anthropological discursive approach taken in the fieldwork, tackling the issue of the imagined Russophone communities from wider and more interdisciplinary perspectives.

A particular value of this event was that it brought together and created a productive dialogue between academics who provided a critical examination of the way in which the Russian community in the UK is imagined, and representatives of the creative professions engaged in the production of cultural organisations, events and artefacts that feed these imaginaries.

The workshop was introduced by Professors Andy Byford and Lara Ryazanova-Clarke who gave an overview of the Transnational Strand of the OWRI programme and the 'Global Russians' project. The project's focus on the 'here and now' of the Global Russians was expanded in time and space in the papers by Ilya Vinitzky (Princeton University) and Robert Saunders (Farmingdale College). Professor Vinitzky examined the legacy of Alexis Eustaphie, a Don Cossack and chorister at the Russian Embassy's church in London, who lived in London in the early 1800s and who, as a writer, formed a distinctive image of Russia for the English audiences of the time. Professor Saunders made both historical and geographical comparisons looking at Russian transformations of major world cities through their presence as exiles. Anna Pechurina (Leeds Beckett University) offered a sociological perspective on identity marking in the homemaking and interior design of the Russophone community in the UK.

A substantial section of the workshop contributions concentrated around the visual representation of 'Londongrad', including the prominent eponymous 2015 television serial in 28 episodes on the life of the Russian diaspora in London. Here, Adrian Wanner (Pennsylvania State University) contextualised the script of *Londongrad* within the oeuvre of Mikhail Idov, who, having been born in Latvia, educated in the US and writing in both Russian and English, is himself an outstanding example of a 'Global Russian'.

Lara Ryazanova-Clarke (Edinburgh University) and Stephen Hutchings (Manchester University) examined the representation of the Russian-speaking community in this TV series, showing how contemporary London became a site of the construction of Russian-ness and Russian émigré-ness. Ryazanova-Clarke juxtaposed *Londongrad* to Andrei Ostalsky's novel *Angliiskaia Taina* (The English Mystery) to demonstrate how characters in the series and the novel deploy their language to construct solidarities and social differences and to self-identify. Hutchings compared *Londongrad* with another 2015 Russian television film called *Dusha shpiona* (Soul of a Spy) and a series of documentary films made by the talk-show hosts, Vladimir Pozner and Ivan Urgant, called 'England in General and in Particular'. He argued that images of Londongrad and Russia in these productions create a system of mirrors producing multiple reflections of each other.

Victoria Merzliakova (Russian Humanitarian University) presented an analysis of the ways Russian media represented life of Russian emigrants in Britain and Vlad Strukov (Leeds University) focused on the documentary *Meet the Russians* (UK; Fox International Channels, 2013) as a factor of Russian hyper-visibility and an example of geo-political television.

The programme of the workshop included a rich and versatile non-academic part:

- a) a roundtable on 'The Role of British Cultural Institutions and Creative Professions in Shaping and Interpreting Londongrad'. The roundtable focused on 'media' and 'childhood' as its sub-themes and involved the following speakers: Roman Borisovich of *From Russia with Cash*, Alexander Kan of the BBC Russian Service, Karina Karmenian of the Russian Children World organisation in London, and Anna Edovina and Pavel Iosad from the PTA of the Russian School in Edinburgh.
- b) a reading of the play 'Tate Modern' by Iulia Savikovskaia, an Anthropology PhD student in Oxford and a playwright. The topics of her research and art overlap and speak to each other, both of them being concerned with Russians in the UK and their life stories. The reading was undertaken by Edinburgh-based Russian-speaking actors: Ksenia Ivleva, Wiera Szczurewska, Ivan Rybtsov and Stanislav Rybtsov. Savikovskaya gave a presentation of her play, which raised a lively discussion including the questions of the acting techniques and textual means of representation of longing, separation, loneliness, clash of cultures and the sense of home and homelessness, depicted in this beautiful and complex work.

The workshop also included two evening keynote events with stakeholders from the cultural professions:

- a) The BBC Russian Service Culture correspondent Alexander Kan gave a lecture entitled 'Russian Cultural Presence in London: A Snowballing Effect', in which he shared his vision of the Russian diaspora in Britain and its development over the last twenty years.
- b) The second evening event 'Russian Anti-Corruption Campaign in the UK and its Representations: A Discussion' was given by Roman Borisovich, the lead actor of the Channel 4 film *From Russia With Cash* and campaigner against the influence exerted by Russian corrupt money in the UK. The film started a vigorous political campaign which resulted in the adoption of the Criminal Finances Bill by the British Parliament. Borisovich discussed his techniques of playing a Russian corrupt official Boris and the role of art in changing the perceptions of Russian corruption in the UK.

While the whole workshop was open to the public, the evening events were publicised separately and widely to the Scottish community interested in Russia, especially the subscribers to the Princess Dashkova Russian Centre events mailing list, which includes representatives from the Scottish Russian-speaking community. We are very pleased that over 100 people attended Alexander Kan's lecture and 45 took part in the discussion with Roman Borisovich.

4. Research Outputs (by Prof Lara Ryazanova-Clarke, unless otherwise indicated)

a) Keynote lectures:

- keynote lecture 'Sociolinguistics of globalisation and the diasporisation of Russian' given at an international workshop 'Sociolinguistic and cultural practices among Russian-speaking diasporas', 14-15 December 2016, University of Jyväskylä, Finland.
- keynote lecture 'Cross-cultural understanding and misunderstandings: Narratives of Russian tourism in Scotland' given at the international seminar in honour of Dean Arto Mustajoki, Professor of Russian Language and Literature, entitled 'Understanding', 16 December 2016, Helsinki University, Finland.
- keynote lecture 'I am a European person but have Russian values', given at the international conference 'Perceptions of Russia in Contemporary World', a capstone of the ERA-NetRUSPlus international research programme (2016-17), University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, 27-29 November 2017. An article about the conference appeared in *Karjalainen*, 29 November 2017.

b) Conference papers:

- 'Znai nashikh! The global Russian identity and the imaginary of Londongrad', a paper at the conference entitled 'The Languages of Utopia: Geopolitical Identity-Making in Post-Soviet Russian Speculative Fiction', 23-24 March 2017, Uppsala University, Sweden.
- 'Londongrad as a linguistic imaginary: Russian migrants in the UK in the work of Mikhail Idov and Andrei Ostalsky', paper presented at: a) conference 'Politics of Multilingualism: Possibilities and challenges', 22-24 May 2017, Amsterdam University, Netherlands; b) workshop 'Londongrad and Londongradians: Identities, Imaginaries, and Cultural Practices' (16-17 June 2017, The University of Edinburgh).
- 'Знай наших: The Russophone World in the UK', Transnational Russian Studies conference, Durham University, 14-16 September 2017.
- 'Methodology of interview-taking and transcribing in research on Russophone communities in the UK', OWRI *Cross Language Dynamics: Reshaping Community Work* in Progress Research Meeting, Durham, 17-18 October 2017. **Presentation by Dr Yulia Lukyanova.** Prof Ryazanova-Clarke was also at the meeting discussing papers and providing advice to the network of the consortium's junior researchers.

c) Publications:

- 'The globe-trotting Russian in Scotland: Discourses of Russian cultural tourism', accepted for publication in Kevin Platt (ed.), *Global Russian Cultures*, the University of Wisconsin Press, 2018.
- 'Russophonism of the contemporary Russian diaspora', for Andy Byford, Connor Doak and Stephen Hutchings (eds.), *Transnational Russian Studies*, to be published by Liverpool University Press. (First draft submitted and reviewed; second draft due in March 2018).
- 'Londongrad as a linguistic imaginary: Russian migrants in the UK in the work of Mikhail Idov and Andrei Ostalsky', chapter accepted for the volume edited by Mikhail Suslov and Per Arne Bodin, *The Post-Soviet Politics of Utopia: Language, Fiction and Fantasy in Modern Russia*, I.B. Tauris. (It will also form a chapter of a monograph that is envisaged as a key output of the project).

5. KE, Outreach and Impact

- The project's web presence has been developed:
 - a) as part of the Durham University OWRI Transnational Strand site, and
 - b) on the Princess Dashkova Russian Centre at the University of Edinburgh (<http://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/dashkova/research-resources/about>)
- Apart from incorporating public events in the 'Londongrad' workshop, all its papers and public lectures have been recorded and made available from the Project website at <http://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/dashkova/media/podcasts/conferences/londongrad-and-londongradians>
- All events related to the project have been advertised on the Princess Dashkova Russian Centre Facebook page.
- Information about Prof Lara Ryazanova-Clarke's invited lectures at Jyvaskyla and Helsinki Universities have been publicised across Finland, and on the main page of Helsinki University. In Helsinki, around 200 people attended the event.
- Rossotrudnichestvo have published an article about the project: <http://gbr.rs.gov.ru/ru/news/15937>.