

“I am not a teacher, but an awakener.”

— Robert Frost



Eaching is one of the core missions of the university, alongside research, and in this issue of The HSE Look we would like to address both. It's no secret that internationalisation of education is multifaceted, and with the help of a study conducted by HSE Centre for Institutional Research we look at how faculty members and students perceive the benefits and challenges of teaching and learning in a foreign language in classes with a diverse background of students. However, classroom lectures and seminars are not the only way to teach and learn – and several of HSE postdocs share their experience with less formal learning with students, as well as tell about their research interests. Last but not least, in this issue's column 'Discovering HSE and Russia' Mahama Tawat invites the readers on a journey through the world of Afro-Latin dancing in Moscow.

Director of Internationalisation  
Yulia Grinkevich

## International Classroom at HSE: Challenges and Benefits

Nowadays at HSE courses both in English and Russian are likely to be taught to a diverse class of students with different linguistic, educational and cultural background. Since more than 80% of courses had at least 1 international student attend them, the majority of students and teachers experience what benefits and challenges the situation brings.

Last autumn HSE's project 'Teach for HSE', which organises workshops for new and experienced teachers alike, as well as holds lively discussions about various professional issues related to learning

and teaching, commissioned an internal study by HSE Centre for Institutional Research (CIR).

The study aimed to see a broad picture of how faculty members and students perceive benefits and challenges of teaching and studying in an international classroom. In November 2018 **Ivan Gruzdev**, Director for Internal Monitoring and Student Academic Development, and **Marina Kudryavtseva**, deputy director of the Centre for Institutional Research, wrote an overview of the study for the university bulletin *Okna Rosta*.

*The study consisted of 27 interviews, and it raised a number of issues worth to be discussed and researched further. The HSE Look is grateful for the chance to use the material from Okna Rosta, from the peer-to-peer discussions “Teaching at HSE” among international faculty members, as well as for the access to the extended description of the study results provided by colleagues from CIR.*

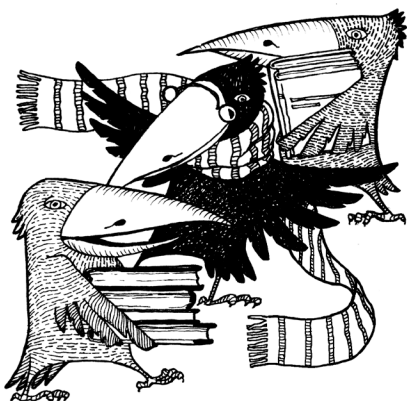
## Internationalising the curriculum is more than just teaching in English

If a course was originally designed to be delivered to Russian students, with all the assumptions and educated guesses the teacher has about their background, simply (even if brilliantly) translating it into English might not work as well on a mixed group. Of course, not all study areas are context-sensitive, and some subjects are easily converted into another language (e.g. mathematics), while others require a more

subtle approach. The changes might cover many aspects, from recommended literature, to databases or cases for analysis, to historic or cultural examples the teacher alludes to.

Some of the international faculty members reported having similar challenges with the context-sensitive courses they used to teach in another country, which also invoked a lot of the shared cultural knowledge.

Adapting the course might prove to be a challenging task because it's difficult to re-design it without knowing first all the students' background and finding something that would help everyone understand the course material better. Moreover, some teachers noted that such an adaptation of the course feels to them like oversimplification because of the abundance of the sources they have previously prepared and which are impossible to translate due to the sheer volume of pages.



## The language barrier: the informal version

Some of HSE's international students are studying in Russian, but for those who take courses and programmes in English HSE has done a lot of work in making the university services and environment accessible in English to international students ([istudents.hse.ru](http://istudents.hse.ru)) and faculty ([ifaculty.hse.ru](http://ifaculty.hse.ru)), including guidelines on standard procedures, translation of the regulations, information about social and scientific events. However, when it comes to informal communication regarding studies, language barrier can still pose a problem. The interviewees listed several typical situations when language and social media habits contribute to keeping English-speaking and Russian-speaking students apart even when they take the same course. For instance, when information about the course assignments or additional materials were sent first in Russian to an informal group email, when communication about group projects is informally carried out in Vkontakte which is rarely used by international students, etc.

## Different expectations and communication cultures

While one of the great benefits of international mobility and exposure is a chance to improve intercultural communication skills, sometimes neither students nor faculty members are fully ready for the practical implications of what it means for the studies. Many of the ways in which we communicate in a professional or educational setting are heavily influenced by culture, and not necessarily the culture of the country per se, as much as of previous education institutions as well. What is polite, what is reasonable to expect regarding availability of professors for additional meetings, which forms of communications are considered appropriate to use

(meeting in person, email, messengers, etc.), how fast you will get an answer - all of these things can easily become a source of stress for students and teachers, especially when their expectations mismatch and are not clearly articulated.

And while it's always helpful to communicate 'ground rules' for communication in class, it might be particularly necessary for any subjects involving group work or debate. The more diverse a group of students, the more likely some of the discussed contentious issues or an ongoing political conflict would be a very personal experience to the student rather than just a point to prove in a debate, and the teachers should be mindful of this as well as help mediate the resulting conflicts if they do arise in the group. All in all, interviewees

noted that HSE has quite a cosmopolitan environment and that international students feel welcome here. At the same time, teachers noted that they would like to gain additional experience in working with diverse classrooms so as to help them handle the challenges and create a more effective and creative space for learning.

*If you are interested in more information and discussions about teaching at HSE, it might be interesting to explore the events and workshops organised by “Teach for HSE” project., as well as join one of the peer-to-peer seminars on teaching where international faculty members share their experiences. For more information see [foi.hse.ru/en/teach4hse](http://foi.hse.ru/en/teach4hse) and [ifaculty.hse.ru](http://ifaculty.hse.ru).*



## Asking Questions Together with Students

International faculty at HSE are involved not only in research and teaching, but some also combine it with active participation in the city’s public discussion spaces. *The HSE Look* took an interview with **Jan Surman**, Research Fellow at Poletayev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities (IGITI), about his research and Cultures of Critique project.

### What kind of research do you do?

I am a historian of science, my first education was in sociology, and then I turned to sociology of developing countries, branched off into sociology of science, and then further into history.

I did a project on universities and am close to finalizing a research project on the history of scientific languages, i.e. languages and terminology used in scientific communication, in Central Europe, a comparative study of Czech, Polish and Ukrainian. I applied to HSE with the project about the history of Ukrainian science in 1920s and 1930s. I look at the transfer of knowledge between the centers of Ukrainian science in Soviet Union, Free Ukrainian University in Prague and the institute which emigrated to Warsaw, as well as a secret Ukrainian university that was functioning in Lviv at the time. Over the course of the project I have become increasingly interested in the inner interactions among scientists, as well as their connections with other intellectuals and artists (e.g. in cinema, theatre, etc.).

For example, during my time here in Russia I did some research into *Dvorets Tekhniki*, which is one of the large Utopian projects of the 1930s and was meant to become the world’s largest center for promoting the latest advancements and innovations in technical science and their application – of course in the Marxist-Leninist version. For my research project, this is about connection of science and architecture.

Right now I am working on the question of how to look at the science in 1920s and 1930s in the context of the broader discourses in the Soviet Union and the political *chistki* (repressions). It is also very important to look at different strategies of how scholars coped with it: clearly it was a brutal time, but also complex, as scholars often used politics for their own aims, so we clearly have no simple situation “good scholars – bad politicians” as it is often depicted.

I discovered new interesting things in source materials that I studied, as well as found new ways to look at it through the prism of the literature about the topic that was written here in Russia.

### You are involved in a project called “Cultures of Critique”, could you tell more about that?

“Cultures of Critique” is an interdisciplinary research project which I co-created together with Daria Petushkova (PhD student of the School of History at HSE) and Armen Aramyan (one of the editors of Journal DOXA and a student of Political Philosophy at Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences), in partnership with IGITI and Journal DOXA (*online journal created by students from HSE Faculty of Humanities and other universities; it is devoted to a critical outlook on university and academic life*). We have invited the students to explore and discuss with us different theories and practices of critique in various spheres, not only reading



classical philosophical texts through but also engaging with contemporary artworks, movies of popular literature.

This project brings me back to being a sociologist, and in a way it is a reaction to the situation I encountered in Moscow, both at HSE and outside HSE. Reflecting on my role as an international scholar in Moscow, both on my own and while talking to my colleagues, I understand that I am invited primarily to do research and publications in Scopus and WoS journals, but I believe that the role of international scholars cannot end there and we can contribute more, and learn even more as well.

So with Armen and Daria we wanted to do something that is relevant not only for scholars and reach beyond the academia, but without the typical scholarly habitus of “we are scholars and know better how you should do things.” The format of our meetings is not set in stone and keeps evolving, we go into new places and meet new people from outside of our circle. The basic idea was to explore what critique/criticism/critic (importantly, in Russian it is one word) means in contemporary societies, and in Russia in particular, which different meanings and connotations it has.

We started meeting people whom we wanted to invite, and they had their own ideas on what critique is, influenced by different disciplines, but also artistic or journalistic uses. We devised a broad set of issues based on these discussions, and keep adding to it. For instance, in December we were meeting with independent journalists from *moloko plus* (*independent almanac*) and OVD-info (*independent media project devoted to human right and monitoring of political prosecution*), as well as held an event on academia and critique of academia, so it is a very diverse and thick programme. In January, we started with meetings already proposed and organized by students: on contemporary discussions about socrealism, urban feminism and Russian discourses of provincialisation.

From the start of the project, the idea was not to make it a vertical knowledge sharing, e.g. professor possesses all the knowledge, comes into the classroom and tell the students what they need to know. Our approach was to ask the students firsthand what is their background and what are their expectations and needs. Originally we devised this research project with the students of history and philosophy in mind, and turned out we had more participants from design, media studies, and journalism, so we had to rethink things very fast.

We really wanted to create a bottom-up project, an exploration space where we could ask the questions together with students and search for answers together. And it works better than we imagined.

## How many meetings of “Cultures of Critique” have you already had?

Basically every week since mid-September. We also had several extra meetings in addition to the preliminary plan. For one of the extras we invited colleagues from the journal *moloko plus* to Rodchenko School to do a performance together with a German artist Wanda Koller, who had an arts residence in Moscow at the time and who was eager to explore issues we were also interested in.

As I said, this project brought me back to being a sociologist, and I do not want to say it is a sociological study, but I would say it is an exploration, with the sociologist being thrown in the middle of the things he does not understand and wants to understand. For me, this project is a way to explore Russia: thanks to it I work closely with colleagues from the different branches of the academia but also artists, both from and from beyond Moscow.

This creates also many interesting synergies for the students and they can meet interesting people from outside HSE. Other colleagues who also come to the project events really cherish the atmosphere we create: we do not want to have frontal discussions, so we have students preparing in groups formulating the questions they can ask or how to challenge the speakers etc.

One of this project's great byproducts is that it connects people who most likely otherwise would not have met. We can say what we want, but academia is a quite closed space, hierarchically structured on the top. And Moscow is Moscow, with not very well developed contacts between different universities and institutions.

We intend to break the circle a bit and contest the hierarchies. It was conceived from the start that the project will take place not only at HSE but also will partner with other cultural spaces in the city. Among other things, we had some events at The Center for Creative Industries Fabrika (*Fabrika CCI*), gallery Art-Kremlin, plan to go to for one meeting to one of well-known Moscow theaters, and in June participants of the project will hold a small exhibition at *Fabrika CCI* to present the final results of the project and their reflections.

## What other results of the project do you envision?

Some of our meetings are available on YouTube, and we also plan to publish some of the texts produced by students on Facebook and at syg.ma. Much depends on students and their initiative – for instance the meeting on socrealism will result in an article on colta.ru. Together with the exhibition we

also plan to publish a small zine. As for the scholarly results, we are planning to write an article on the concept of critique, how it is used differently in Russian and English academic and professional circles, and on how students and professionals use it. We also look at what problems this concept poses for translations, for example, how because of this Foucault is understood differently in French and in Russian.

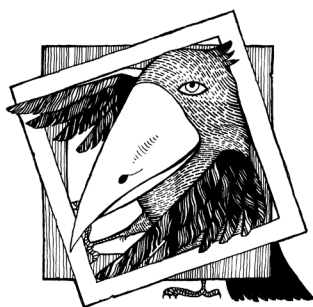
It should be an experimental article in “Contributions to the History of Concepts,” a journal I have been involved in for some years already.

### On this project as an experiment and learning experience

Working on this project, but also talking to colleagues in IGITI and from DOXA, student project on critique of the academia, has brought me to a different understanding of

what a university is and how it works, as well as a critical look at it. In autumn, I took part in two conferences on academic freedom and freedom of science, and I realized how my reflexivity about several of the key concepts I am using changed and has become reified.

A more critical and reflexive look at how university functions in different contexts certainly has a positive impact on my research. And this story goes further, as we recently learned that HSE granted the request for financing a summer school I submitted together with Armen, which will be concerned with debates on contemporary crises of academia in Russia and abroad. Being in Moscow, I can develop a more reified and deeper insight into the Western academia as well as the Russian one – and for me as a historian of science it is a very crucial issue. And of course I learn a lot about the society surrounding me, which I consider actually more rewarding than academic advancement.



## Property and Power

**Vera Smirnova**, Research Fellow at the Institute of Regional Studies and Urban Planning, Faculty of Urban and Regional Development, shared her research interests and experience of building strong connections at HSE with The HSE Look readers.

### What are your research interests?

To put it shortly, my research is about land, capital and power: how land is acquired by different actors, such as the state, businesses, corporations, or local citizens, and how this acquisition is legitimized.

My dissertation was focused on land acquisition and the origin of private land ownership in Russia during the late imperial period, including analysis of the ideas and narratives around the topic as well as the legal frameworks and practices. I worked in the archives and used critical discourse analysis to explore how the transformation in land ownership was perceived by different government officials, social groups, landless citizens, and peasant proprietors, what the land meant to them, and how they conceived of its ownership and the resulting consequences. Part of the analysis was to see how this discourse contrasted with and borrowed from the Western political thought about private property, social contract, and individual freedom, and how it shaped specifically Russian understanding of land ownership. My

first degree was in architecture in Vologda State Technical University and I was very interested in the topic of what makes the space ‘private’ or ‘public’. When I received Fulbright Graduate Fellowship and moved to the USA for my Master of Science in Architecture program, it finally clicked for me that what was standing behind the private/public space issue was directly related to who holds the right to land and it gave a new direction to my research in urban political geography. You could say it was a blend of architecture, urban planning, and political science that brought me to work on my PhD in a multidisciplinary program ‘Planning, Governance, and Globalization’ at Virginia Tech (USA). As a research fellow at HSE I am continuing this topic but in the context of Post-Soviet period: What is our current understanding of land ownership and private property? How does it relate to the ideas and discussions in the late Russian empire which tried to introduce private ownership of land in 1906? Has the Land Code of 2002 about land privatization really introduced ‘private ownership’ in a common sense or are we living in some kind of a hybrid model? I am planning to

interview some of the experts who provided policy advice for this legislation and its implementation, and, while it's more difficult and risky, I would also like to get interviews from people who participated in land appropriation, for example, real estate developers or large agricultural companies. There's also a lot to be studied in terms of how the profit from land privatization circulate between urban and non-urban spaces, but this is a question for further research.

### How does your stay at HSE help to develop your research?

I am very lucky to work at the Institute of Regional Studies and Urban Planning, as it has a strong analytical profile in the policy issues related to my research. This gives me access to many interviewees among experts and policymakers whom I would have a hard time reaching on my own, and moreover, it raises my credibility to work in Russia in general. A first article on the theoretical part of my research was just published in a special issue of one European journal in geography and I am now starting to work on the interviews.

It's very important to formulate questions well, so as to gather the necessary information but also to be tactful and neutral as a researcher – and it's quite a challenge to be neutral on this topic, knowing how many people have lost their land given what we know from our history and own experience.

### What about social life at HSE?

Thanks to the events organized by International Faculty Support Unit in September and throughout the autumn I've met a lot of other young postdocs and tenure-track professors, and we meet quite often and regularly as a group. It's nice to get such a social circle when you are new at the university, but it's also been a very enriching experience in terms of discussing research. Everyone has unique expertise and research topics, and since most of them are interdisciplinary,

we click well together and share ideas, see the limitations of our research, and discuss how best to take them into account etc.

History, political economy, urban studies, sociology – all of our previous knowledge and current research combined, especially in a relaxed and friendly environment, provides good ground for discussions and, at least for me personally, is highly motivating. Being an academic researcher and belonging to such a lively community is very important to me, it's a vital part of my identity. My Institute also very actively organizes and participates in roundtables and workshops, so there are many opportunities for professional discussion and networking in my field, starting from discussing issues about tactical urbanism, smart urbanism, and participatory planning, to policy recommendations in the sphere of social housing.

### Do you work with students in some way?

Faculty of Urban and Regional Development at HSE has launched several long-term 'workshops' for students, dedicated to a wide range of research areas in the field of urbanism under the supervision of researchers.

It's an extracurricular activity and the results can be quite varied – a publication in a journal, or online, or a presentation at a conference or another type of event. It's a way to create an informal learning space, based on the collective research. Me and my colleague Daniela Zupan also offered a topic for such a workshop titled 'City in the Periphery', to explore how spatial and power relations are perceived outside the capital, how the discourses of various urban planning innovations are circulated or implemented, how small cities try to keep their identity or create it anew. We have 13 students from the MA programme with whom we are meeting every two weeks and going to present our work at the April Conference this year - we'll see how it goes!



## Studying Foreign Policy Discourse

*The HSE Look* continues a series of interviews with international postdocs about their research. For the February issue we've talked with **Iain Ferguson**, Research Fellow at the International Laboratory on World Order Studies and the New Regionalism, Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs, about his work and exploration of Moscow and other cities.



## What are your research interests?

I've been at HSE for 3 years now, but it's my first year as a postdoc in Moscow. I work in International Relations. More specifically, I focus on Russia's relations with the West from the end of the Cold War to the recent past. In theory terms, I am interested in how to interpret these relations, which trajectories the relationship between Russia and Western actors, particularly the European Union, follows. But I like to keep a broad outlook.

I am working on a few papers at the moment. One is a discourse analysis of what Russian intellectuals and policy-makers have to say about Russia as a civilization. I'm working with a colleague from HSE on this paper.

He is helping me to collect and interpret the statements from official sources, interviews in newspapers and other media, and key texts by leading Russian intellectuals. The next thing I'm planning to do is a two-part analysis of the changing Russian visions for regional security order.

I am particularly interested in tracing out how these visions of security have evolved from the end of the Cold War and how and why Russia has switched from a Western-focus to an Eastern-focus in its search for regional order since the beginning of the 2014 crisis between Russia and Ukraine.

## How does your stay at HSE help to develop your research?

It's a great honor to be a part of my laboratory and faculty at HSE. My department is unquestionably – at least to me – the best in Russia in my field of International Relations. Many of my colleagues are actively engaged in providing policy analysis and policy advice regarding Russia's foreign policy. I am learning a lot from having informal access to them as a research fellow.

My lab holds a regular research seminar, and it's a great place to present your work and get insightful feedback. I presented there in December, when one of the top professors in international relations in the world, Prof T.V. Paul of McGill University was in attendance. He gave me some really good advice on how I could turn my paper into a top Q1 article. He even said he thought there could be a book in it!

## What are your plans for this year as a postdoc?

Apart from the articles I mentioned, I'm teaching two courses for the double degree programme BA in International Relations (HSE University and the University College of London) this year: Introduction to International relations for

2nd year students and The Theory of International Relations for 3rd year students. I'm also representing the lab at two international conferences in London and in Toronto.

And I have also managed to get some funding from Sweden for organising a conference on 15-16 of May, here in Moscow. That event on 'Civilizations and international order' is being co-sponsored by Centre for Baltic and East European Studies at Sodertorn University, in Stockholm, and my International Laboratory. I am very excited about this. The confirmation of dates and funding just came through this week.

## What would you suggest for the newcomers?

It's quite challenging to be a newly-arrived international researcher under any circumstances, and in Moscow it is exacerbated if you do not know Russian (very well). I'm quite impressed by the variety of activities and support aimed at helping new international faculty to become a part of the university life, even though I rarely attend them myself now. Personally, I find it very important to make a good effort in learning Russian, and I would strongly encourage all newcomers to give it a go.

Even though we teach and do research in English, without knowing the language it's hard to make a real connection with the place and the people. I, for one, do not want to be just passing through.

I've experienced a bit of a closed culture in Russia, in the sense that people have quite well-established social networks, and it's hard to get into them, so you have to take initiative. However, once you establish a friendship, it's meaningful and not superficial, while the opposite can sometimes be the case in the West.

## What other cities in Russia have you visited?

I've been to Kazan, and I can highly recommend it to any international or Russian colleague.

I also visited Murmansk. It was a bit of a crazy winter expedition to Russian Arctic, but I'm glad to say I survived -40 degrees. Speaking of warmer destinations, I've been to Kislovodsk, Vladikavkaz and Mineralnye Vody in the South, and Kaliningrad in the West.

What struck me as a surprise in my travels is that Russia has so little difference in pronunciation from place to place - coming from UK, where the variation in accents can be extreme, this commonality across such a huge country is striking.

# Discovering HSE and Russia

In addition to interviews with international faculty, *The HSE Look* has launched a column about their life in Russia, what they discover in different cities, and interesting venues at HSE and beyond. If you have an interesting experience to share, please contact us at [ifaculty.support@hse.ru](mailto:ifaculty.support@hse.ru). In this issue, we present a column by **Mahama Tawat**, Assistant Professor at the School of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences. His research interests include migration policy, social policy, and public management reforms.

## Moscow's hot tropical rhythms

Moscow is known for its urban sprawl, expansive parks, picturesque metro and cold winters. What it is less known for is its hot dancing scene for tropical rhythms such as salsa. As a music aficionado, this aspect of the city's life has come most to my attention. There are dozens of clubs with names such as "Liberty", "Malencon", "Lima", "Casa Agave", "Pancho Villa". You can name it.

Any one of them is open every day of the week. Some even until the early hours of the morning. It makes it possible to go out and dance all the seven days of the week. During the summer, open air events gatherings with hundreds if not thousands of dancers in parks such as Gorki and Zaryadye add to the list. There are even more Afro-Latin dancing schools. Just a couple of years ago, there used to be a few well-known names. Now, it seems that each district of the capital has two or more dancing schools and new ones enter continuously the market. It starts even to feel like an over-supply. Why is it so?

A reason one can think of, is Russia's long political connection with Cuba. Indeed, there has been a steady stream of Cuban artists coming here since the Castro Revolution.

It may be that this prolonged contact has made many Russians sensitive to salsa. Moreover, after the end of the Soviet system and the advent of capitalism, young Cubans who come to Moscow and work as dance teachers can readily earn more money than in Havana. But a bigger and more compelling reason for me seems to be the existence of a large layer of the population that is open to foreign cultures.

I base my judgement on the warm embrace that two other rhythms outside Cuba have received: bachata and kizomba. The former comes from the Dominican Republic and the

latter from Angola. They are relatively recent in their global outreach but are now played and taught alongside salsa at every turn.

They are exclusive bachata and kizomba festivals, some of which last for several days and gather thousands of participants coming from all the corners of Russia. Kizzafro, one of the most popular festivals, has been held every spring in Moscow for six consecutive years. Furthermore, a similar trend has developed in other cities across Russia. There is, for example, the Hot Winter in Siberia Festival in Krasnoyarsk which takes place in the first week of January and is often attended by some of the big names in the world of salsa/bachata/kizomba music. It is common to see at these events a Russian flag flowing next to those of Cuba, Angola, the Dominican Republic or even Cape Verde, another African country where kizomba has evolved.

This speaks of a patriotism which is divorced from nationalism. At least, not in the sense of the word that encourages people to undervalue other nationalities, hate those who look differently, have a different religion, or think differently. There is no doubt that these Moscovites love their city and their country. Yet they are able to open their hands to foreign people and cultures.

## XX April Conference: Join the Discussions

Whether you have been confirmed as a speaker at the April International Conference on Economic and Social Development on April 9-12, or if you are planning to attend without a presentation, it's high time to finish the preparations and submit the full text of the paper (by March 11) or register (by March 25 – for non-speakers).

In addition to the already traditional conference sessions on economic policy, financial institutions, regional and urban development, education and social policy, this year the programme covers a wider range of issues, including Arctic research, network analysis, cultural processes, social and economic history, and sports studies.

In addition to the Conference sessions, a great variety of associated events are organised at HSE which allow the participants to continue lively discussions of research and policy in greater depth. See the full list of workshops and symposia at [conf.hse.ru/en/2019](http://conf.hse.ru/en/2019) and do not forget to apply and register if you would like to participate.