

This paper is taken from



*Creating Communities: Local, National and Global
Selected papers from the fourteenth Conference of the
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe
Academic Network*

London: CiCe 2012

**edited by Peter Cunningham and Nathan Fretwell, published in London by CiCe,
ISBN 978-1-907675-19-5**

Without explicit authorisation from CiCe (the copyright holder)

- only a single copy may be made by any individual or institution for the purposes of private study only
- multiple copies may be made only by
 - members of the CiCe Thematic Network Project or CiCe Association, or
 - a official of the European Commission
 - a member of the European parliament

If this paper is quoted or referred to it must always be acknowledged as
Chehlova, Z., Kevisha, I. & Chehlov, M. (2012) 'The Russian Society of Latvia: A national-cultural citizenship community', in P. Cunningham & N. Fretwell (eds.) *Creating Communities: Local, National and Global*.
London: CiCe, pp. 360 - 365.

© CiCe 2012

CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a selection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- The CiCe administrative team at London Metropolitan University
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The Lifelong Learning Programme and the personnel of the Education and Culture DG of the European Commission for their support and encouragement.

The Russian Society of Latvia: A national-cultural citizenship community

Zoja Chehlova,¹ Ingrida Kevisha¹ and Mihail Chehlov²

¹University of Latvia (Latvia); ²Information Technology Management Institute (Latvia)

Abstract

“The Russian Society of Latvia” is a non-governmental organisation that was established in Latvia in 1996 in order to unite the country’s Russian inhabitants on the basis of Russian language, history and culture. Its members want to preserve their national identity, traditional spirituality and the historical memory of the Russian people. The purpose of the article is to analyse the activities of the Russian Society that aim at preserving Russian language and culture and developing a sense of national identity.

Keywords: *national identity, Russian culture, the system of Russian education, spiritual self-determination*

The History of the Russian Society of Latvia

The Russian Society of Latvia was set up as a national-cultural citizenship community in the complicated 1990s. At that time, the socio-cultural situation in Latvia had caused the crisis of social identity among the representatives of ethno-cultural minorities, which Russians had become after Latvia regained its independence. In the situation of social and cultural transformations, the orientation of individuals towards the most stable traditional values like ethnos, culture, and religion is a natural process. Mental values, providing a certain frame of reference in the form of traditions and the experience of generations, help an individual to overcome the crisis of social identity in the unstable world (Erikson, 1996; Marcia, 1980). In the period of acute social instability when the traditional norms and values are breaking apart, searching for the ways of spiritual self-determination becomes the key issue for many people (Bibler, 1957; Kasianova, 1994).

The representatives of ethno-cultural minorities started forming positive local identities (“Latvian Russians”) corresponding to the new ethno-cultural and social political reality. According to scholars, integration is considered to be the most positive strategy of overcoming the crisis of social identity: ‘preserving the national cultural belonging and acquisition of the culture of the dominant ethnos’ (Lebedeva, 1999: 218). However, the traditional social organizations and the existing educational model in Latvia did not fully provide individuals with the world view principles necessary for productive interaction with the representatives of other value-orientations, ethno-cultural traditions and lifestyles. There arose a need for a new non-governmental organization that would unite Russians on the basis of the Russian language, history, and culture; thus, in 1996 the Russian Society of Latvia was established. The Russian Society of Latvia is a non-governmental organization which unites the Russian inhabitants of Latvia willing to

preserve their national identity, traditional spirituality and the historical memory of the Russian people.

The Purpose and Objectives of the Russian Society

The main purpose of the Society is to preserve the cultural, historical and creative heritage of the Russian people, its spiritual and moral values, and to develop the national identity on this basis. The main objective of the Russian Society is creating a socio-cultural, spiritual environment for Russian people in Latvia, reducing social exclusion, and expanding social inclusion. The work of the Russian Society of Latvia is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the laws of the Republic of Latvia.

The Russian Society of Latvia is striving to maintain contacts with Russia, other Russian associations and organizations, as well as compatriots living in different countries to unite the Russian inhabitants of Latvia, to establish and maintain good relations with other national and ethnic groups on the principles of mutual respect and trust, as well as to develop cooperation with them.

The Main Directions in the activity of the Russian Society

The main direction is the cultural and educational activity: the preservation and study of the Russian language, history, culture and traditions of the Russian people. The Russian Society organizes open lectures on Russian culture, celebrates the jubilees of prominent figures in Russian culture. The folk group "Rodnik" ("Spring") has an active concert life. They participate in festivals organized both by the Russian Society and other national-cultural organizations and often visit nursing homes for old people to give concerts there. The group also takes part in the celebrations and festivals that are organized in Latvia at the state level.

Another important direction in the activity of the Russian Society is setting up its regional branches and centres promoting Russian culture and education. Ventspils Branch does serious cultural work in the city and carries out the project "The Russian Book". In the last years, the Latvian libraries have not purchased Russian books. Within the framework of the project "The Russian Book", there has been set up the readers' club "Labyrinth", which has become popular among the city inhabitants. The members of the club, the lovers of Russian literature, order books in the Russian language, exchange books with other readers, and organize literary evenings in Parventa Library. There is also a youth theatre "We", which stages performances in the Russian language. In Ventspils, they also organize public festivities "Sviatki, Maslennitsa" in the traditional Russian style and concerts of traditional folk-songs. The Ventspils Branch of the Russian Society has long-standing and fruitful cooperation with the Association of National Cultural Societies of Ventspils.

Similarly, the Salaspils Branch of the Russian Society actively provides cultural programmes for the city inhabitants, organizes various festivities and excursions to memorial sites.

A very important direction in the activity of the Russian Society of Latvia is the support and development of the system of Russian education. There has been set up the Latvian Association of the Teachers of Russian Language and Literature headed by Mr. A. Yefremov, a teacher of the Russian language and literature. Each year they organize the contest “The Best teacher of the Russian Language and Literature.” A teacher conducts a class in the auditorium of the Russian Society in the presence of other teachers and students with its subsequent discussion. During the discussion, each participant can express his/ her opinion, offer some innovative methodology or interesting educational technologies. When asked, why these competitions were personally meaningful to them, the teachers said that it was a very strong incentive for self-development. Mr. Yefremov, who teaches the Russian language and literature in Pushkin Lyceum and has been a multiple award-winner of this contest, defined its significance for him personally referring to Hegel’s philosophy: In his philosophy, Hegel advocated the idea of individual’s autonomy and pointed out that personality is never perfect, and it promotes its self-development. Lack of interest in one’s own development means mental lethargy. The Latvian Association of the Teachers of Russian Language and Literature is the member of the International Association of the Teachers of Russian Language and Literature.

The Russian Society carries out its cultural and educational work with children on the basis of the concept developed by E. Bondarevskaya. The key idea of her concept is education as the development of a citizen, a man of culture and spirituality. The author of the concept singles out five key elements constituting ‘a man of culture’ (the term proposed by M. Bakhtin): the development of free personality, the development of humane personality, the development of spiritual personality, the development of creative personality, and the development of practical personality. The Russian Society implements the principle of humanism in its practical activity, which implies taking into account the gender and age characteristics of the learners, as well as the principle that education should be based on national and cultural traditions of the people, culture, as well as ethnic peculiarities and habits. (Bondarevskaya,1999).

The development of national identity has been promoted by children’s works and performances. The contest “Russian Culture in Latvia: Tatiana’s Day – 2012” was a particularly memorable one. The participants were offered several kinds of competitions:

- the competition of school theatre performances. The classical theatre of Pushkin Lyceum was awarded the grand prix for the performance “New Year’s Fairytale”. Zolitude Gymnasium won the first prize for the performance “In Pursuit of Happiness”. The awards for the best actor and actress were also given;
- the literature competition “The Fairytale in Russian Culture”. The authors read their own fairytales;
- performers’ competition : there were two nominations – instrumental music and vocal music (solo);
- the competition of drawings “The Fairytale in Russian Literature”. This competition turned out to be the most popular one among the school children.

In order to find out what attracts students to creative competitions, a survey was carried out in three secondary schools in Riga: Pushkin Lyceum, Zolitude Gymnasium, and Secondary School No 34.

The survey question was, “What attracts you to the competitions organized by the Russian Society?”

1. Awareness of one’s abilities and possibilities	30%	25%	20%
2. Interest in creative activity	10%	15%	10%
3. Opportunities for self-expression	15%	10%	15%
4. Expanding the circle of friends in creative activity	20%	25%	30%
5. Becoming familiar with Russian culture	25%	25%	25%

The key incentives for the students were the awareness of their abilities and possibilities, becoming familiar with Russian culture and expanding their circle of friends.

In the Russian society, there has been set up an education centre where senior secondary school students who are planning to obtain higher education in Russia are given an opportunity to attend preparatory courses according to the curricula of Russian secondary schools. As regards educational issues, the Russian society cooperates with the governmental institutions as well: it participates in the Consultative Council of the Ministry of Education and Science with the representatives of ethnic minorities in Latvia. The Russian Society has played an important role preserving education in the Russian language in Latvia.

At present, the Latvian Society has understood the importance and necessity of social integration. Therefore, the Russian Society has set a goal to develop not only ethnic (Russian) identity, but also multicultural identity. The dialogue is the key mechanism for the development of multicultural identity. In the present historical and cultural situation, the dialogue becomes ‘a universal, all-embracing mode for the existence of culture and for an individual in culture’ (Kagan, 1996; Bakhtin, 1986).

In the concept of the Russian Society, multicultural identity is viewed as a personality feature which characterises individual’s need and ability to understand and accept Latvian culture, the rich diversity of the world cultures, various forms of self-expression, and various forms of the manifestation of human individuality. The development of the multicultural identity of secondary school students is based on the interconnection between the objective cultural values and value-orientations of an individual.

Multicultural education is based on the interconnection and mutual enrichment of various cultures, in the Latvian context - the Latvian and Russian cultures, and the acquisition of cultural and educational values, which will lead to the consolidation of the society and the development of European identity.

The Russian Society has developed an interesting series of lectures “Russian-Latvian Relations”. After lectures, there are held discussions “We Have to Live Together” involving both Latvian and Russian participants; there are also organized competitions of Russian as a foreign language in which the representatives of Latvian schools take part.

The humanitarian activities of the Russian Society in helping socially disadvantaged people also facilitate the integration of society. It is another important direction in the work of the Russian Society of Latvia. They have set up the club „Friendship” for elderly people. The club provides comfortable atmosphere for communication, thus promoting the social inclusion of elderly people, it also organizes interesting lectures and talks with psychologists.

Since 1999, there are also computer skills courses for the elderly, which promote the idea of life-long learning, on the one hand, and expand the informational space, on the other hand, thus helping senior citizens to adapt to the contemporary world. Since 1998, there are also held Latvian language courses for low-income and elderly people, and courses in the history of Latvia helping people to prepare for the naturalization process, since there are about 400 000 non-citizens living in Latvia.

The cultural, educational, and humanitarian activities of the Russian Society include both large-scale events and small-group activities. The age of the participants ranges from school children to senior citizens. All the efforts of the Society are focused on increasing the adaptive capabilities of the social groups involved, strengthening their individual positions in society, i.e. to the development of integration and increase in social potential.

The international activity of the Russian Society in the development of integration is also worth mentioning. It involves helping people who are looking for their lost relatives who died during World War II. Since 2006, the Russian Society of Latvia has been involved in search activities. The results of their work are regularly published on the website <http://voin.russkie.org.lv>. Their work is focused on clarifying the names of the fallen soldiers and making a complete list of memorial sights. This is done by means of advanced technologies. For instance, with the help of the site <http://maps.google.com> there has been made an interactive map of World War II memorials, which has been visited by 36 000 people during the year and a half of its existence.

At present, the website contains information about more than 105,000 soldiers and 160 memorial sites. Due to this work, hundreds of people living in Russia, Latvia, Belarus, the Ukraine, Estonia, Moldova, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Israel, and the USA have found the places where their relatives were buried, have received photos from warrior’s cemeteries, or have learned how to visit them.

Conclusion

The Russian Society of Latvia was established in the period of social and political transformations in Latvia. These events led to the crisis of national identity among Russians living in Latvia.

Setting up of a national-cultural citizenship community – the Russian Society of Latvia – was a challenge of the period. The Russian Society has united the Russian speaking inhabitants of Latvia on the basis of the Russian language, history, and culture. The

activity of the Russian Society has promoted the development of national identity and social integration since the knowledge of the native language and culture, like the knowledge of Latvian culture, is an important precondition for the integration of the Latvian society.

At present, the development of European identity is also a priority direction in the work of the Russian Society.

The analysis of the research results demonstrated consistent interest of the Russian secondary school students and teachers in Russian culture and a positive attitude to the activities of the Russian Society of Latvia.

References

- Berry, J. (1997) Immigration, Acculturation and Adaptation, in *Applied Psychology: An International Review*. 1997. Vol. 46 (1). pp. 5 - 34
- Bakhtin, M. (1986) *The Aesthetics of Verbal Creativity*. Moscow: Iskusstvo
- Bondarevskaya, E. (1999) School Education in the Context of Culture, in *The Bulletin of Rostov University*. 1999. №2. pp. 27 - 39
- Bibler, V. (1997) *On the Brink of the Logic of Culture*. Moscow: Progress
- Erikson E. (1996) *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. Moscow: Progress
- Kagan, M. (1997) *The Philosophy of Culture*. St. Petersburg: Petropolis
- Kasianova, K. (1994) *On the Russian National Character*. Moscow: The Institute of the National Model of Economy
- Lebedeva, H. (1999) *Introduction into Ethical and Cross-Cultural Psychology*. Moscow: Kluch
- Marcia, J. (1980)/ Identity in Adolescence, in Adelson, I. (ed) *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*. New York: John Wiley. pp. 213 - 231
- Neimatov, Y. (2002) *Education in the 21st Century: Trends and Predictions*. Moscow: Algorithm
- Ross, A. (2008). *Human Rights and Education for Citizenship, Society and Identity: Europe and Its Regions*. Educare: Malmo University