

UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
FACULTY OF ECONOMICS

MASTER'S THESIS

**THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE KNOWLEDGE ON THE TRAVEL
EXPERIENCE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TOURISTS
VISITING THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

LISA SCHATOR

EUROPEAN MASTER IN TOURISM MANAGEMENT
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN DENMARK
FACULTY OF ECONOMICS, UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
FACULTY OF TOURISM, UNIVERSITY OF GIRONA

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Ljubljana, July 2018

LISA SCHATOR

AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

The undersigned Lisa Schator, a student at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Economics, (hereafter: FELU), author of this written final work of studies with the title *The Impact of Language Knowledge on the Travel Experience: A Comparative Analysis of Tourists Visiting the Russian Federation*, prepared under supervision of Prof. Tanja Mihalič, PhD.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is omnipresent. It affects somebody's personality, the experiences one makes and subsequently expresses to other people, and their identity (Banerjee, 2014). Banerjee (2014) states that "we can only express our experiences to ourselves and to others by using the concepts ingrained in our language". Language is more than just a tool for communication and has the power to influence the service experience of customers. Therefore, language barriers can be seen as a significant problem to transcultural communication (Cohen and Cooper, 1986). Especially tourists are faced with obstacles such as not being able to voice a complaint or obtain necessary information (Banerjee, 2014). Nothing is more annoying, than not being able to communicate with another human being, in ordinary situations such as buying food at a market or ordering meals in a restaurant. All of a sudden, one feels like a baby, using simple phrases, often only words, to make the opposite understand what is asked for. These difficulties can have significant effects on tourists, their choice of destination, how they prepare for their travels, how they interact with the local population, and the quality of their experience (Cohen & Cooper, 1986).

Apart from affecting a tourist's choice of destination (Cohen & Cooper, 1986), language barriers also influence a tourist's destination experience. Findings of a research conducted by Yan and Lee (2014) in Macau show that tourists who are able to read the local street signs, had an overall enhanced destination experience. The respondents stated that being able to understand street names and signs increases the understanding of a destination's history and culture. Apart from that, it was also explored that not being able to communicate with staff members at a restaurant will diminish the meal satisfaction, as customers are not able to complain if something is wrong or are worried to lose their face when not using the right words (Kim & Mattila, 2011). These two examples already indicate that language is a crucial part of the tourist activity and therefore, are of significant importance within the tourism sector.

While some years ago, the services offered used to be the main concern of a trip, today the tourism sector has changed into an experience-driven economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Tourist focus more on which experiences they consume, rather than the products. Contrary to the field of language research, an abundance of studies can be found on experience and how to measure such. This has turned out to be a challenging task and a legitimate method to measure experiences has not been developed yet. However, what has been discussed to be a reliable possibility to at least evaluate experiences, is to establish a method to characterize and categorize them. This would make it possible to further analyze or even compare experiences. One of those proposing such theories and methods is Seppo Aho, whose model of the experience formation process (Aho, 2001) was used as framework for not only evaluate the results of the gathered data, but even before, when it came to create suitable interview questions.

Regardless of how many theories and methods have been established to create a range of valuable frameworks to somehow analyze experiences, the fact that there is a need for improvement in this area is undeniable. The tourism sector is continuously growing, year by year, and people going on trips desire to increase the experiences they are encountering. This includes not only the number of experience itself, but also their nature. Everything needs to be more exotic, different than anything before, and more authentic. Therefore, it is no surprise that offering local cultures or traditions as tourism product, in the form of an experience, has become an enormous commodity on the tourism market all over the world (Ooi, 2005).

The complexity of the understanding and the analysis of tourism experiences is already widely acknowledged in the literature. Nevertheless, many researchers still argue that the field of tourist experience has still not been given enough attention in the research. Especially from a psychological point of view, which highlight events, expectations, and memories of tourists (Larsen, 2007). Despite the obvious, significant role of language in tourism, only little research can be found within this field (Cohen & Cooper, 1986). Only two surveys have been conducted focusing on the impact of tourism on the language of local, while some others mention problems that occur relating to language barriers, however, they are not further discussed. Other studies only focus on other groups which are faced with barriers such as immigrants or guest workers (Cohen & Cooper, 1986).

Furthermore, Cohen and Cooper (1986) criticize linguists for overseeing the problem of language barriers in tourism, which for them is only a “casual, short-term contact between groups which do not have a language in common” and therefore undesirable to discuss further (Cohen & Cooper, 1986). This is not just a practical problem but also interesting from a theoretical point of view, since these encounters are defined by different parameters than other forms of transcultural communication, which have been studied before.

A crucial point which is often ignored by researchers is that travelling is being done by human beings who speak, communicate, and interact with each other. Exactly this is vital in tourism research. Even though human interaction, in this case primarily language and communication, is a key element of travel and tourism, the relationship of the traveler to languages is widely neglected in academic research (Cronin, 2000). A situation of sudden language loss, non- or misunderstanding, and supposedly known words turn out to be the complete opposite or purely useless, constitutes one of the most common experiences of travelers (Cronin, 2000, pp. 1). This still adds up to the neglect in academic travel literature and supports the claims being made that a stronger focus on the issue of communication in travel and language barriers encountered by tourists is needed (Cronin, 2000).

What adds up to the lack of research and valuable tools within this field, is that regarding the chosen location of this research, data of the Russian Federation shows that 70% of its population do not speak a second language (Levada Center, 2018). Furthermore, receiving a total of 24.5 million inbound tourists in 2016 (UNWTO, 2017) only 11% of the population

is able to speak English, which is considered a lingua franca in tourism (Levada Center, 2018; Cohen & Cooper, 1986). Moreover, regarding literature which discusses Russia's competitiveness on the tourism market, as well as its issues and challenges, it has been observed that language or potential issues of language barrier are not given any attention. In addition, considering the lack of academic research in this field, it can therefore be assumed that there is little to no awareness in Russia of a potential issue connected to language barriers in tourism.

In addition, observations have shown that there is little to know awareness in Russia, when it comes to foreign language skills and their advantages. Even in popular tourist destinations, such as Saint Petersburg or Moscow, the number of people being able to speak the lingua franca of tourism, English, is significantly lower than other tourist destinations around the globe. Therefore, it is safe to say that tourist who come to the Russian Federation and do not possess any Russian skills, yet alone be able to read Cyrillic, will eventually be confronted with a language barrier.

As mentioned before, even though there have been studies about the impact of language on tourism (Banerjee, 2014; Kim & Matilla, 2011), this topic has barely been touched by research and therefore there is an existing gap when it comes to knowledge about the impact language or more specifically, language barriers, can have on the quality of a tourist's destination experience. This thesis is not intended to examine whether tourists face a language barrier when visiting Russia, but how this existing barrier is influencing their experience. Numerous studies have been conducted to explore the nature of experiences, as well as the tourist experience in particular. None of those however, has managed to thoroughly examine the connection to the issue of language barriers. Even though it seems obvious that tourists need to communicate, and it is dared to assume there is probably no one in the whole world who would be able to communicate everywhere they go in their local language. The fact that tourists are confronted with language barriers, sometimes on a daily basis during their trip, and how those affect their experience, has largely been neglected in popular research. The existing research gaps in this field and the ever-lasting presence of this issue, as well as the increasing importance of experiences in the tourism sector, lead to the following research question: How and to what extent does the experience of non-Russian speaking tourists, when visiting the country, differ from the visitation experience of Russian speaking tourists?

To answer this question, this thesis will provide the reader first with an overview of existing literature on language and communication, as well as language barriers and their role in tourism. Moreover, research in the field of tourist experiences and challenges regarding this field will be discussed and certain methods for experience evaluation are introduced. Before introducing the methodology, an outline of the current tourism situation in Russia will also be drawn.

To gather data for an analysis, interviews with tourists who visited the Russian Federation after the dissemination of the Soviet Union were conducted. The interview respondents have been divided into two groups, one possessing Russian language skills the other one not. Then, the interviews were transcribed, and the written data analyzed using qualitative content analysis in the form of coding. The identified codes were evaluated by implementing them into a model of the experience formation process, to discover differences in the experiences of those two groups.

The framework of the experience formation process is a seven-stage model, initially proposed by Seppo Aho (2001), to identify the strength of an experience. Each of the seven stages covers one aspect of the experience formation process. Aho's model is used in this thesis as a guideline, not only for the analysis of the codes that emerged from the data, but also before, for the creation of suitable interview questions. This model has been chosen because it clearly illustrates the different stages a tourist is going through when deciding, planning, and going on a trip as well as it demonstrates what happens afterwards. Moreover, as research still struggles with developing a method or system to measure experiences, the experiences that are identified within the data, will be categorized to be compared between the two groups. The seven-stage model seemed most appropriate for this undertaking because it provides a structured overview on how experiences are formed, and it is possible to evaluate different aspects of the tourist experience separately.

Since a lack of relevant literature has already been identified, and no theory which could be tested to answer the research question exists, the research design of this thesis is of a rather constructive nature. In addition, qualitative content analysis is known to be used to examine oral and written data, with a focus on identifying codes and themes that could be relevant in the latter process of the data analysis (Hiseh & Shannon, 2005). As it was mentioned, the existing literature is not sufficient, and the gathered data must be evaluated by also taking its underlying meaning into account. Therefore, this master's thesis is framed by a constructivist paradigm which suggests that knowledge is rather subjective, and the methodology of this approach focuses on interactions. This method has more of a flexible nature (Polit & Beck, 2006), to be able to use and evaluate the gathered data appropriately, as knowledge should be provided by understanding the contextual meaning of the data (Berelson, 1952).

The aim of this thesis is to provide a deeper insight into the differences in experience, when language barriers are encountered and to point out the connection between language and the tourist experience. It has already been established that language barriers influence visitation experience, however, how or in which way they influence experience and to what extent, is still unknown. Further, what kind of experiences do Russian speaking tourists make, compared to those of non-Russian speaking tourists will also be investigated. As mentioned before the question is, do they even differ and if so, is it possible to determine the level of impact of language barriers on those experience? Moreover, where do tourists encounter the most language barriers? Which experiences are most affected by language barriers? How do

tourists react when confronted with barriers, or are they even aware that language barriers affect their experience? Do language barriers keep tourists from making certain experiences, or even put sort of a veil on the overall experience? Those, and many more questions can be asked besides the initial research question. Probably not all those questions will or can be answered within the following chapters, however, it can be assured that after the reading of this paper, the reader can expect a deeper understanding of the topic.

1 THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

“Language is a poor thing. You fill your lungs with wind and shake a little slit in your throat, and make mouths, and that shakes the air; and the air shakes a pair of little drums in my head - a very complicated arrangement, with lots of bones behind - and my brain seizes your meaning in the rough. What a roundabout way, and what a waste of time!” (Du Maurier, 1981, p.178)

Just as the writer George Du Maurier theatrically expressed in *Peter Ibbetson* – language and subsequently communication are highly complicated processes and it takes time to fully understand all its factettes and aspects. This chapter will discuss the role of language and communication in our society and will provide information for a basic understanding, how communication between two individuals takes place, as well as what role it plays within the scope of travel and tourism. What is relevant for the further research conducted in this thesis is how language barriers arise, how they affect communication in general and especially in the context of tourism.

1.1 Language and Communication

“One cannot not communicate”, is probably one of the most quoted statements in lectures of linguistic or communication studies. But what does this mean? This statement by the Austrian-American communication theorist Paul Watzlawick represents the first and most famous of his five axioms of human communication. An axiom is a statement which is regarded as true and needs no further investigation. Watzlawick’s first axiom is relevant because it demonstrates how communication is an unavoidable part in a person’s life and that it is impossible to “escape” communication. The double negative cannot not indicates that an individual has no choice whether or not to communicate. Everything one says or does develops into a message. Even the act of doing nothing, creates a message of its own. It implies that not only language is used for communication, but also body language, gestures, mimics, having a certain attitude or behavior towards someone – everything is part of communication (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1965). Therefore, each human being constantly communicates with other individuals. The reason for communication is the need to exchange messages. Whenever such transfer from one side to another takes place, the whole process combines certain components which, all together, form a communication system (Miller, 1963).

Every communication system consists of five components: a source where the message derives from, a destination where the message will be perceived, a channel through which the message travels, a transmitter which is responsible for transferring the message, and a receiver who will receive and eventually decode the message. Most of the time, the source of a communication system is a human individual. However, this individual can be source and destination at the same time – by writing a post-it note for themselves for example. In this scenario, the post-it would be the channel, the writing the transmitter, and the reader's eyes the receiver (Miller, 1963).

To transmit a certain message over a channel, it must be encoded, to pass through the channel and then can be received at the destination. The receiver then decodes the message again, to make sense out of it and be able to understand its meaning (Miller, 1963). Speaking of encoding and decoding, it must be clarified what is considered a code. Defining the term code can be difficult, since it has a rather broad meaning. A code can consist of sounds, written words, gestures, etc. It is a system of symbols, that has been agreed upon before. Languages themselves can be codes too. Each language is a different code that needs to be understood by the one decoding the message (Miller, 1963).

Miller (1963, p.119) describes the language diversity of humankind as “perhaps the most glaring source of individual differences”. However, he states that even though language is part of our culture, it is no specific trait of our personality, nor influences it. Nevertheless, one must always be aware that language always has and always will influence the way humans are thinking. Somebody's worldview usually depends on the language they speak (Cronin, 2000). Furthermore, to be able to use a language, we must know the rules of that particular language. This includes grammar, vocabulary and often the connotation of certain words (Miller, 1963).

According to Miller (1963, p. 249) “social organization without communication is impossible.” He mentions that a group of individuals can only function to its fullest if effective communication channels are available. In this case, this does not mean modern day communication through social media, mobile phones or emailing, but rather that members of this group need to be able to talk to each other. An individual who is not able to interact or engage with the group through language or any other form of communication, will eventually be excluded. Furthermore, it can be observed that social groups have certain patterns of communication, which reveal information about social structures and behavior (Miller, 1963). However, the topic of the relation between the communication patterns and the actions of groups is a rather complex one and will not be further investigated in this thesis.

Nevertheless, the importance of language and the ability to properly communicate can clearly be seen, as well as how language can influence human behavior and social interactions. One can only imagine what it means then, if the ability to interact with other

individuals is suddenly limited, or even lost. The next section will further disclose what can happen in situations like this and how people react to it.

1.2 Language Barriers

“The limits of our language, means the limits of our world”- this quote by the famous philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, as well as the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, and the 2004 film Spanglish, have one thing in common – the issue of language barriers, whether it is the story of humanity being divided by languages and individuals were no longer able to communicate with each other, or the story of a Mexican housekeeper trying to communicate with her American employers. Although Wittgenstein has long passed, and regardless if the biblical punishment or the Hollywood movie are fiction or not, this theme has been and still is a ubiquitous issue, if not even fear, in our society.

As mentioned before, every communication process is formed by a communication system. The five components which those systems in general consist of have been explained, as well as the process of encoding and decoding a message. What must be added to this, is that an additional factor influences the message that is being transmitted. As in every aspect of life, errors might occur, and a mistake could be made by encoding or decoding, or while transferring the message through the channel. Such errors are commonly known as noise. The higher the level of such noise is, the more difficult it becomes for the system to deliver reliable information. Most likely, this will result in a situation of miscommunication. A language barrier is a factor of noise. In this scenario, the receiver is not familiar with the code of the source, and therefore unable to decode the message that has been sent. (Miller, 1963).

We live in a world where currently over 7000 languages are spoken (Simons & Fennig, 2018). It is easy to assume that due to this abundance of languages, many individuals are not able to understand each other, even though a significant number of people have skills in more than one or two additional languages. As the story of the Tower of Babel, language divisions and the resulting barriers between groups of different mother tongues and distrust in foreign languages have caused problems throughout history. In Ancient Greece, peoples who did not speak Greek were accredited as barbarians. In the Middle Ages, a nation was only a nation if it had a proper language to communicate and areas where people spoke differently became a “land of unlikeliness” (Fyler, 2015).

Linguistic thinking in the Middle Ages constituted of the idea that humans are social beings, who have the desire to communicate with each other and therefore urge to use language. Even Aristotle mention that “all friendship consists in communication”, hence, individuals who speak different languages, cannot communicate with one another which makes coexistence or even an acceptance of the other, much more difficult. Augustine of Hippo, a Christian theologian and philosopher, stated that “if two men meet and are forced by some compelling reason not to pass on but to stay in company, then if neither knows the other’s

language, it is easier for dumb animals, even of different kinds, to associate together than these men, although both are human beings. For when men cannot communicate their thoughts to each other, simply because of difference of language, all the similarity of their common human nature is of no avail to unite them in fellowship. So true is this that a man would be more cheerful with his dog for company than with a foreigner” (in Fyler, 2015, pp. 417).

Apart from Augustine, several other authors and philosophers discussed the issue of language barriers already centuries ago - Richard Verstegan in *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*, Dante Alighieri in various of his works such as *On Eloquence of Vernacular* or *Commedia*. Even in the 13th century history of the world, *Historie Universelle*, language barriers and what they mean to human beings, were acknowledged (Fyler, 2015). Further, the author John Gower named the confusion of tongues in the prologue of *Confessio Amantis*, a “culminating example of and metonymy for sinful division in the declining world” (Fyler, 2015, p. 420). Those works are only a few examples, which indicate that the importance of the issue has been realized early in history.

However, it was not until the time of Charles V that translators became aware of the potential issues that can arise in the work of their profession. One must be incredibly cautious when it comes to translating texts and manuscripts and not only pay attention to the words, but also meanings and the context of the situation. Furthermore, a translator had to be sensitive to differences in cultures and unique traits of certain languages, to deliver a well translated script. It soon became obvious that, for instance, a text translated from Greek into Latin, which has then been further translated into French, lost its original meaning, because many Greek terms would not even have had a proper correspondent in Latin, even less in French (Fyler, 2015).

Nowadays, in times of globalization and the world becoming one big playground, people travelling as much as never before and nearly everybody is connected through the internet, issues like language barrier are still as present as ever before. Hence, Henderson (2005) claims that there is an urgent need, to put a bigger focus on this issue, especially by researchers connected to international business and management. Various studies have been conducted to find solutions to this ongoing problem. However, most of the research focuses on language barriers in health care. Although this is an issue of a certain relevance, and different approaches could be used in other areas, a lack of research has been observed in the field in which language barriers seem to be most occurring – tourism (Cronin, 2000; Kim & Matilla, 2011; Cohen & Cooper, 1986).

As it has been illustrated, language barriers have existed since the beginning of humans using language to communicate. Countless attempts have been made to overcome language barriers, however, most of the methods tried have been marked as ineffective and inefficient (Sharma, Kitchens & Miller, 2003). While translators and interpreters are expensive, tools like dictionaries or digital devices and apps are often slow or prone to mistakes. Needless to

say, they are of no value when it comes to correct pronunciation. As a result, many tourists are frustrated, embarrassed, confused, or avoid communication with a foreign speaking person at all, when faced with a potential language barrier and as a result, they might suffer from holiday dissatisfaction (Sharma, Kitchens & Miller, 2003). However, before the issue of language barriers in tourism will be discussed, the role of language itself in such settings will be further investigated in the next chapter.

1.3 The Role of Language in Tourism

According to Cronin (2000) language occupies a special place within the field of tourism, and furthermore, “modernity is characterized by the exponential growth in travel and movement of people around the globe.” Nowadays, travel and tourism has not only developed into an influential business component, but it has also become one of the fastest growing economic sectors, academic research within this field has become increasingly popular (Cronin, 2000).

Cronin (2000) raised awareness on how the relationship between travel and travelers and language has been neglected by researchers in the past, and that it needs to receive more attention. He also mentions that this neglect is “all the more telling in that one of the most commonplace experiences of the traveler is the sudden humiliation of language loss (...)”, and that using the wrong words in a certain situation is even worse than not knowing how to communicate at all.

Moreover, in his work, Cronin (2000) mentions a thesis that implies tourism plays a significant role in the creation of national cultures, however, he argues that the role of language in this process is highly neglected. The reason for his argumentation is that tourist sites as we know them, would not be the same without the existence of texts describing them. Texts such as history book entries, articles, and blog posts for example, put a meaning on a travel destination. In addition, there is a deeper, much more complex level that connects travel and language – the concept of displacement. In linguistic terms, displacement is “the ability to talk about things that are distant in place or time”. This ability allows that one can travel to different places or periods which are in the past, or one has never seen before. In *Across the Lines – Travel, Language, Translation*, Cronin (2000) states how Paul Theroux illustrates the power of linguistic displacement in one of his works, describing his ignorance while living in Britain:

“I knew little about some parts [of Britain] because in Britain there was an oral tradition that took the place of travel, like the Bognor jokes and the Scotland was breathtaking, and Cornwall was creepy and South Wales was awful and Rye was ever so lovely” (Cronin, 2000, p. 22).

People travel to certain places to see attractions they have already heard or read about. Even airlines provide information on board in their magazines about popular sights at the

approached destination to make people long for a visit at the attraction or place. Furthermore, professional as well as amateur travel writers also contribute to the creation of a national culture in reporting about their own journeys. Language lets readers of travel blogs, books and articles see a whole country without even leaving their own home. Many of those, who read about traveling, might not even be able to go this far in real life (Cronin, 2000).

Leslie and Russel (2006), also demonstrated the importance of language in tourism in a study about language skills in the tourism sector and its perception by students. They concluded that, especially in the tourism industry, foreign language skills are not only a valuable but crucial asset to own, since destinations must be able to compete with another on an international scale. If tourists feel welcomed by their chosen destination in terms of language, meaning they can understand what is important to them and are able to communicate with hotel staff, service members or even locals, will eventually come back or at least promote the destination by word of mouth, when arriving back home.

When it comes to different languages, English has become a lingua franca in the travel and tourism sector over the last decades (Cronin, 2000). Nevertheless, it is of increasing importance to employ multilingual services staff, as communication with visitors has become part of the tourism product. Hotels all over the world, as well as tourist attraction sites, advertise that they “speak your language”. As a result, if tourists are confronted with a service or staff member who might not be able to communicate with them in their native language, this encounter could decrease holiday satisfaction or even lead to the decision to not return to this destination. Language has become a vital part of the holiday experience and tourism establishments need to be aware of this (Cronin, 2000).

Moreover, tourists are not aware of a distinction between frontstage and backstage communication of staff members. Frontstage is everything that involves communication with the tourist and therefore the target language of the tourist must be used. On the other hand, backstage communication happens between employees who are barely in contact with tourists and mostly interact with other employees, such as house cleaners, chefs, gardeners, janitors, or other maintenance staff, etc. Those employees are in no need to have any other skills than their native language (Cronin, 2000). Nowadays, many tourists feel an increased need to experience what they think is authentic and are eager to engage in backstage communication. Consequently, the service workers in the background, who want to keep the tourists from invading what they consider their safe space and keep their language as some sort of protective mask, subsequently fake a backstage scenario for the tourist (Cronin, 2000).

When examining the sociolinguistic aspects of touristic situations, an obvious characteristic is that a difference in status and power can be noticed. In situations where a local is communicating with a foreigner, a simpler sentence structure as well as a simplified register is used. In linguistic terms, this is called foreigner talk. This foreigner talk is seen as a special form of register, in which locals usually talk to guest workers, immigrants, and other, often

temporary visitors, who are not able to speak the local language on a certain level (Cohen & Cooper, 1986). What is worth mentioning here is that the usage of foreigner talk typically goes hand in hand with an asymmetry of status. In those situations, linguistically speaking, the individual using foreigner talk is usually of higher status than the one receiving it, even though there would be no difference in power or status on a social level.

However, when it comes to interactions with tourists, the situation suddenly reversed, and the locals using foreigner talk become of lower status than the tourist. This is because in many regions of the world, tourism is still an activity for the rich members of a well-developed society. Apart from this, in touristic situations the visitor is usually a customer, therefore he or she is automatically assigned a higher status by the local, who is probably trying to sell their product or service in the given scenario and needs the visitor for their economic benefit (Cooper & Cohen, 1986).

Moreover, an average tourist would not try to gain skills in the host language, which would usually be the case in any other foreigner-local interaction. This often leads to locals learning at least a few phrases in the tourist's language. What happens then is that in the attempt to interact with the tourist, locals are using the tourist's language in a much more simplified manner, also known as tourist talk. This tourist talk is basically the same as foreigner talk with the small difference that when using tourist talk, the local talks up to the receiver of the talk, instead of talking down as it would be with foreigner talk (Cohen & Cooper, 1986).

Aside from this differentiation in power and status in tourist-local communication, some other aspects characterize the "remarkable linguistic reversal" which is experienced in the mentioned communication and interactions. First, tourists are only temporary visitors and interact with the local community only on a superficial level, therefore, they are not expected to know or learn the local language. On the other hand, other temporary strangers are indeed expected to acquire sufficient language skills for their visit. Moreover, since tourists mostly travel for leisure, they do not have the same need to communicate with locals as other foreigners would have, such as guest-workers, immigrants, etc. In addition, as tourism is "commercialized hospitality", therefore, the local community who is engaged in the tourism sector, has an economic interest to cater to the tourist's needs and wishes. This means that it is of course much more likely for a local staff member to learn a tourist's language than for them to expect the tourist to accommodate to the local situation (Cohen & Cooper, 1986).

What can be observed by the points being made is that in most scenarios, the group with the lower power or status group is much more willing to learn the other group's language. Cohen and Cooper (1986, p. 539) explain this further by stating "Sellers learn buyer's language rather than the reverse.". In general, it can be said that the acquisition of foreign language skills within the field of tourism is only loosely connected to the wish to communicate with other individuals but rather of an economic interest for the one acquiring them (Cohen & Cooper, 1986).

According to Cohen (1972), tourists can be divided into institutionalized and noninstitutionalized. The first group is one that travels within a protected environmental bubble in which they have all commodities of their home society, including not only food, services, and surroundings, but also language. The other group is characterized by being more open for the foreign community and even seek interaction with the unknown (Cohen, 1972).

In the field of institutionalized tourism, a high level of knowledge in the tourist's language is expected by service members. The aim is that tourists should never face any situation with language difficulties, while being on their vacation. This means, they should be able to communicate either in their own native language or a commonly used lingua franca. In touristically well developed countries, tourism establishments would ensure to cater the needs of their customers by employing multilingual waiters, deskmen, house cleaners, tour guides, and other staff members. In countries which usually have a low tourism flow, such as Third World Countries, staff members are advised to speak at least English, the lingua franca of the tourism industry nowadays, as it was mentioned before. However, even if the protective bubble is never left, problems may arise when the tourist does not have any knowledge of a common lingua franca, such as English (Cohen & Cooper, 1986).

Possessing knowledge or even advanced skills in the tourist's language is a crucial factor in the success of a tourism business. It has been discovered that many hotels, shops, restaurants or similar, advertise the multilingualism of their staff. Their language skills are usually not acquired in special courses but through interaction with tourists and every day practice. Normally, the range of vocabulary used does not exceed the level that is needed for business interactions, meaning that individuals are able to speak two or more foreign languages, but their skills are limited to a certain set of words and phrases (Cohen & Cooper, 1986).

Considering that none of the individuals involved in a conversation, neither the tourist nor the local, speak any of each other's language, how would communication transpire in such a scenario? As stated by Cohen and Cooper (1986), no research or literature on this topic currently exists. However, their speculations suggest that a situation of total absence of language skills, would lead to a "complete breakdown of communication.". Even though it was mentioned before that we cannot not communicate (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1965), from a purely sociolinguistic point of view, this means that a conversation is not happening anymore since messages cannot be exchanged anymore in a way, that everyone would grasp their meaning. Nevertheless, such scenarios of a complete communicative shutdown, are said to be extremely rare and situations like this would most likely only irritate less experienced travelers. Those who constantly expose themselves to the otherness and strangeness of foreign cultures and communities, are more aware of factors that influence communication other than plain language itself. Highly experienced travelers would pay attention to facial expressions, gestures, or the tone in which something is said. Sign language is also often used for simple conversations between two individuals who lack knowledge of a common language (Cohen & Cooper, 1986).

Contrary to their counterparts, noninstitutionalized tourists are willing to fully accommodate to the host destination – meaning they will prepare for their travels, educate themselves about local traditions and customs, try local dishes without hesitation, and most importantly, try to communicate with locals in the host language. Simply said – a noninstitutionalized tourist will fully engage in the otherness of the local community (Cohen and Cooper, 1986).

Yet still, tourism businesses are employing staff with at least a little competence in a tourist language or the tourism's lingua franca English, to still be able to accommodate even independent tourists and be able to run their businesses successfully over many decades (Cohen & Cooper, 1986). Several little businesses on the islands of Thailand for example, where the owner has no knowledge of any foreign language, will at least partially employ younger people with such skills, to take orders and reservations from international guests. This is an indicator that, nevertheless if interacting with institutionalized or noninstitutionalized tourists, the language of these tourists will always be the dominant one in nearly every conversational interaction happening (Cohen & Cooper, 1986).

Another issue that connects language and travel is the stereotyping of tourists (Cronin, 2000). Usually, it is rather difficult for tourists to have meaningful interactions with locals, if they are not highly skilled in the local language of their holiday destination. Often, they are not able to voice complex ideas in a foreign language and must simplify all their messages they are trying to communicate. By doing so, tourists are often seen as a dumb invader or “a grinning child bullied by adults who shout at him/her in loud, staccato speech.” (Cronin, 2000, p.44).

A similar problem, connected to the non-understanding of given information is that especially in the tourism sector, “translation is visible in failure and invisible in success” (Cronin, 2000, p.51). The problem of mistranslations is evident in countless guidebooks or travel guides that have been published in various languages other than their original one. The same can be observed on different informational signs, restaurant menus and in any other form of written tourist information at various destinations (Cronin, 2000).

In a tourism setting, the customer and the service provider are rarely from the same country or cultural background, which results in intercultural service encounters (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2002). Those are not only influenced by cultural difference but can also lead to one of the biggest issues that connects language and tourism – language barriers (Kim & Mattila, 2011). It can easily be noticed that language barriers are often the biggest problem tourists are facing during their travels. What can happen in such situations, how they arise, how they influence the individual and how people are trying to cope with them, will be further discussed in the following chapter.

1.4 Language Barriers in Tourism

Travelling in a world where currently more than 7000 languages are spoken, can be enormously demanding (Simons & Fennig, 2018). Tourists encounter countless traps all over the world when trying to communicate with a local community. Misunderstandings, mistranslations, the loss of meaning; the dangers of approximation, all those, are just a few potential pitfalls (Cronin, 2000).

As people travel not only further but also more often than a few decades ago, more countries are visited of which in proportion, less and less native languages are spoken by the travelers themselves (Cronin, 2000). Cronin (2000, p. 4) calls the traveler “a mute presence in a world of foreign signs that is disorienting and threatening”, given that he or she has no prior knowledge of the native language of their chosen destination. With this being said, it is perhaps not surprising that the decreasing travel times not only lead to an increase in mobility, but also to a higher demand for translation services, more translations being done by machines and, not to forget, the dominance of the English language in a global context. Even though there is a prevailing wish to minimize risks of being misunderstood or not able to voice a need, the usage of foreign languages skills or relying on a translator, is still seen as a risky business (Cronin, 2000).

Nevertheless, the problem of language barriers is much more complex than to be characterized as simple misunderstandings. Individuals are limited in the ability to share their ideas, feelings, and concerns, if they are not able to communicate in different languages, which forces them to only use the few phrases or word they know, to express their personality (Cronin, 2000).

Not only translations, also a translator’s tools such as a simple dictionary can become obstacles, even though they are meant to overcome such. One example given by Bouvier would be the word *shahrah*, in Colonel C.D. Philott’s English-Persian dictionary. The term *shahrah* is defined as highway, however, a comment in the dictionary states: “There are no ways in Iran, high or otherwise” (in Cronin, 2000, p. 52).

This example is used to demonstrate that not only translations, but also tools tourists can use for translation on their own, can create irritating situations for individuals seeking for the right words in a foreign language. This raises one question: Why would one use a tool that can easily lead to a misuse of words? First on foremost, to be able to communicate. To be able to communicate with another individual and to voice needs and wishes in the other, the foreign language. Secondly, to show a genuine interest in the local culture. There is a general movement to become, what society claims to be a traveler, not a tourist. As already mentioned before, language is a fundamental part of a society’s culture and heritage. The commitment to learn and the ability to speak another language, even if only a few words or catchphrases, turns a casual tourist into a serious traveler. The traveler then can connect

through language with the local culture and catches a glimpse of what is happening below the surface of a society other than their own at home (Cronin, 2000).

A common dilemma amongst travelers who are not able to speak the local language of the destination they are visiting is the embarrassment of language loss and not being able to voice needs and concerns. An example for this situation is the story of Deriva Murphy, who describes her journey on a bus in Madagascar (Cronin, 2000). In this scenario, a woman feeds her child, and every time it is fed, the child vomits. Murphy knows why the child keeps vomiting, however, she tries to communicate this to the mother through gestures and mimics, only provokes laughter among the other passengers on the bus. Deriva Murphy is not the first person to use gestures to communicate with locals and certainly not the first one to feel frustrated when failing in getting the message across (Cronin, 2000).

For many, the loss of language also means the loss of control. Not being able to ask for directions, help, a place to eat, or obtain simple information may lead to frustration and a feeling of helplessness. Not being able to explain oneself is a common fear of all travelers. Cronin (2000, p. 69) mentions that in a situation like this, a traveler becomes both – a child and a barbarian: “The infantilization of the traveler is the assumption that failure to understand the language is a correlative of intellectual immaturity and that if words are repeated slowly and of the loudly enough, the obdurate child-(wo)man will eventually get the message.”

This infantilization Cronin is talking about can also be embraced by the traveler and used as tool for openness and spontaneity (Cronin, 2000). As soon as one loses its ability to speak, all other senses are evolving in a much stronger matter. Smells, tastes, sounds and sights – everything becomes more vivid and lively. In this situation, a traveler literally feels like a child again, before he or she was able to communicate through speech and was only a part of a communication through their other senses (Cronin, 2000, p. 70). “The traveler is desensitized by the habitual use of language”, which means, when speech is taken away from a traveler, he or she might start going beyond their usual stimuli. They might start noticing little details on buildings, the smell of a market, sounds of a city, certain behavior of locals, etc. Little things which usually would not attract interest can become suddenly, the center of attention.

However, this does not mean that a traveler cannot experience the same at home or anywhere, where they speak the local language and can easily communicate with other people. “But the communicative resourcefulness demanded if the traveler in situations of total linguistic incomprehension makes a scrupulous attention to the multi-sensory detail of the everyday lifeworld much more likely”. Since the traveler is basically trapped in an environment where he or she is not skilled in the native language, something as simple as a walk through a park is something that “boosts the ego and does not require knowledge of the local tongue” (Cronin, 2000, p. 70)

Besides affecting a tourist's choice of destination (Cohen & Cooper, 1986), language barriers also influence tourists' destination experience. Findings of various surveys suggest that language barriers not only generate negative emotions but also prevent tourists from taking certain actions (Kim & Mattila, 2011). The fact that language can make or break the tourist's experience is undisputed (Banerjee, 2014). When confronted with the loss of language, a tourist may feel confused, frustrated, and embarrassed. Situations like this, make an offering of efficient, friendly, or even personalized service basically impossible (Banerjee, 2014).

Findings of a research conducted by Yan and Lee (2014) in Macau suggests that tourists have an improved destination experience when they are able to read street signs. In addition, they state that tourists are much more informed about their destination's culture, and have an easier time understanding the history and exploring the destination when being able to understand the information given on street signs. Another relevant study was conducted by Mattila and Kim (2011). According to their findings, the ability to communicate wishes and complaints do influence the costumer's experience in a restaurant setting, and if faced with difficulties in communication, costumers may fail to obtain important information. It was also noted that language is affecting everyone in nearly every aspect of life, therefore, a much bigger focus needs to be put on the influence of language barriers on costumer experience. Especially since research within the field of has been still been largely neglected.

Apart from these two studies and a small number of others on the impact of language on tourism, this has barely been touched by research and therefore there is an existing gap when it comes to knowledge about the impact language can have on the quality of a tourist's destination experience. This thesis is not intended to examine whether tourists face a language barrier when visiting Russia, but to what extent this existing barrier is influencing their experience. Especially when it comes to how do tourists behave in a situation where they lack language skills and are not able to communicate or understand the situation, compared to those, who speak the local language. How one can understand the basic principle of experiences, and how those can be measured and categorized, will be further explained in the following chapter.

2 THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE

Tourism is not only one of the fastest growing economic sector nowadays, it is also the biggest area in which individuals search for wellbeing, as it serves a wide range of human needs, such as relaxation and cure, feeling togetherness, social acceptance, prestige, learning, self-realization in different forms, and esthetic impressions (Aho, 2001). The study of touristic experience is a relatively new field in research. While Aho claimed in 2001 that science is lacking research on touristic experiences in general and Larsen still complained in 2007 that the field of tourist experiences is "under-researched", Čomić & Kalmić already

acknowledged in 2015 the variety of literature on the complexity of understanding and analyzing touristic experiences.

What needs to be mentioned is that tourist experiences can be investigated from two angles, either from an economical or a psychological point of view (Quang & Wang, 2004). The focus of this paper will be on the latter one, in which expectations, emotions, and feelings of the individual tourist play a significant role. While most of the conducted studies focus on the economical aspect, tourist experience from a psychological point of view is a crucial yet under researched component in the social sciences. It is of significant relevance to tourism actors who offer an experience as their main product for sale. Even though research in this area has been conducted over a period of three decades now, and even though the field of tourism is increasingly receiving attention in research, there are numerous gaps in the literature when it comes to the analysis of tourist experiences (Larsen, 2007). It still needs to be further investigated what tourists think and feel during and after a trip, and what they are encountering during their travels or while staying at their holiday destination (Čomić & Kalmić, 2015).

One of the characteristics of tourism is the interaction of the individual tourist with the tourism system. Even though most of these interactions are of a rather short duration, the amount of processed information and perceptions is considerably higher than during everyday life (Mossberg in Larsen, 2007). Therefore, some researchers claim that those interactions with the tourism system are essential encounters, during the creation of a tourist's experience (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Mossberg in Larsen 2007). However, Larsen (2007) strongly recommends that "a tourist experience cannot, and in my view should not, be conceived of as the interaction of the tourist with the tourism system in itself. The tourist experience should also not be considered to be any or all of the various events taking place during a tourist trip, or any particularity of the individuals' outer environment while on a tourist trip, although admittedly some such events do contribute to the construction of the tourist experience." (Larsen, 2007, p. 8). With this being said, this paper will be guided by Larsen's claim that a tourist experience is a psychological phenomenon, created and influenced by the mind of the individual tourist and not solely by the interactions of the tourist with the tourism system.

In German, two terms for experiences are being used – *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. These two terms are often used interchangeably, however, their meaning slightly differs. While *Erlebnis* signifies an "immediate participation or consciousness related to specific situations", *Erfahrung* is "the accumulated experiences in the course of a time period, or even the entity's life span". (Larsen, 2007, p. 9). Larsen (2007) simplifies this statement by mentioning that *Erlebnis* is something that happens right in the moment while *Erfahrung* is something that was created over time, it is something an individual goes through or undertakes.

A tourist experience incorporates both connotations, since a tourist will participate in events and activities during their trip but also create memories during the whole time of their travels (Larsen, 2007; Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003). Therefore, to describe the nature of a tourist experience, Larsen (2007) suggests the basic three-stage model which consists of a planning stage, during which expectations are formed, a stage in where the individual undertakes the trip and perceives the destination in a certain way and finally, a third stage during which the events and experiences are remembered.

A tourist experience can be defined as “a past personal travel-related event strong enough to have entered long-term memory.” (Larsen, 2007, p. 15). What can be added to this, is that a tourist experience is something out of the ordinary, something that does not happen in a person’s daily life or is not part of their usual routine, something unexpected or surprising one could say (Quan & Wang, 2004; Arnould & Price, 1993). Another definition by Tung and Ritchie (2011) is that a memorable tourism experience is a meaningful experience, that a tourist remembers and reconstructs when telling others about their travel encounters (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Memory is a crucial part of a tourist experience and closely connected to it. The poorer and less exciting an experience turns out to be, or the more negative it is perceived, the less lasting the memory of it will be (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Positive emotions that were felt during an experience, are crucial parts of a memorable tourist experience and play an important role when restoring the memories (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). As memories can remain in a person’s mind, even long after an experience has taken place, memories could be the most influential factors of a tourism experience. Due to their long-lasting nature, they can have a significant impact on the perception of a destination after a trip has ended (Larsen, 2007). Additionally, positive memories of experiences can lead to another visit of a holiday destination, as well as a positive word-of-mouth promotion (Woodside, Caldwell, & Albers-Miller, 2004). However, some researchers claim that also negative feelings and emotions play a significant role in the formation of experiences and tourists will also remember these (Wirtz et al., 2003). Nevertheless, it seems that tourists tend to recall positive experiences much easier and, in more detail, than negative ones, which leads to the construction of mainly positive memories (Kim, Ritchie & McCormick, 2012).

As it has been illustrated, describing the nature of a tourist experience is rather simple, however, considering all influencing factors and keeping in mind what else could contribute to the formation of the experience is a whole different issue. Understanding tourist experiences when looking closer into their research, becomes a more challenging endeavor. Experience research in tourism is a relatively new area, which still needs to be further developed, due to its complex nature and the past neglect. What the pitfalls are, what has been done so far, and how researchers are trying to shine light on this matter, will be discussed in the following chapters.

2.1 The Complexity of Experience Research

Several researchers claim that the tourist experience is a highly complex topic which includes a number of factors such as cultural and social background, expectations, memories, skills and prior knowledge, etc. (Aho, 2001; Cohen, 1979; Čomić & Kalmić, 2015; Larsen, 2007; Ryan, 2002) Therefore, it can be said that language barriers are only one aspect of what can influence a person's experience at a destination. Further, depending on which aspect of the tourist experience is desired to be investigated, a variety of theories and frameworks can be used to go a certain direction. Nevertheless, it seems impossible to have one universal framework to analyze tourist experiences as a whole and in a standardized matter, considering all factors that play a role in the formation of such experiences.

Firstly, even though tourism is a mean for going beyond social and cultural differences, tourist experiences vary depending on an individual's background. According to Therkelsen (2003), only few studies compare tourist experiences cross-culturally, and the risk of focusing too much on one's own culture and nation, which she describes as overlooking the ethnocentrism, is high (Therkelsen, 2003). This means, if a researcher has the same cultural background as the tourists, whose experiences he or she is comparing has an impact on the research itself. The same applies to tourist destinations and services, which are culture-bound products. Their meaning is influenced by the cultural background of the individual tourist (Therkelsen, 2003).

Secondly, a memorable tourist experience is not only "holistic and multiphased", but its formation also consists of several interconnected processes, which combine expectation and anticipation, the traveling to and from the destination itself, the on-site experience, and the memories afterwards. All of this adds up to the complexity one faces, when trying to investigate the essences of tourist experiences (Braun- LaTour, Grinley & Loftus 2006).

Finally, apart from expectations, which are constructed before the trip and strongly influence the on-site experiences individuals have at a destination, after traveling, tourists will remember certain experiences vividly (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). As mentioned before, memories of experiences are not only created by the recollection of on-site experiences, but also derive from other stages of the experience (Aho, 2001). Moreover, experiences may also influence future travel plans and destination choices, as well as impact any further anticipation and expectations (Park & Santos, 2017).

These are only a few issues that need to be considered when conducting tourist experience research. However, what has not been mentioned yet, is the question of how to measure or categorize experiences, to analyze them for various purposes. The attempts that have been made and proposed frameworks for further investigation, shall be introduced in the following chapters.

2.2 Measuring Tourist Experience

Currently, the tourism industry is trying to sell experiences in packages. Various actors are working together to be able to offer tourists the most exciting and enriching experience they could possibly offer. However, those efforts seem of a rather weak nature, if certain characteristics of tourism experiences proposed by Ooi (2006) are considered. He claims that, depending on their social and cultural background, personal feelings and interests, individuals will have a different experience at the same place. Moreover, these backgrounds, as well as interests play a significant role on how a tourist will interpret a tourism product (Ooi, 2006; Park & Santos, 2017). Even if all participants of a tourist activity claim that they enjoyed the experience, it does not necessarily mean that they all had the exact same experiences (Ooi 2006, Lengkeek, 2001; Park & Santos, 2017). As a result, research on the theories to analyze tourist experiences has shifted away from the objects provided by tourism businesses leads now in the direction of the subjective interpretation of the objects' meanings by the tourists (Uriely, 2005). Through the identification of these objects in different ways in which individuals perceive experiences, researchers came to the conclusion that the tourist experience has to be considered as highly subjective (Cohen, 1979; Larsen, 2007; Ryan, 2002).

Čomić and Kalmić, call experiences “highly personal, subjectively perceived, intangible, ever fleeting and continuously ongoing.” (2015, p. 56). Nevertheless, they are more than just randomly being created in the minds of tourists. As commodities, experiences can occur in a vast variety of locations – stores and shopping malls, museums, parks, big cities and little villages, popular tourist sights, etc. Therefore, even though possessing a fleeting nature, experiences are partly created by being exposed to different stimuli in our environment (Čomić & Kalmić, 2015).

Increasing attention has been dedicated to the attempt of understanding what constitutes a memorable tourist experience. This is essential, considering the connections between tourist experiences, consumer behavior, and decision-making process. Therefore, researches are continuously working on conceptualizing the components of a memorable tourist experience and try to find a method to measure those (Kim, Ritchie & McCormick 2012; Tung & Ritchie 2011). To this day, various researchers have created conceptual models that included different construct dimensions to examine the different phases of the experience and its formation. To give some examples, Tung and Ritchie (2011) proposed a theory that four key dimensions are involved, in the formation of memorable tourism experiences: affect (the emotions and feelings associated with the experience), expectations (unexpected surprises, or the failing to meet the expectations), consequentiality (the intellectual or social development, also self-discovery, and overcoming physical challenges), and recollection (remembering the experience, creating memories of a trip).

Furthermore, in the attempt to create an instrument for measuring tourist experiences, a scale was developed by Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick (2012), identifying seven dimensions of

travel experiences which influence the formation of a memorable tourism experience. The identified components were hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty. According to Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick (2012), those are all crucial aspects of an experience, which will most likely affect a tourist's memory. The aim of this study was to develop a suitable method, to achieve higher levels of reliability and validity. Especially since there is little prior research on memorable tourist experiences, this developed scale is seen as a new stepping stone in the research of tourism for not only academic but also marketing practices. However, since no similar study exists, the obtained data cannot be compared to other research or be supported by existing literature. Moreover, the study conducted is of a quantitative nature, and therefore, the scale can only be used as food for thought in this area, when it comes to qualitative analysis of tourist experiences. This means that the findings by Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick (2012) do add valuable information to the discussed topic, nevertheless is the framework itself of rather unusable nature for the aim of this paper.

To summarize, research in tourism cannot be fully conducted or understood without an intensive analysis of a central category - the tourist experience. Existing research is insufficient to demonstrate the complexity of the whole issue (Park & Santos, 2017; Kim, Ritchie & McCormick, 2012) and therefore researchers are forced to look at every tourist experience separately (Čomić & Kalmić, 2015). Moreover, as explained earlier, it is rather impossible to create a universal method to measure tourist experiences, due to their level of subjectivity, since different tourists will have different experiences even though they are at the same location or participating in the same activity (Ooi, 2006; Lengkeek 2001; Park & Santos, 2017). Therefore, for this thesis, it is proposed not to measure, but rather categorize experiences, to be able to compare them and properly analyze the meaning of those comparisons in a scientific manner.

2.3 Categorizing Tourist Experiences

It has been mentioned that tourism can be characterized by being a process of purposely creating experiences. The prevailing factors or those experiences are usually entertainment, emotions, learning, relaxation, and other types of different activities (Aho, 2001).

Aho (2001) criticizes Pine and Gilmore (1999), who stated that there are only four aspects to human experiences – entertainment, education, escapism, and esthetism, which are sufficient to describe them in detail. Aho claims that those areas are not covering all relevant types of experiences, as for instance, the wish of recovering/ getting healthier and activities of personal development are missing in this list. Furthermore, crucial elements such as emotions, are covering more than just one specific area or experiences and can overlap with others, while learning could create experiences which does not involve any emotions at all (Aho, 2001).

2.3.1 Four Core Contents of Experiences

Aho (2001) presents a useful method distinguishing touristic experiences in emotional, informative, practice, and transformative ones. Emotional experiences are evoking mental impressions, created in the mind of the individual experiencing tourism. These are either immediate reactions, such as applause, excitement, cry or laughter, or mental imprints, just as memories, which are produced over a longer time span. Informative experiences are enriching the knowledge of the tourists. Such encounters can be either intended or occasional. Learning happens based on the information offered. Study trips are a good example for informative experiences. Furthermore, emotions are playing a significant role here, as their presence and strength may facilitate the learning experience. Practice experience include all experiences made by practicing skills, whether they are hobbies or of professional nature, which an individual already possesses. Language courses or any kind of sports activities may fall into this category. Lastly, transformative experiences consist of changes in mind or body. Health tourism for example, where a tourist undergoes several curing treatments, aim at this. Art could also inspire a tourist's mind during a cultural trip. All these examples can be categorized as transformative experiences.

Another useful differentiation of experiences consists of whether social, mental, or physical contact is given between the individual and the activity of the experience. Social experiences are important and occur in nearly every type of tourism, no matter if business men are travelling, families with children or elderly people. Mental experiences usually occur during pilgrimages, spiritual trips, but also cultural travels. Finally, physical experience can be had while visiting a bathing facility or massage place. According to Aho (2001), a tourist's motivation "can be classified on the base of these three basic categories of elements." (Aho, 2001, p. 34). In addition, experiences can be made in an introverted or extroverted manner, meaning that an individual either hides their feelings, learning outcome or transformation, while another expresses them openly to other people (Aho, 2001).

2.3.2 Six Types of Personal Resources

Apart from the possible distinctions between the nature of an experience, one can also differentiate between six different personal resources which influence how an experience is perceived (Aho, 2001). One would be time, which is needed to plan, think, receive, and reflect on experiences. Another is money, to be able to buy services which are needed for receiving experiences. A third is knowledge, which includes knowledge of earlier experiences, to be able to evaluate new experiences and choose between available ones. Somebody who has accumulated information and knowledge about a place or has been there before, will have a different experience as someone who has never been there before. Skills are needed to contribute to an experience. If a tourist visits a festival and is invited to dance because they can, their experience will differ from the ones who are not able to. If the person is not willing to dance, it would be categorized as attitude. Attitude will influence the

openness towards new activities and unexpected encounters. Therefore, the individual who is willing to try something new will shape their experience in a different way. Finally, social networks will influence the delivery and sharing of the experience (Aho, 2001). The overall perception of an experience is based on these six personal resources. However, it is also a combination of these factors. For instance, having time to travel, but no money for tourism services, will not lead to new experiences and vice versa (Aho, 2001). Therefore, the availability of time and money is a crucial factor and basic condition for tourism. As for time and money, those are rather obvious factors while others of this list might be less notable. Nevertheless, all of them, depending on the individual's possession of the factors and their degree of usage, can influence an experience and determine its strength (Aho, 2001).

2.3.3 Seven Stages of Experience Formation

To gain a better understanding of experiences in general, the stages of the experience formation processes must be further explained. Although a basic description of the stages in three steps (before, during, and after the trip) has already existed much longer and been briefly explained before, Aho (2001) proposes a seven-step model, to describe the process in more detail:

- Orientation

Orientation is the starting point of every touristic experience. Without an interest in visiting a place or engaging in an activity, no new experiences can be made. During this phase, the decision of making a trip, as well as the destination choice is being made (Aho, 2001).

- Attachment

After deciding on a destination, the preparation process for the trip will be initiated and expectations are developed. Those expectations will play a significant role in the evaluation of the experiences, since those will be influenced by the expectations of the decision maker. Therefore, expectations are an essential factor not only in the attachment phase but also in the whole process of experience creation (Aho, 2001).

- Visiting

This phase consists of the time visiting the chosen destination, and the travelling to and from the destination. It is the essential feature of the travel activity. During this time, the tourist will consume “raw material” for his or her experiences, at the location of the stay, as well as during the journey there (Aho, 2001).

- Evaluation

When evaluating experiences, a comparison with past experiences is made and conclusions for the future are drawn. What is important to mention here is that on-the-spot evaluation of

experience will not have the same result as the same evaluation of the same experience at a later point in time. How tourists feel about an experience and in which detail they will remember it, will change over time (Aho, 2001).

- Storing

Storing is the way of preserving the experiences made, it is also the process of taking souvenirs, not only physical objects, but also social encounters or mental features, back home after a visit. Keeping these elements through storing has many forms, either by displaying souvenirs, remembering interesting people, writing down certain impressions in a diary or simply by telling stories. Storing has an important role in the creation of a person's experience and in addition, this stage represents a base for the next two steps in the formation process (Aho, 2001).

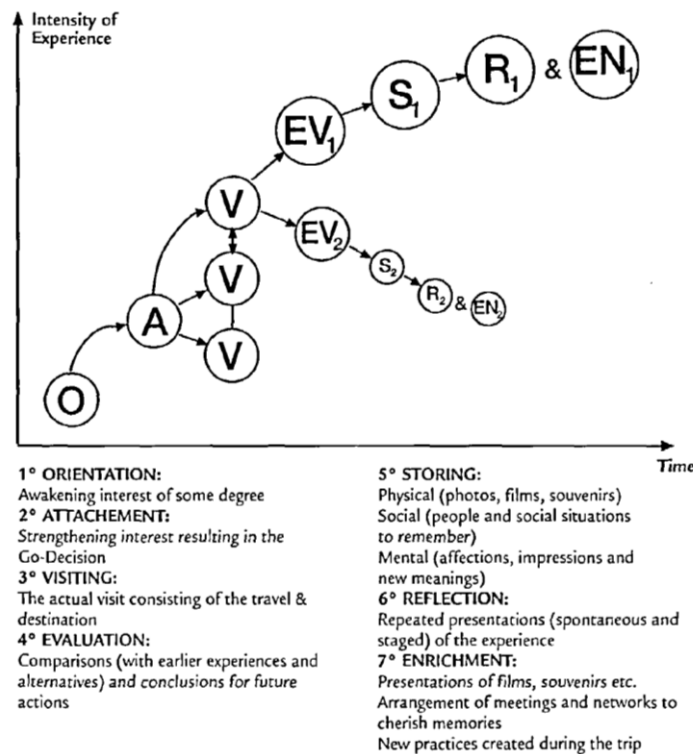
- Reflection

Reflection is the repeated presentation, either spontaneously or staged, of the experiences made. Tourists will share what they experienced through social communication – whether this happens in private or a more social setting. Either way, this is a method of indicating and increasing their strength. The reflection of one's experience is the base on the before stored materials of the travels (Aho, 2001).

- Enrichment

In the last step of the process, experiences are shared with a bigger audience for entertainment or information exchange. It includes presentations of films, souvenirs, or pictures, the organization of meetings to share memories or discuss new practices created during the trip. This has the purpose of spreading information to other people, who might be in an orientation or attachment phase. "The essence of this stage is the post-trip growth of either experience audience or the internal utilization of the experience." (Aho, 2001, p. 36). Enrichment therefore refers to the growing value of experiences after a trip (Aho, 2001). The presented stages are all linked into a dynamic system, where each phase has a specific role in the final experience.

Figure 1: The Seven Stages of Experience Formation



Source: Aho (2001).

Experiences can be changed, modified, and shaped throughout the process and in each stage. Moreover, the impact of each stage on the final experience cannot be evaluated, since it highly depends on the individual going through this process and the experiences being made. However, this system can be used as a framework for evaluation overall experiences of a trip since it provides a clear overview on how touristic experiences are formed (Aho, 2001):

- The experience itself begins already before the trip in the orientation phase;
- All stages are linked with their pre- and succeeding stages, however, some might be weaker than the others;
- Each stage is an indicator for the strength of the experience. The more stages are covered, the stronger the experience will become;
- Not all touristic experiences cover all seven stages. If one or more stages are left out or only barely lived through, the intensity of the experience and its value might be fading;
- The stepwise process reinforces itself after it is started successfully. This happens either, during single visits by going from expectation to enrichment, or over the period of several visits, when expectations of a newly chosen destination, presume overall rewards which are comparable to those achieved earlier.

This model offers a framework for a variety of evaluating different aspects of the tourism experience. Either to analyze the overall experience to gain insight in the visitation satisfaction of a visitor, or individual stages, mostly storing, reflection, and enrichment can be investigated, to provide material for understanding specific segments of experiences (Aho, 2001).

Apart from the models and theories mentioned, several other approaches and tools to further analyze tourist experiences exist and have been discussed in the literature, however, none of them seemed appropriate to be used for this thesis. Given the research on measuring and categorizing tourist experiences, it seems that the describes methods and frameworks of this last chapter present themselves as most suitable to analyze the experiences of the interviewees of this study. How each model will be used in practice and what their application is expected to reveal, will be further discussed in the analysis.

3 TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN RUSSIA

The Russian Federation is the biggest country in the world, with 143.5 million inhabitants (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). After the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.), which was also known as the Soviet Union, the country became independent in December 1991 (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018).

Today, it has double the size of China, stretches over eleven time-zones, and borders 16 countries (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018; Artal-Tur, Romanova & del Mar Vazquez-Mendez, 2015). An estimated 74% of the overall population are currently living within urban areas (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). It is worth mentioning that, while the rest of the Russian Federation is rather sparsely populated, around 80% of the population is living in the European part of the country. This is where two major urban areas are located – Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Moscow is not only the country's biggest city but also the second biggest in Europe after Istanbul, with 13 million inhabitants, while Saint Petersburg comes in fourth with five million. Furthermore, there are twelve more cities in the country which exceed one million inhabitants (Artal-Tur, Romanova & del Mar Vazquez-Mendez, 2015).

According to Artal-Tur, Romanova & del Mar Vazquez-Mendez (2015), back in 2010 the Russian middle class accounted for 55 million consumers. This is eight times the number of people than it was in 2000. This means that within ten years, the middle class grew by 10%, while the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita even doubled (World Bank, 2018). The country's GDP was US\$ 1,283 billion in 2016 (Worldbank, 2018). The travel and tourism sector generated 1.2% direct contribution and 4.8% indirect in 2017 (WTTC, 2018).

3.1 History of Tourism Development in Russia

Businesses which particularly aimed at creating services to facilitate people's urge to travel and enjoy leisure journeys were not established before the 19th century. Before that time, travel was mainly seen as a mean to undertake pilgrimages, follow political interests, do trading etc. Nothing was regulated by any system or government. By the end of the 18th century however, the Russian government started being involved in what could be called an early tourism development. This can be said since the term tourism started appearing in the country's literature and culture (Andrades & Dimanche, 2017).

In the beginning of the 19th century, people in Russia primarily visited spas, they traveled in groups and with this, laid the base for structured group tours. In the second half of the century, the first agencies, organizations, and associations were established, which provided services and trips for a bigger number of people. Later, Leopold Lipson became the first tour operator in Russia, by providing access to four travel routes through the country. Tourism companies started coming up and only World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 stopped a further development of tourism in Russia (Andrades & Dimanche, 2017).

During the period of the Soviet Union, the tourism sector in Russia underwent significant restructuring. Since all businesses and associations were capitalized, tourism was used by the government to create a certain country image, make ideological approaches, and even play a role in education. Tourism numbers started growing significantly at that point because going on vacation or traveling meant an increase in health and physical wellbeing as well as becoming more cultured. By the year 1980, Russia's domestic tourism numbers reached 28 million, mostly in the culture, health, and sports tourism sectors (Andrades & Dimanche, 2017).

It is important to mention that at that time, the government subsidized all sorts of tourist activities (Dolzhenko & Putrik, 2010), nevertheless, there was no legislation for tourism activities nor has anyone focused on the management of market orientation. Those issues however became bigger over time, especially after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 when all borders were opened and the before capitalized economy transformed into a market economy (Annaraud, 2010). The transition-to-market period brought an immense change to the country, not only, but also in terms of tourism which lead to a "dismantling of the old planned system and the establishment of new administrative connections." (Artal-Tur, Romanova & del Mar Vazquez-Mendez, 2015, p.17).

The transition-to-market period has improved Russia's situation on the worldwide tourism market. The country joined the UNWTO, as well as its Executive committee and the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the International Federation of Tour Operators, and the International Hotel Association (Artal-Tur, Romanova & del Mar Vazquez-Mendez, 2015)

3.2 Current Tourism Situation in Russia

In 2016, tourism generated worldwide 1,235 million of international arrivals, and 1,102 billion euros in tourism receipts. It is one of the fastest growing economic drivers in many countries worldwide (UNWTO, 2017). The UNWTO (2017) is predicting an annual 3.3% worldwide increase in international tourist arrivals, which means 1.8 billion international tourists by the year 2030. Further, emerging economies, such as Russia, are predicted to undergo a sustained annual growth of 4.4% in arrivals between 2010 and 2030 (Artal-Tur, Romanova & del Mar Vazquez-Mendez, 2015).

As mentioned before, in 2017 the direct contribution of travel and tourism to the country's GDP was 1.2%, which is forecasted to rise by 4.6% and an indirect contribution of 4.8%, with a predicted increase of 3.9% in 2018 (WTTC, 2018).

In terms of becoming a more popular tourism destination the Russian Federation, given this beneficial geographical position, could benefit from two forces, which can lead to an increase in tourist arrivals. First, the country has the advantage of a close location to main tourism sending countries. In 2016 Europe was the world's largest region in terms of international tourism flows, generating over 50% in total, while Asia and the Pacific came in second with 23% (Artal-Tur, Romanova & del Mar Vazquez-Mendez, 2015; UNWTO, 2017). Secondly, it can take advantage of the great dynamism characterizing the Asian regions of the country, by not only developing new destinations in those areas but also becoming a regional hub, connecting China and India with Europe and the Middle East, and hence attracting visitors from all these areas (Artal-Tur, Romanova & del Mar Vazquez-Mendez, 2015).

While domestic tourism has been big in Russia for the past decades, international inbound and outbound tourism still has a long way to go. Nevertheless, ever since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, international inbound tourism has grown substantially (Artal-Tur, Romanova & del Mar Vazquez-Mendez, 2015), with the only decrease of 8.6% from 2015 to 2016 (UNWTO, 2017). In 2016, 24.5 million people visited Russia, generating 7.8 billion euros. (UNWTO, 2017). However, international inbound tourism is still in its early stages and will need substantial marketing and structural changes to grow as preferred. The main purposes of visiting Russia are still family reasons, followed by business matters, which is a sector that is slowly but steadily growing. Most international tourists are visiting from former Soviet countries, or the European Union, and the majority of those is coming to see the Russia's two biggest cities, Moscow, and Saint Petersburg (Artal-Tur, Romanova & del Mar Vazquez-Mendez, 2015).

Nevertheless, in 2017 the tourism sector directly supported 1.2% of the country's total employment (854,500 jobs), which is predicted to rise by 4.3% in 2018 and by 1.9% over the next ten years (WWTC, 2018).

Regarding opportunities, the size of the Russian Federation opens countless options for the country to expand enormously in the global tourism market. With borders to almost all world regions and a strategically unbeatable position near some of the most developed countries in the world such as European Union member states or Japan, and to major emerging economies such as China and India, Russia could potentially become a major player in the global tourism sector (Artal-Tur, Romanova & del Mar Vazquez-Mendez, 2015).

Many problems are still existing, which limit the development of the country in a direction that is profitable for tourism. Large areas of Russia still have low levels of population density, poor infrastructure and people must live under difficult circumstances. These regions are mostly covered by natural parks and reserves. Furthermore, an immense part of the country lies beyond the Arctic Circle. These and other conditions may explain why most Russians live in the European part of the country, and why tourism also mainly focuses on these regions and does not go further to the East. However, a further development and promotion of a proper tourism industry in the rest of the country will be a long process and only achieved through long term planning and promotion (Artal-Tur, Romanova & del Mar Vazquez-Mendez, 2015). A short-term strategy however, will put more focus on the European part of the country, since existing infrastructure, better weather conditions, and a bigger population would facilitate the development of new and reinforcement of existing tourism destinations (Artal-Tur, Romanova & del Mar Vazquez-Mendez, 2015).

Currently, Russia's biggest challenges in terms of tourism are the lack of structure in destination marketing, not pursuing diversification of country when it comes to tourism products, infrastructure, absences of coherent, legal framework, seasonality, and proximity (Artal-Tur, Romanova & del Mar Vazquez-Mendez, 2015). Nevertheless, geopolitical reasons are amongst the biggest threats to Russia's transformation into an appealing tourist destination. In 2013, during the Ukraine crisis, international arrivals started to decrease (Andrades & Dimanche, 2017). Even though the situation has been improving since then, the expected 48 million in tourist arrivals in 2020, as forecasted by the UNWTO in 2011, will most probably not be reached. The biggest issues keeping Russia from growing into a more respectable tourism nation still are visa regulations, language barriers, and safety concerns (Andrades & Dimanche, 2017).

Today, while Russian outbound tourism underwent a massive increase which has just recently came to a halt, trends in inbound tourism vary strongly. Some destinations such as Moscow or Saint Petersburg have been increasingly popular among international tourists, other places and cities are just at the beginning of being recognized on the map. Many destinations still have insufficient infrastructure and old, outdated facilities and only a small variety of activities and offers. It will take quite some time for them to promote themselves and develop a tourism strategy, that will insure constant international arrival flows (Artal-Tur, Romanova & del Mar Vazquez-Mendez, 2015).

4 METHODOLOGY

This chapter is supposed to provide a deeper insight into the methodology which will be used for this thesis. The research design will discuss which paradigm is used, why content analysis was chosen and how the method of coding is carried out. Moreover, the study location is introduced, the data collection and sampling method is explained, as well as limitations are mentioned.

4.1 Research Design

The constructivist paradigm is supporting the methodological framework of this thesis, which is commonly used when conducting qualitative research. Constructivism means knowledge and all its meaning is a social construct and therefore does not need to be discovered, since it is already existent. When talking about the concept of constructivism, Illing (2018) mentions that “the world and its objects may have no intrinsic meaning, but they are partners in the generation of meaning”. He also states that even positivists claim that social realities are socially constructed. There is however, a difference between positivists and constructivists which is that the latter believe all meaningful reality is socially constructed. Further, Illing (2018) gives an example by explaining that ordinary things such as a table, may exist in real life, whether one is aware of it or not. However, only if one consciously recognizes it as a table, it really exists as such. Our social lives and cultures lead us to an unconscious decision on how we notice the table or other objects in our environment. Sometimes, these factors even influence if we see or recognize objects at all (Illing, 2018).

When it comes to differentiating constructivism from other perspectives, it is crucial to mention that the ontology of this paradigm is relativism. Relativism means that multiple realities exist, based on how individuals form their existence and content, meaning that everyone could live in a different world, depending on their sets of meaning. This also indicates that there cannot be one, “real” world which is independent of the human consciousness as all realities are socially and experientially based. According to Illing (2018, p. 289), “constructions change as their associated realities change and become more informed rather than ‘true’”.

Another factor that clearly differs constructivism from positivism and post-positivism is that in the epistemological aspect of the paradigm, the focus lies on radical subjectivism. Knowledge is said to be subjective and consists of constructions that are created by the interaction of the researcher with the participants of the study. Such constructions can coexist and depend on interpretation, which can be influenced by different factors such as social, political, or even gender aspects (Illing, 2018). Moreover, values are of great importance when it comes to the creating and shaping of the research outcomes. The role of the researcher within this paradigm is one of a producer and facilitator of the whole research process and it acknowledges his or her central role in the research (Illing, 2018).

The methodology used in constructivism is focusing on interaction. It is said that knowledge is gained by an inductive approach and therefore, it is important to recognize, understand, develop, and contrast constructions through dialogue. The researcher must have close personal interactions with the participants of the study to be able to uncover and improve constructs. However, this involvement may result in difficulties regarding confidentiality and anonymity (Illing, 2018).

During the process of data collection, various individuals were talking about their experiences and how they reacted when facing problems, multiple truths were constructed. Thus, multiple realities exist. Since an inductive approach is used, knowledge is constructed based on the interaction between the researcher and the participants of the interviews.

For this thesis, qualitative data in the form of interview transcripts was used and analyzed using content analysis techniques. Content analysis is primarily used to examine oral or written data, with a focus on its content to identify categories or themes, which have similar meaning (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The aim of this method is to ensure that knowledge is provided by the understanding of the contextual meaning of the phenomenon which is being studied. In short, content analysis is a “research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication.” (Berelson, 1952, p.18).

Furthermore, the main goal of this paper is to investigate how experiences made by tourists differ, depending on their language skills. This leads to theory building rather than theory testing. The fact that language influences visitation experience has already been established in various studies mentioned in the literature review and therefore, the collection of qualitative data seems to be the most suitable measure to further explore this area.

Qualitative content analysis is also appropriate when a lack of research within a certain field is prevails, as it is when it comes to language barriers affecting tourist experiences, and contrary to other methods, the data will not be collected and analyzed simultaneously but rather analyzed after all data has been collected (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This angle is approached to get a better overview of the interview answers. Moreover, Schreier (2012) claims that content analysis data requires a certain degree of interpretation which is believed to be given in this scenario since also the latent content meaning, which is underlying meaning of information, will be under investigation (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Apart from this, it must be kept in mind that tourism is a social phenomenon, and many social aspects of it, which are of great importance, have been largely neglected by research (Cronin, 2000). This is also pointed out by Tribe & Airey (2007) who mention that research in tourism is separated into two main fields – one covering the economic impact of tourism, the other one focusing on the social and cultural aspect of tourism. Since the latter is relevant within the context of this thesis, research methods which are characterized by a more narrative than numerical nature have been chosen. Therefore, with tourism being a social phenomenon, qualitative methods are the best to explore and build theory.

Drawing back to a previous chapter, the creation of experiences in one's mind highly depends on the person experiencing. A situation can create different experiences and evoke different emotions for different people. Therefore, it is impossible to create a set framework to measure the experiences of different individuals in the given context properly. Apart from this, experiences themselves are hard to measure. As mentioned before, the only scale that exists aims to improve the management of tourist experience to subsequently generate more profit as a tourism establishment, therefore, concerns the economical aspect of experiences, which is not the focus of this paper. In this case, it would be unsuitable to create a quantitative questionnaire to be answered by individuals about their encounters since the range of possible emotions describing experiences seems unmanageable and makes qualitative data collection followed by a content analysis a more adequate method.

Content analysis will be carried out by a systematic process of coding, which is a subjective interpretation of the interview data by categorizing certain parts into different themes. It consists of creating such themes or keywords, named codes, and attaching them to segments of the transcribed interview texts. To assure the data collection yields valid and reliable results, certain issues must be considered. Insomuch as the flexibility of the method, the absence of universal rules on how to code data (Polit & Beck, 2006), and the lack of literature on the analyzing process, the researcher must decide what would be most appropriate for the situation (Glaser, 1978).

The process of coding the interview transcripts, makes it possible to identify how often specific themes or issues were mentioned during each interview. All transcripts were repeatedly read by the researcher, before using codes to classify different text segments. All codes and their meanings can be found in the codebook, which will be further explained during the analysis of the collected data. After coding the data into different sub-categories, similar ones were merged into new categories and renamed to reduce the number of groups. New categories could then be further grouped into main categories. This process of abstraction has been repeated as long as it was possible and necessary to extract the core messages and meanings (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Unlike other methods for qualitative data analysis, this reduced the amount of collected data to be left with only the information that was relevant for the research (Schreier, 2012).

What is worth mentioning is that when it comes to coding data, usually either an inductive or deductive approach is used. Which one is chosen depends on the codes that are being created before the actual process of coding (deductive), meaning the researcher has certain expectations of themes that could arise within the data, or categories will directly be drawn from the obtained data (inductive). The latter is mostly used when there is only little prior knowledge regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In addition, by using an inductive approach, decisions on which parts to group in the same category for creating a code, are made through interpretation (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Considering the previously mentioned latent meaning of the texts collected and the aim of this research, an inductive approach was chosen as it seemed to be most suitable in the

purpose of the thesis. Nevertheless, even though the creation of the codes is up to the researcher, as there is only little literature with vague answers on how a system of codes and themes is created (Krippendorff, 1980; Mayring, 2000; Polit & Beck, 2006), it is important to develop the codes or labels as “as near as possible to the material, to formulate them in terms of the material” (Mayring, 2000).

4.2 Study Location

It was decided to interview tourists who have been to the Russian Federation and investigate the influence language barriers had on their tourist experience for a few reasons. First, as mentioned before, Russia has become an increasingly important player in the tourism industry. Not only because the country as a destination is slowly becoming more popular, but also because of its geographical situation, connecting Europe with the Asian continent, which opens new opportunities for various economic sectors, not only tourism. Secondly, little to no research had been conducted regarding the issue of language barriers and how much they influence the formation of experience. Moreover, tourists visiting Russia do not only have the “usual” problem of being confronted with another language they often might not speak, but also an alphabet they are not familiar with. It becomes significantly harder to navigate through a city, when one is not able to recognize writing on buildings, bus stops, or street signs. What played a significant role in the choice of the study location was also the lack of translations available and the lack of foreign or, especially in tourism, English language skills of the local population. The data concerning the little foreign language knowledge of Russian citizens by the Levada Center (2018) is additionally confirmed by observations and firsthand experience on-site by the author of this thesis.

4.3 Data Collection and Sampling Method

What has been further analyzed in the next section are interviews of individuals chosen by a non-random selection of participants on purpose. The chosen participants were tourists who are or have been to Russia after the dissemination of the Soviet Union. The interviews were conducted either in person, face to face with the researcher or via an online video call over the period of a month. Interview questions can be found in the appendix. Individual tourists were asked to talk about why they decided to travel to Russia, what their expectations were, which experiences they had during their visit in the Russian Federation, and if their perception has changed afterwards. The focus of those experiences was put on encounters in the context of communication and language, especially language barriers. Regarding the choice of data collection, interviews seemed to be the most appropriate method in this case, because again, experiences are hard to measure and therefore investigating information given of an individual’s experience requires a certain extend of interpretation of the researcher to further analyze the material.

This data collection is guided by the principle of data saturation, meaning that the researcher decides at which point sufficient data is collected and no new information will be uncovered anymore. This is a common practice for qualitative data studies, as it is likely that there are no preconceived ideas about the outcome of the data analysis and therefore it is up to the researcher to decide (Rodwell, 1998).

4.4 Limitations

During the process of designing the research method and data collection, some potential issues arose which could limit the outcome of the study conducted. Regarding the nature of the data collection one must be aware that all data is self-reported, meaning all answers in their interviews must be taken at face value by the researcher. Participants could have been biased in a way that they only remember certain events or experiences but have forgotten others. Also, one could be exaggerating when talking about their experiences. This issue was already mentioned in the experience section earlier, stating that tourists tend to create more vivid and, in their opinion, exciting memories than the experience might have been on site. This detail might influence the outcome of the research, but on the other hand, the focus is put on the difference between experiences, and not the actual experience itself. It is questionable to what extent this will then affect the results.

Even though all participants had an adequate level of English and were able to answer questions easily and in detail, it cannot be assumed that all individuals would have given a more detailed description in their mother tongue. Furthermore, as mentioned in the language chapter, culture highly influences our language and communication. The fact that most participants come from different countries and therefore have different cultural backgrounds adds up to the issue that some statements might be influenced by this background. Moreover, when giving descriptions of experiences or certain events, it must be kept in mind that in different languages, certain terms have a different connotation or a higher emotional meaning which the individual using it, might not be aware of. With this being said, it is also possible that two individuals who speak the same language, project different meanings to the same term. Therefore, qualitative data analysis can be rather challenging, as the same word or phrase could mean different things for different people, regardless if they speak the same language or not (Porter, 2000).

Moreover, another point that could be a limitation is the chosen technique for transcribing the conducted interviews. The interviews were all transcribed in clean verbatim. This means that all stutters, false starts, and filling words such as uhm, you know, well, etc. were removed. This transcription technique was chosen because it can be assumed that those parts of speech are not essential to the message that the respondent wanted to give. Moreover, not removing those “extras”, would have unnecessarily complicated the coding process even more, since the researcher would have had to disregard those text fragments, but still see

them, while reading and coding the interview transcripts. Therefore, transcribing in clean verbatim seemed to be most suitable in this case.

One last thing that needs to be addressed is that all participants mentioned a total of 15 different destinations, which they visited during their travels. Only three of them are located east of the Ural Mountains, which are the border between the European and the Asian part of Russia. Those three places were all mentioned by the same person. Circumstances as well as tourist facilities are most likely different in other parts of the country, if not even less developed than in the western, more touristy places. However, this is not seen as a limitation, as it is not of significant importance how little information is translated, but how people who do not speak any Russian experience the country, contrary to those who have language skills.

On first sight it seems that the limitations mentioned are not of significant importance or influence for the outcome of the research, however, one can never be sure of the influence of such issues and therefore they were mentioned to give a proper overview of what could be a potential pitfall.

5 ANALYSIS

In the following, an overview of the analysis process will be given. First, information about the conducted interviews will be provided, which is followed by a description of how the interview questions were created and how the previously discussed seven stage model of experience formation by Aho (2001) was used as a framework for the creation of those questions, as well as how it will be further implemented in this research. Then, the coding process will be explained, how many codes were identified and how they were merged into different themes, which are then discussed in the *Findings* chapter afterwards.

5.1 Interviews

As stated before, the process of gathering data for this research included the conduct of twelve interviews, focusing on a tourist's experience and impressions when visiting the Russian Federation. All interviews took place either in person, face to face with the researcher, or via Skype. All participants have been to Russia after the dissemination of the Soviet Union and exactly half of them possess different levels of Russian language skills. The individuals have been divided into two groups according to their language skills – Russian speaking and non-Russian speaking. The respondents were between 20 and 36 years old, and all of them are obtaining or have already obtained a higher education degree from a university. One of the participants uses English as their mother tongue, all others however, were able to properly communicate their thoughts in the respective language as well. As it can be seen in the table below, it was tried to not have more than one person per country in each of the two groups, to create a more diversified pool of answers, regarding cultural

background, since this is what influences a person's perception of their surroundings when travelling.

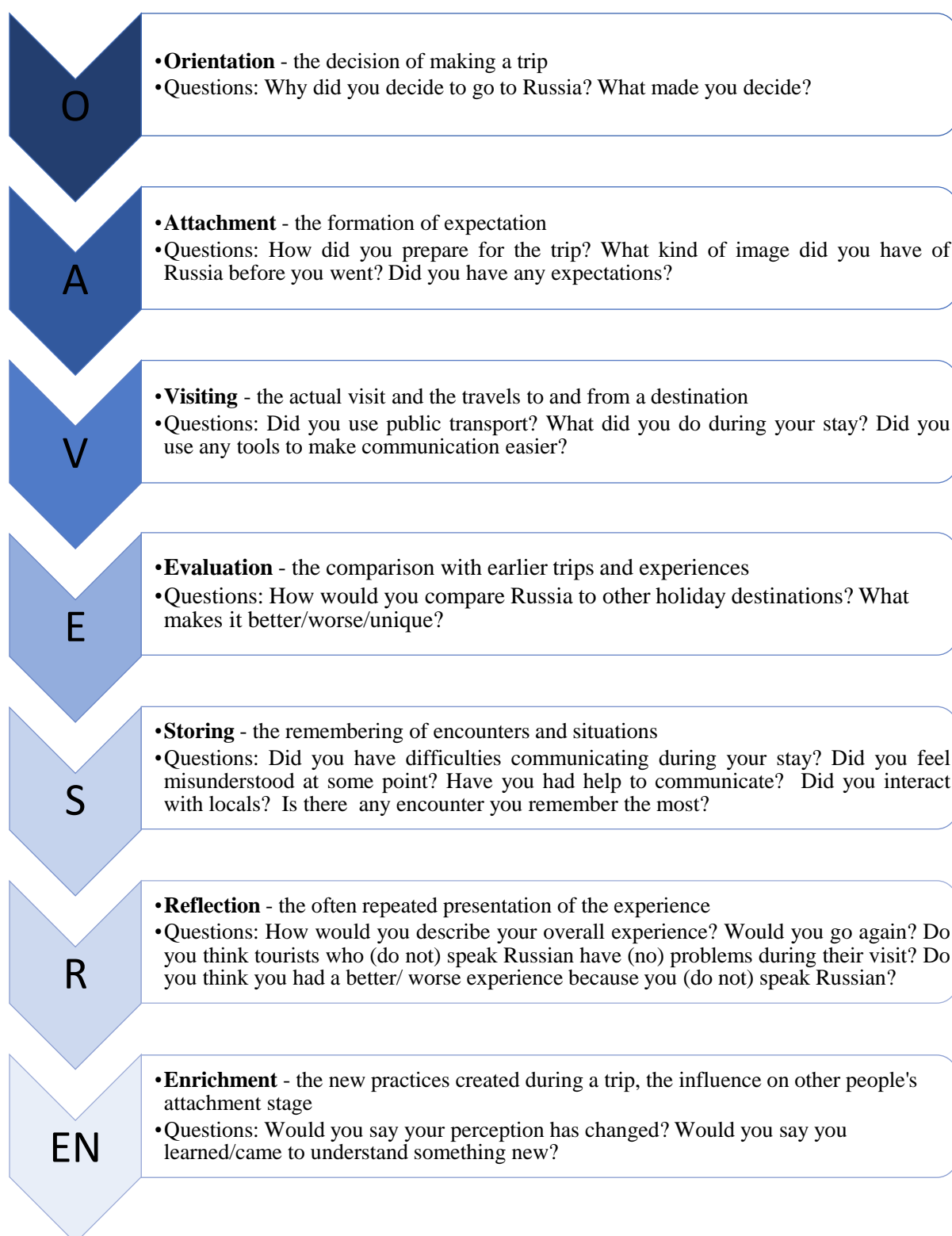
Table 1: Overview of Interview Participants

Interview Nr.	Gender	Age	Origin	Russian skills
# 1	Female	33	Hong Kong	no
# 2	Male	31	Brazil	yes
# 3	Female	25	Switzerland	yes
# 4	Male	27	Austria	yes
# 5	Male	24	Czech Republic	no
# 6	Male	27	Taiwan	no
# 7	Female	25	Denmark	yes
# 8	Male	36	Germany	no
# 9	Female	25	Canada	yes
#10	Female	20	Germany	yes
# 11	Female	26	Austria	no
# 12	Female	23	Greece	no

Source: Own work

Since no theory will be proven, but rather a new one established, the approach that has been chosen for the data analysis is qualitative content analysis in the form of coding. For this measure, and to draw a closer connection between the interview data and the theory of experiences, the coded data will be implemented into Aho's seven-step model of experience formation (2001). To ensure the collected data will be detailed enough for the implementation into the model, the interview questions have been developed while keeping the different stages of the experience formation model in mind. This helped to guide the research in a certain direction, by focusing on the experiences made and the impressions that were perceived during the travels, but not influence the participants of the interviews in their responds. To present this approach is a more visual way, the following graphic will demonstrate the seven stages of Aho's (2001) experience formation, paired with the relevant interview questions. All stages have been covered with questions that were assumed to be most suitable for each area. The aim was to gather enough relevant data for each stage, to further analyze and compare the stages between the two different participant groups:

Graphic 1: Seven Stage Model and Interview Questions



Source: Own work

5.2 Codes and Themes

After conducting the interviews, all of them were transcribed and anonymized to diminish any potential unconscious bias towards the interviewees and their cultural backgrounds. The transcripts have been read multiple times and then manually coded repeatedly. This means that the coding of the interview data did not happen in one cycle but numerous ones. In each, the researcher went back and forth within the data, creating codes in a first cycle, merging those in a second cycle, or even dropping some in a third, if they were identified to be irrelevant for the analysis. This process of abstracting data was described earlier in the methodology section and has been repeated until the data was left with only the information that is relevant for the research. The outcome of the abstraction can be seen in the illustration below, where all identified codes and the themes are listed. Moreover, the codes have already been categorized into their respective themes. A total of 79 codes have been labeled and matched with 16 themes. A more detailed description of all codes, including their definition and how oft the individual codes were identified, can be found in the codebook which is attached in the appendix (Appendix 1: Codebook).

Graphic 2: Overview of Codes and Themes

Reasons to Go <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest • Love • Work • Opportunity • Study & Practice 	Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior Knowledge • Guidebook • Vocabulary prep • Little/No Preparation • Other People • (internet) Research 	Expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common Stereotypes • No Image/ Expectations • Language Barrier • Culture • History • More English 	Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museum • Church • Exploring • Tours • Trans-Siberian Railway • Nightlife • Didn't Go
Impressions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich Culture • Low Standards • Good Food • Cheap Destination • Good Metro • Not Safe • Old vs. Young • Nice People 	Language Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Problems • Different Treatment • Easier • Different Experience • Lack of English • Impatient Locals • No Difference • Help 	Comparison <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique • Different • Harder • Urban Destination • Better • Not Typical • Cheaper • More Historic • More Military • Not That Different • Worse Infrastructure 	Realization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better than Reputation • Different than Expected • Safer • Authenticity • Diversity • Cultural Differences • Politics
Language <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of Language • Russian Term • Language Issue • Forgot 	Experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Experience • Neutral Experience • Negative Experience 	Places <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City • POI 	Tools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dictionary / Map • App/ Internet • No Tools

Overall Reflection	Perception	Encounters	Advice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Great/ Amazing •Interesting/ Exotic •Challenging •Want to Go Back •Might Go Back 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Change •Little Change •No Change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Daily Life •Necessary Encounters •Casual Encounters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Go See •Learn

Source: Own work

It has been mentioned before that experiences are hard to measure; therefore, the coded experiences of the interview participants will be categorized by implementing them into Aho's seven-step model. Using this model as framework for the further categorization of the coded experiences, it must be kept in mind that some stages will be stronger than others, since some have more themes attached than others. However, this should not be considered as a limitation, since themes were created by grouping similar codes, which derived from the data of the interviews. Therefore, having stages with only one or two themes attached, is not a potential weakness of this approach but is rather sort of a pre-analysis indication of the data received. As it is visualized in the table below, the 16 identified themes were each matched with one of the seven stages of Aho's experience formation process (2001). Each of those themes will be further discussed in the findings section, by comparing both groups' coded answers.

Graphic 3: Seven Stages with Themes



Source: Own work

Since the number of individual experiences in a stage indicates the strength of such, they subsequently also provide an insight in the overall visitation experience of the individual tourist. Moreover, it was stated that the seven-step system can be used as a framework for an evaluation of overall experiences of a trip because it gives a clear overview on how touristic experiences are formed. Nonetheless, was the focus of the analysis not set on only the overall experience of a tourist but rather also incorporating different aspects or sub-levels of the visitation experience. This is the reason for the decision that each stage is going to be discussed individually and an overall conclusion is only being drawn afterwards.

It must be mentioned that some codes have only been coded once per person, meaning that they mentioned the same topic or issue again, but it was not coded or counted separately, because it would distort the analysis. However, some other codes have been counted multiple times, because the nature of the code or the message itself implied that mentioning it repeatedly is essential to the message the interviewee was trying to give. This is what was mentioned earlier as the latent meaning of a text and is crucial to the research in this case, since the approach that has been chosen also takes latent meanings into account. It was also the case that some text fragments are different than others, describe a different situation, yet received the same label during coding. In this case, depending on the code used, they could have also been counted multiple times.

6 FINDINGS

The presentation of the research findings will evolve around the created codes which have been presented in the analysis, connecting the coded text fragments with the theoretical models to categorize experiences, which have been described earlier. The different stages of the seven-step model by Aho (2001) will guide through this chapter, with text examples directly taken from the coded transcripts, to provide a better insight in the data. Afterwards, a short summary of all stages and the differences between the two interview groups will be given. This will lead up to the final chapter with a conclusion, the answers of the research question and an outlook at possible implications these answers have for future actions and research. In addition, to present the outcome of the coding process in a more visual way, each stage will include a table with the codes and themes that were matched with the respective stage, as well as the number of how many times, a specific label was coded for each of the two groups – the Russian speaking group and the non-Russian speaking one.

6.1 Orientation

As described before, the seven-step model by Aho (2001) proposes *Orientation* as the first stage of the experience formation process, in which a person decides on the destination of a trip. In the coding process, five codes were identified for this stage which all fit into one theme, namely *Reasons to go*. The codes that derived from the data are *Interest*, *Love*, *Work*, *Opportunity*, and *Study & Practice*. What must be mentioned is that if somebody mentioned

they visited Russia more than once, and named different reasons, all reasons were coded and counted. Therefore, one person could have had multiple codes when asked about why they decided to visit the country.

Table 2: Orientation Stage Codes

Themes	Codes	Number of codes for Russian speakers	Number of codes for non-Russian speakers
Reasons to go	Interest	5	3
	Love	1	1
	Work	1	1
	Opportunity	1	4
	Study & Practice	4	0

Source: Own work

- Reasons to Go

When asked about the purpose of going to Russia, most interviewees who speak Russian answered that they either went because they were interested in the country, needed to go for work related reasons, had a girlfriend there or wanted to improve their language skills. Therefore, the codes *Interest*, *Study & Practice*, *Work* and *Love* emerged. All respondents in this group mentioned either a purpose and that they actively planned to visit the country, and therefore took the initiative to go, or that they had to, due to work or school related reasons. More than 80% mentioned an interest in the country and two thirds stated that they also wanted to improve their language skills and therefore also had a study-related reason to go. Only one person said that it was the given opportunity that made them decide to visit Russia, however, this opportunity was connected to study-related reasons:

“(...) the first time I went to Russia was in 2013, (...) I decided to go during that time because the idea of going to Russia has always been a scary thing, at least from a North-American perspective, it’s very far away, different, and difficult, so I thought going on an excursion with a school program would make it a lot easier (...)”

On the other hand, the respondents who do not possess any language skills, answered very differently. Most of them mentioned that they had an opportunity to go (83%), therefore, the code *Opportunity* was created. This code implies that the respondents did not actively plan to visit Russia in the past, but as the opportunity arose they, rather spontaneously, decided to go as the following examples demonstrate:

“I was on Erasmus in Sweden (...) and there was this wonderful trip (...) and I used the opportunity to visit the biggest country in the world.”

“Honestly, because the flight was cheap. We wanted to go abroad, a little bit more east, so we checked Checkfelix and it suggested a multi-stop route including Russia, so we decided to go.”

The second most coded label for this group was *Interest*, since some stated that they had a certain interest in the country before, and it might have crossed their mind to visit Russia someday. Half of the participants named interest as one of their reasons to visit Russia.

This first theme shows a clear difference between the two groups – those who are able to speak Russian, showed a clear interest in the country and its culture, some even wanted to improve their skills even further, while those who do not speak any Russian, mostly only went because they were given an opportunity to do so but did not have any plans to visit the country before. This is a first indicator, of how much language skills influence a tourist experience, even before starting the actual trip. In this case, it also shows that if somebody does not possess any Russian skills, they do not necessarily plan to go to visit the country but rather only do so when given an opportunity.

6.2 Attachment

When it comes to *Attachment*, it was asked how the interviewees prepared for their trip and what kind of image or expectations they had of the country. Two themes were identified for this stage which are *Preparation* and *Expectations*. Those themes also represent what tourists go through at this stage of the experience formation process.

Table 3: Attachment Stage Codes

Themes	Codes	Number of codes for Russian speakers	Number of codes for non-Russian speakers
Preparations	Prior Knowledge	5	0
	Guidebook	3	0
	Vocabulary Prep	5	1
	Little/ No Preparation	3	3
	Other People	0	4
	(Internet) Research	1	2
Expectations	Common Stereotypes	10	9
	No Image/ Expectations	1	3
	Language Barrier	1	1
	Culture	3	1
	History	1	3
	More English	0	1

Source: Own work

- Preparation

When asked about preparations, the group of Russian speakers mainly answered that they either had some sort of prior knowledge about the country, the culture, or even the specific destination they went to. More than 80% stated they received information either from teachers, class mates, friends, or people who have been to Russia before or were aware of potential cultural and social differences, due to studying the language for some time and engaging in the culture from afar. This means that according to them, they were also aware of what to expect:

“I kind of knew what to expect. Since I was studying Russian, I already knew a lot about the country, the culture, the people and so on. (...) I also had a friend who went there, a year before me, and she already told me about the city, the school and what to expect from the living conditions, (...).”

The same percentage was also prepared in terms of revising their language skills or acquiring a dictionary, to counterfeit potential language issues or just to be on the safe side, when it comes to using the right vocabulary:

“I also looked up the most common phrases I might have to use in Russia, since I already spoke Russian, I just polished up my vocabulary and I also bought a dictionary to take with me.”

However, 50% of all respondents speaking Russian also stated they only prepared a little to nothing at all, before going to Russia and another 50% said they used a travel guide to read up on the destination before going. The use of travel guides however, seemed as to only feed a certain need to acquire additional tips on where to go and what to see, rather than receiving crucial information, except for one case:

“I bought the Lonely Planet guide for the Trans-Siberian Railway, this book I consider to be really well written and it describes very well every part of the trip, like the distance, what cities are there, what you can expect and also how long it takes you between the different towns which is really, really good because in Russia you have a lot of time zones and if you try going from Moscow to Irkutsk and on the train, they will always have Moscow time. And if you have that on the ticket, when you need a hostel along the way, you don’t want to arrive at 2am in the morning, even if says something else on the ticket, so you have to be very, very careful. It’s a big help if you know how many hours are actually between the cities.”

Non-Russian speakers on the other hand, had no prior knowledge, or at least did not mention anything similar. The majority (83%), had other people taking care of their preparations or helping them at least. Those included tour guides, travel companions who spoke Russian, friends who live in Russia etc. Half of the respondents explicitly stated that they came to the country with little to no preparation at all. Moreover, none of them mentioned a travel guide

or similar, only two respondents conducted some sort of internet research and one tried to learn the language, but failed:

“What I did before I went the first time, was learning the alphabet, the Cyrillic alphabet. I tried to learn the language too, but I was incredibly slow, so my knowledge of the language was basically 0.”

One of the reasons for this lack of preparation in the non-Russian speaking group, could be that since the majority of the group had somebody they could rely on, no further measures were taken, and some sort of bubble was created. This bubble can be considered similar to the one that was mentioned regarding institutionalized tourists (Cohen & Cooper, 1986). They are said to travel within a protective bubble, since they do not have to or even do not want to engage with the host community. The same can be assumed for the non-Russian speaking group, as they are not able to meaningfully engage with the local communities at their Russian destination, due to the language barrier, and therefore already create a similar protective bubble before even going on the trip by relying on other people and disregarding any other forms of preparation.

When looking at the number of codes for the theme *Preparation*, it was observed that the data of the Russian speaking group was coded 17 times within the theme, while the non-Russian speaking one had only six codes - keeping in mind four codes were deducted from that number, since even though the label *Other People* was grouped into *Preparation*, it cannot be counted as such. This also includes the code for *Little/ No Preparation*, which is disregarded in this case, since both groups had the same amount of codes for this label.

- Expectations

Regarding the theme *Expectations*, not much of a difference between the both groups could be identified. Keeping in mind the previous theme of *Preparation* and the fact that most Russian speakers had prior knowledge, it is surprising that even more codes were labelled as common stereotype in their data than the one of the non-Russian speakers. Ten mentions of stereotypes such as rude people, vodka, cold temperature, or a “Soviet vibe” were counted while the non-Russian speakers had one less with nine codes.

Apart from common stereotypes, the next most coded label for the non-Russian speaking group was *No Image/Expectations*, meaning that they either did not expect anything or did not know what to expect. Half of the group mentioned this. Another 50% however, described an image somewhat related to history, politics, or such happenings in the past:

“(…) I always considered Russia as an ally of China in political questions and since I was a child, I was always a fan of Russia because, (...)”

“(…) I remember the first time I went, I had certain expectations or at least an image, since there was a lot of propaganda about Russia where I grew up, you could still feel the influence of the past, but I didn’t try to expect too much.”

While the non-Russian speakers leaned more towards those political or history related issues or had no expectations at all, 50% of the Russian speaking group mention cultural or social images, however, only short text fragments or even only keywords were coded here.

The finding of the theme *Expectations* could be an indicator that, nonetheless a person has prior knowledge about a destination and its culture, it can be hard to break down existing stereotypes, which could have been evolved in one’s mind before even starting to closer engage with the respective language, country, or culture. Therefore, it might only make little to even no difference, if a person does possess foreign language skills or not, they will not noticeably influence the expectations people have about a certain destination. In this case, it is probably more likely that those expectations derive from the popular image that is portrayed by the media or other influencing factors about a country and cannot be easily diminished by learning and further studying the respective local language.

To summarize, nearly all Russian speaking participants had prior knowledge of the country and somewhat knew what to expect. They also prepared by getting guidebooks or simply polishing up their vocabulary for the trip. The non-Russian speakers relied on other people to help them with preparations or did not prepare because they knew they would have somebody at the destination, who will take care of things. Some of them also relied on the internet as a research base, but none said that they knew what to expect or that they even thought of acquiring a guidebook. Overall, the Russian speaking group seemed to be much more prepared for their individual trips, at least according to the answers that were given. However, when looking at the expectations, the two groups do not differ much from each other. Both groups’ respondents mentioned nearly the same expectations. Stereotypes were brought up in both groups, the same accounts for cultural or historical related expectations. Same as for the first stage of *Orientation*, this second stage seems to be more present in the experience formation process of the Russian speaking group, since more pre-trip preparations have taken place amongst its members.

6.3 Visiting

During this third stage, the tourists are not only visiting the chosen destination, but it also includes travelling to and from the destination. As explained before, they are consuming “raw material” for their experiences during this time span (Aho, 2001). The interview questions matched to this staged asked for what kind of activities they engaged in during their stay as well as which tools they used, to simplify communication. Three themes emerged from the codes, which can be categorized as part of the *Visiting* stage – *Activities*, *Places*, and *Tools*.

Table 4: Visiting Stage Codes

Themes	Codes	Number of codes for Russian speakers	Number of codes for non-Russian speakers
Activities	Museum	11	9
	Church	3	4
	Exploring	6	5
	Tours	1	8
	Trans-Siberian Railway	1	0
	Nightlife	3	2
	Didn't Go	0	1
Places	City	23	14
	Point of Interest	12	8
Tools	Dictionary / Map	2	1
	App /Internet	5	3
	No Tools	2	3

Source: Own work

- Activities

Having a closer look at the codes for the theme *Activities* reveals that both groups mostly spent their time engaging in the same sort of tourist activities. The Russian speaking group had two more codes for going to a museum or similar, while the non-Russian speaking group was coded with one more church visit. The same can be said about mentioning going out to a bar or club, which was coded as *Nightlife*, or leisurely walking around the city with no real destination to go to, only looking at buildings and exploring the streets of that respected city or town they have been to. However, the big difference in this theme is that nearly none of the Russian speaker engaged in organized tours, only one said that they had the chance to participate in pre-organized tours, which was then assumed according to the context that they did, while the non-Russian speakers specifically mentioned tours eight times:

“Also, we went on a bus, which was driving us around the city for two hours and a guide was explaining us stuff about each statue, significant building in the city, (...)”

“On the first evening, we used the opportunity to book an optional limousine tour for two hours and we stopped at each site and had some champagne and made photos which was quite cool.”

“(...) we did a boat tour in Saint Petersburg, a free walking tour in both of the cities, we basically (...)”

Participating in organized tours can be seen as another criterion that would categorize the group of non-Russian speaking tourists as institutionalized tourists, since organized tours often cater to the specific need of the customer, especially in terms of languages. From the

given context during the interviews, it can be assumed that the tours which the interviewees participated in were either led by a guide in English, or even the tourists' native languages. Only one participant mentioned that the tours they went to, were only in Russian and because of this, they could not understand anything. However, as this results in a decrease in visitation satisfaction, it can be expected that others would mention this as well if it would have been an issue. Therefore, participating in organized tours, can add up to the level of how much an individual tourist is institutionalized or not.

Moreover, one person from the non-Russian speaking group even mentioned that they did not participate in a tourist activity, because they cannot speak the language and therefore thought it would not be possible to fully enjoy this activity.

- Places

This theme derived because both groups mentioned a considerable number of places by their actual name, either a city (*City*) or any other tourist sight or similar (*Point of Interest*). When evaluating the code *City*, the Russian speaking group named a considerable higher number (23) than the non-Russian speaking (14). What is interesting here is that from 14 coded city mentions in the non-Russian speaking group, only three were not Saint Petersburg or Moscow. One person stated that they went to Voronezh, Sochi, and Karelia.

The Russian speaking group on the other hand, explicitly mentioned a total of 15 different cities, some of them being located much further to the East than Saint Petersburg and Moscow. This shows that tourists who speak Russian, are probably much more aware of places outside of those two major cities, which can also derive from being more prepared for the trip than their non-Russian speaking counterparts, as well as the fact that all most Russian speaking participants went to Russia because they were interested in the country and because they wanted to explore more of it. Many of the Russian speakers mentioned later in the interview that going to those other places outside of the typical tourist destinations of Moscow and Saint Petersburg made them feel like they have seen the "real" Russia, a more authentic version of the country. It was also said that, especially Saint Petersburg does not feel like Russia at all, but more like another big, Western European city.

This could mean that, the more language skills a person possesses, the more they are engaged in the respective culture, and subsequently the more they want to break out of the usual, the known, the familiar, and are willing to see or explore something different. In this case, participants who possess Russian skills, do not only visit cities, which are commonly known to be a tourist destination, but also go to less popular places, which are less developed, not only when it comes to tourism, but also generally speaking. Nevertheless, those destinations might even have the same attractions available or offer more, different site to visit or places of interest to see, which will be only experienced by tourists without language skills, if they are willing to break out of their bubble and explore the unknown.

The other code in this theme, *Point of Interest*, does not show any obvious distinctions between the two groups. Russian speakers mentioned a few more points of interest that their counterparts with no language skills, but other than that, nothing noteworthy can be observed, except for the fact that the Russian speaking interviewees tend to mention those places by their Russian name and not the English one:

“(...) and then one of my favorite trips, we did it basically every time we went to Moscow, is there is Воробьёвы горы, it is next to the main university МГУ. I don't know if it counts but it's not a typical tourist spot but (...)”

Воробьёвы горы, called the Sparrow Hills in English, is an observation deck and area, where young people hang out after class, or in the evening, due to its proximity to the main university, also Moscow State University (MSU). *MTU* or *MGU*, is the abbreviation of *Московский государственный университет* which means the exact same.

This is the only feature that differentiates the Russian speakers from the non-Russian speakers, in terms of which points of interest they have visited during their travels. The fact that some places were mentioned by their Russian names, will be further discussed in a different theme.

- Tools

What is interesting in the theme of *Tools* is that the group which possesses language skills, received more codes for the use of tools than the one without skills. Two codes included mentions of a map or a dictionary and five codes indicate the use of an app or the internet, mostly Google Translate, amongst the Russian speakers. Only two Russian speaking participants mentioned they did not use any tools to make communication easier, while three of the non-Russian speakers stated so. This however, could be interpreted in a way that Russian speakers want to be prepared because they are already aware that they will have to use their language skills and therefore make sure to revise them or have a tool which will help to communicate more precisely, while the non-Russian speakers are sure they will not have to use any skills, since they do not have any, and therefore do not even bother to prepare. Moreover, because the Russian language is using a completely different alphabet from what the common western tourist is used to, many individuals are not even able to use translation tools in the ordinary way. This is demonstrated in the following example:

“No because not for translating English to Russian I never tried and then for Russian into English I didn't know how to try because I don't know how to type Russian or I don't know how to do it in Cyrillic.”

While others did not bother, simply because they did not have to:

“(No) Nothing digital. We had one person in our group who was able to speak a little Russian (...)”

Having help from other people contributed to the lack of need for translation tools or similar, amongst the non-Russian speaking participants. Therefore, the use of tools de facto indicates in this case that the user was prepared for a situation in which they had to use their language skills and did not rely on the help of other people.

On this third stage, not much of a difference can be seen when comparing the two groups. Especially not regarding which activities they took part in. The non-Russian speakers however, went on organized tours, while the Russian speakers did not attend any. In addition to that, the group with no skills stayed only in Moscow or Saint Petersburg, only one person made it further, while the other group named a considerable higher number of places they went to. Another difference that needed to be pointed out was that the non-Russian speaking group apparently used less tools while being on their trip. This can be connected to the fact that most who do not speak Russian, had help from other people regarding finding places, getting around, and communicating in general, therefore had no need to use any sort of tools.

6.4 Evaluation

Same as the first stage of *Orientation*, *Evaluation* was also only matched with one theme – *Comparison*, since during this stage, the tourists evaluate their experiences and compare them to those of past travels. This theme includes all codes that were used when the participants made a direct comparison of Russia, the culture, people, living conditions etc. with another destination or their home country. This was either by explicitly mentioning phrases like *compared to* or they stated something was not as they are used to back home or have never seen in another country. The interview question corresponding with this stage also asked how they would compare Russia to other destinations, therefore, each person mentioned at least one comparison.

Table 5: Evaluation Stage Codes

Themes	Codes	Number of codes for Russian speakers	Number of codes for non-Russian speakers
Comparison	Unique	1	3
	Different	4	2
	Harder	1	0
	Urban Destination	3	0
	Better	1	0
	Not Typical	4	1
	Cheaper	1	1
	More Historic	2	1
	More Military	0	1
	Not That Different	0	3
	Worse Infrastructure	4	0

Source: Own work

- Comparison

What was mentioned most when compared to other countries and destinations was that Russia is either unique or very different. This was mentioned by more than 80% of both groups. Moreover, more than 60% of the Russian speaking group also mentioned that according to them, Russia is not a typical tourist destination. Reasons for that were that in their opinion, a tourist destination is located somewhere at the sea, in a warm climate and adapts to the need of their tourists, which is seemingly not the case in Russia. It was also mentioned that even though Russia is such a vast country with countless options for nature activities, it is more of an urban tourism destination for maybe even a specific type of tourist:

“I think Russia attracts some very specific tourists, nature is beautiful but it is a bit difficult to reach, so I don’t really see ecotourists going to Russia, I don’t really see sun, sand or snow tourists going to Russia, even though it snows a lot in Russia, all the nature based attractions are too far from Moscow or Saint Petersburg, so I say it’s more like a urban destination, people who like cities, people who like historical landmarks, people who are interested in Eastern European culture or former, or Soviet history.”

“I wouldn't describe it as a typical holiday destination because even if you do, you can go to Crimea or something, but it would be more, a city trip vacation probably and it is definitely harder to find your way around than in other countries.”

What was also mentioned by most participants of this group (83%) was that Russia has a worse infrastructure than they are used to or have seen before at other destinations. This includes the bad conditions of the streets, dirt, and litter everywhere, no safety measures in busses, meaning they might drive with open doors, the driver is eating and talking on the phone while driving the bus and so on. It is interesting that none of the non-Russian speaking participants mentioned any of those issues. However, it can be assumed that Russian speaking tourists engage more in the daily life than those who do not speak the language, it is no surprise that the latter did not mention any of the listed issues. Moreover, it has been established that the tourists with Russian skills are going further than visiting only the two major destinations Saint Petersburg and Moscow. They also go to smaller, less popular places, where the chances that the usual standards tourists are used to differ, are significantly higher. This might also explain why 50% of the non-Russian speaking respondents stated that they think Saint Petersburg or Moscow are not that different from other big western European cities. Not being able to get beyond the surface of a destination and its culture is one aspect of not being able to speak the language or have anyone helping with communication. Most of the non-Russian speaking tourists stayed within the popular cities for tourism, which are prepared for people from all over the world with their different expectations and needs. Not being able to speak the local language and therefore not engaging too much with the local culture and explore beyond the borders of what is presented

right under their noses, is probably a feature only the ones with no language skills are familiar with, even if they do not realize it.

To conclude, when comparing Russia to other holiday destinations or the experiences from past trips, both groups have the same opinions and most interviewees stated that Russia is a unique place which is very different from other destinations. At least those, the respondents have been to. However, the Russian speaking group made a few more comparisons than the non-Russian speaking group, including that Russia is more for tourists who like city trips and that the country is not a typical tourist destination – since, according to the respondents, those are usually somewhere at the beach, at a lake or are more developed when it comes to tourism. Not only did they mention the low tourism status of Russia as a destination, but also most of the participants of the Russian speaking group pointed out that the infrastructure in Russia is worse than they are used to or have seen before. It seems as if this group gained a deeper insight in the daily life and therefore is more aware of differences between Russia and other destinations or their home countries.

6.5 Storing

Three themes have been identified for the stage of *Storing*. *Encounters* includes encounters with locals, either necessarily or casually and other situations of the daily life. *Language* is illustrating how often an individual was confronted with a language barrier or actively used their language skills, but also, how the two groups deal with names of places, either in English or Russian. Lastly, *Experiences* will give an insight on actual stories that were told during the interviews, and how those were perceived by the interviewees themselves.

Table 6: *Storing Stage Codes*

Themes	Codes	Number of codes for Russian speakers	Number of codes for non-Russian speakers
Encounters	Daily Life	8	0
	Necessary Encounters	4	2
	Casual Encounters	5	2
Language	Use of Language	7	0
	Russian Term	23	3
	Language Issue	1	13
	Forgot	1	8
Experiences	Positive Experience	6	2
	Neutral Experience	2	1
	Negative Experience	4	6

Source: Own work

- Encounters

When talking about encounters, a total of 17 labels were coded in the Russian speaking group, while the non-Russian speaking one had only four. Most labels were coded *Daily Life*, including living with a Russian, which might be a host or a roommate, going to markets, talking to people in grocery stores, etc. Those codes were only identified in the Russian speaking group, which indicates that this group was much more engaged in the daily life than the non-Russian speaking one, while visiting the country. Furthermore, the group with language skills also received a higher number of the code *Casual Encounters*, meaning voluntarily engaging in conversations with locals, by meeting up with friends of friends, or spending time with the before mentioned roommates, meeting people in bars and willingly talking to strangers or a bus or train. The non-Russian speakers only had two codes for those casual and two *Necessary Encounters*, while the other group had twice the number for each code.

This however is not surprising considering that casual encounters require a level of local language skills, as English is not a prevailing skill in the Russian Federation, as well as tourist are much more hesitant to talk to shopkeepers, waiters, or bus drivers, if they do not possess any Russian skills. Therefore, this might not be a new finding, but a confirmation of already existing assumptions.

- Language

The theme *Language* includes codes for text passages where the participants mentioned they actively used their language skills, meaning they talked to, explained, or asked somebody something. This label (Use of Language) was coded seven times within the Russian speaking group and never in the non-Russian speaking. This is not a surprise, considering that one group has no language skills, and therefore, expecting content that could be coded as use of language would be irrational. The same occurs for the label *Russian Term*, which was coded when an interviewee used a Russian term, to describe a place, food, or the use of any other word in Russian but also, pronounced a city name in Russian. Here, however, it could be expected that even the non-Russian speakers use some for certain popular tourist attractions, which was not the case in the end. The only mentions of a Russian term in the non-Russian speaking group were да (yes), нет (no), and спасибо (thank you), while the Russian speakers used a total of 23 terms, for objects, places, and other random subjects. All of them can be found in the codebook which is attached in the appendix.

An interesting observation in this theme is that even not using the Russian terms for places, the non-Russian speakers repeatedly mentioned that they have forgotten the name of a certain place:

“I went also to this big museum in St Petersburg, the very famous one I also forgot the name, the most famous one.”

“Yes, there, and I saw that famous church that is there and in St Petersburg I also went to this church, I forgot the name, but I can send you a picture later, also in Moscow I went to the white church right next to the river, do you know which one I mean?”

This happened eight times, while forgot was only coded once within the Russian speaking group’s transcriptions, and is of a rather irrelevant nature:

“I think one of the strangest things I encountered was in Nizhny Novgorod, where we went to a place, where I don't really remember the name, it was a local art museum or anything, (...)”

What also belong to this theme and was coded as *Language Issue*, were mentions of situations where the tourists clearly had problems communicating with locals, due to a language barrier. If they were not able to order, understand directions, find something they were looking for or simply got lost due to not being able to read street signs.

These examples and the number of codes for the different labels under this theme demonstrate the clear difference between the two participant groups, which has been assumed before, especially for this theme, since it covers language skills and encounters.

- Experiences

Text fragments that were longer, resembled a story or specific memories, were coded as *Experiences*. Under this theme, three codes were merged – *Positive*, *Neutral*, and *Negative Experiences*. Comparing the labels for this theme that were coded within the two groups, one thing became obvious. The Russian speaking group had three times more positive experiences than the non-Russian speaking one. This group even mentioned more negative experiences than their language skilled counterparts. Only three codes were used for *Neutral Experience*, two for the Russian speakers, one for the non-Russian speakers. Those were stories that seemed worth to be told, where the individuals were even confronted with issues such as the language barrier, but it seemed that those were not too stressful, at least not to a level where it would have been worth mentioning. In the following, one example for each code is given:

“I think one of the funniest and most positive things I experienced was the first time, as I said I came to Russia with my uncle, we went to the karaoke bar and it was, I think 5 a.m. in the morning and we were completely drunk and the whole evening we were sitting at our table just the colleagues from our office, my uncle, and me but then as the evening progressed more and more people from other tables joined us, and the group got bigger and bigger. We ended up at in the apartment from one of the guys from our table and I never saw this guy again, his name was Pavel and as of this day I've never seen him again, but we swore each other, we would be best friends till death do us apart (laughs). We were there at his apartment, continuing to drink,

he was preparing food, making some sandwiches, hot dishes, some soups and whatever. It was a very positive experience because I don't think that something like this would easily happen to you in anywhere else, but it was very funny and very nice.”

“And then there was another situation I don't know if that counts but I was already with Vica and we were in Vladimir and we wanted to go back to Moscow, so we went to the bus station and the lady where Vica was buying the tickets she needed to provide our names and she said my name and the lady asked, how do I write this name? So, Vica wrote my name in Latin letters but the lady said something like, I'm sorry I cannot understand Latin letters I can only speak, well read, Cyrillic. I had to write my name in Cyrillic because otherwise the lady would not have known my name. I don't know, how you cannot know Latin letters? That is weird, but I don't know, I didn't have much other misunderstandings (...)”

“Yes, there was one where I felt lost. It was in Ekaterinburg, I went to the train station and wanted to catch my train, I was there half an hour early, I was approaching to the train building and tried to find my train. But on the monitor, I could not find it, so I was a bit worried. I tried to ask the guard in the cash counter, she answered me, but it was Russian, (...) I started asking everyone I could find, I started showing people my ticket and finally someone spoke a little English, it was a guy who was ordering taxis for people, so this guy was able to speak English and he told me that this train station was under construction and that it has two entrances which was not announced anywhere. I managed to reach the other one, with my full bag pack, I had to run. Then I had another challenged to find my train on the monitors there to see from where it started but, in the end, I managed to get on the train. This was very stressful.”

Given the six mentions of positive experiences within the Russian speaking group versus only two in the non-Russian speaking and the higher number of codes for negative experiences in the latter group, it is undeniable that tourists who have local language skills have more positive experiences which can therefore add up to a more memorable overall experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

The differences within the two groups when evaluating the codes of this stage are probably the most evident. First, the Russian speaking group had a high number of encounters which are seen as daily life chores. This group interacted much more with local people than the one with no language skills. This however can be explained by the lack of language skills of the other group, and the low number of English speakers throughout Russia. In addition, the Russian speakers not only mentioned more places by their Russian name, or used a Russian term to describe something, but some non-Russian speakers specifically stated they forgot certain names of spots they visited. Even though all of what was just discussed could have been assumed before, since it is rather difficult to engage in a host community without language skills, it supports the claim that language barriers influence a tourist's experience.

Furthermore, also implies that tourists who speak a local language get a deeper insight in the community they are visiting, while those without skill seem to only scratch the surface. In addition, it became clear that the group possessing language skills, had more positive experiences than the one with no skills. Experiences were coded when the participants told a story about an encounter during their visit or something they remember the most. Most of all coded experiences in the Russian speaking group were either positive, or at least of neutral nature, while for the one with no skills, it is the other way around.

6.6 Reflection

This stage encompasses all labels that are connected to impressions of a destination. What differentiates these codes from the ones of the *Evaluation* stage is that no direct comparison to other countries have been made in the text that was labeled with one of the three themes in this category. Individuals were specifically asked for their impression of the country, their overall experience and if they think language skills influence those experiences.

Table 7: Reflection Stage Codes

Themes	Codes	Number of codes for Russian speakers	Number of codes for non-Russian speakers
Impressions	Rich Culture	1	1
	Low Standards	1	3
	Good Food	1	1
	Cheap Destination	1	1
	Good Metro	2	4
	Not Safe	1	1
	Old vs. Young	1	2
	Nice People	3	3
Language skills	No Problem	4	0
	Different Treatment	4	1
	Easier	5	4
	Different Experience	2	4
	Lack of English	4	4
	Impatient Locals	3	1
	No Difference	0	2
	Help	1	5
Overall reflection	Great/Amazing	5	3
	Interesting/Exotic	1	3
	Challenging	0	1
	Want to Go Back	6	4
	Might Go Back	0	1

Source: Own work

- Impressions

Within the theme of *Impressions*, eight labels were coded. What is interesting here is that only four of those were coded more than once per group. This already indicated that all participants have had rather different impressions of the country, no matter their language skills. The label that was identified the most for both groups is *Nice People*. Half of the participants in both groups stated that Russians seem to be nice people, who are very hospitable:

“I met a few very helpful people and I heard from some friends that they were invited for tea and food. I had that experience too, when I took the train. People are actually pretty social when you try to engage with them or their culture.”

Good metro was coded as often as *Nice People*, however, only 33% of the Russian speaker found the attitude of the locals worth mentioning, while 67% of the non-Russian speakers did so.

Another code that was identified within 50% of the non-Russian speaking interviews is *Lower Standards*. This was coded when it was mentioned that there had been a lot of littering, places seemed run-down, streets are dirty, living conditions were expected to be better and education seems to be lagging. On the other hand, this code was only identified once, within the group with language skills. Other labels such as – *Rich Culture*, *Good Food*, *Cheap Destination* and *Not Safe*, were only coded once per each group.

One interesting code that derived from the impressions of the participants was labeled *Old vs. Young*. This was coded, when interviewees talked about the difference between the generations, that can apparently be seen in the Russian population. Old people tend to be more introverted, and seem either cold or not open minded, while the younger generations are much more outgoing and curious about foreigners and their cultures:

“(…) and, to be honest, a lot of Russians are just like the stereotype. I think this accounts for the older generation, the ones who actually grew up living in the Soviet Union, but the younger ones tend to be more open more open-minded and they are excited about other people from other cultures. They're very curious about what's out there in the world. And of course, there are the other the older generations, were you can tell that they have been through stuff, so you see difference in the people, but apart from that, (…)”

“Also, I feel the Russians, somehow, they still have this little value of the Soviet Union, it's still a little in them. To me it seems like that. That the people still, at least the older generations, the younger, or our generation is maybe different, but the older generations, for them life is still, I feel the people are still, because they grew up with the Soviet regime, and they still have somehow that kind of thinking in their head.”

Even though this code was only labeled once in the Russian speaking group and twice in the non-Russian speaking one, the specific mentions of this very observation make it worth mentioning and raises the question if other people might have experienced the same but did not really realize it in that situation.

When looking at *Impressions* as a whole, not much of a difference can be seen between the two groups. What differs has been mentioned, however, those differences are very small and therefore of a rather insignificant nature.

- Language Skills

The theme of *Language Skills* includes all labels that were coded when somebody mentioned an impression they got regarding the possession of language skills. This is connected to either having no problems with the language or having help when it comes to communicating in Russian, receiving different treatment when people realized one speaks Russian, but it was also coded, when somebody mentioned the lack of English skills of the Russian population.

A total of eight codes were combined into this theme, the one that was coded the most was Easier, meaning that participants mentioned that they believe people who speak Russian will have an easier time during their stay in the country. More than 80% of the Russian speakers as well as 67% of the non-Russian speakers said so. Many also mentioned that this accounts for other countries as well:

“I think it's much easier if you speak the local language, but I think that's the same in every country.”

“I think if you understand Russian and can talk to the people, it is easier and if you can read the street names, it is definitely easier.”

“It's easier for them to communicate of course, to find things, to go to the museum and understand everything. But also, the little things like food shopping or ordering at a restaurant. And it would save so much time. Not having to translate everything on the menu and just order. Everything must be so much easier, (...)”

The second most coded item is *Lack of English*, illustrating the lack of English skills amongst Russian people. Four codes for each group were identified and therefore support the claim that Russian significantly lack foreign language skills, especially when it comes to English, which was made earlier in the theoretical chapter, with the support of data by the Levada Center (2018).

Moreover, another 67% of those who possess language skills mentioned that they were treated differently, as soon as locals realized they are able to speak Russian. Even one of the non-Russian speakers mentioned that they believe this to be true. However, 50% of the

Russian speaking participants also stated that Russians are often impatient with people who are not speaking fully fluently and without any mistakes. They tend to become rude or even ask why one is not able to speak the language better:

“(…), sometimes Russians tend to get angry easily if you are not perfect in Russian and they don't quite understand you, or you don't quite understand them. Even though I speak the language, I still have some problems. The older generations or older people tend to ask sometimes why I'm not speaking better Russian (…)”

Nevertheless, the majority (67%) of those with skills added that there were no bigger issues concerning communication and they had no problems regarding any language barrier. The non-Russian speakers on the other hand did not mention this at all. However, five out of the six participants stated that they had somebody who helped them, when it comes to communicating in Russian. Furthermore, 67% believe that, if somebody has skills in the local language, they will have a different or even more authentic experiences than those who do not. The other 33% think that there is no difference at all, no matter if somebody speaks Russian or not.

This theme once again underlines the fact that people who speak the local language at a destination will have a different experience during their visit. As already mentioned, this assumption has been established in various studies before but in this case, participants also mention which kind of consequence the possession of skills have or not have, when talking about the different treatment or the feeling of having a less authentic experience. Nevertheless, it must be kept in mind that this is only a small aspect of the overall picture, which will be presented in the end.

- Overall Reflection

When it comes to the overall reflection of the experiences tourists had in Russia, some minor differences can be observed. Within the Russian speaking group for example, five out of the six interview participants specifically stated they had a great, amazing, or wonderful time during their stay, while only half of the non-Russian speakers said so. Half of the non-Russian speakers also called the country interesting or exotic, which only one person with language skills did. Moreover, while all members of the first group want to go back or are already planning to do so, only four people without language skills said that they will visit Russia again. However, an additional interviewee mentioned they might consider it, which lowers the number of those who do not want to visit Russia another time to only one person.

In short, contrary to all other stages, not much of a difference between the different participants can be identified. Both groups had nearly the same impressions of the country, all the Russian speakers want to visit Russia again, but so does most of the non-Russian speakers. The only thing that was pointed out by only the Russian speaking group was that they did not face any problems when it came to communication that they were treated differently when they started to speak Russian, and that Russians, especially the older

generation, can be impatient if they do not speak the language fluently and without any mistakes. Those observations will probably never be revealed to the interviewees who do not speak Russian, since language skills are required to realized that there is a difference or even a bias from the side of the local population.

6.7 Enrichment

The last stage describes what the individual tourist realized or came to understand during or even after their trip to Russia or if their perception of the country has changed. Three themes derived from the questions asked and the data received, which are *Realization*, *Perception*, and *Advice*.

Table 8: Enrichment Stage Codes

Themes	Codes	Number of codes for Russian speakers	Number of codes for non-Russian speakers
Realization	Better than Reputation	2	4
	Different than Expected	2	2
	Safer	2	0
	Authenticity	2	1
	Diversity	4	0
	Cultural Differences	5	1
	Politics	2	0
Perception	Change	4	0
	Little Change	2	2
	No Change	0	4
Advice	Go See	3	3
	Learn	1	1

Source: Own work

- Realization

Seven different labels have been coded for the theme *Realization*. Most labels in the transcripts of the interviewees who speak Russian were coded as *Cultural Differences* (five times) or *Diversity* (four times). Regarding the cultural differences, the following passage describes in detail that it is not beneficial to speak a language, but it is also of significant importance, to be able to grasp cultural concepts and be aware of differences:

“Even if you speak the language, yes, you're lost sometimes. Not strictly because of the vocabulary, but there's always a logic behind the language, so if you don't understand certain concepts whether you were saying something or somebody else is saying something to you, sometimes you just don't understand each other because you have a completely different view of the world. (...) In Russia the whole thing with giving a present it is very important. When you go somewhere, you take a

present with you or if you meet a new person, a new relative or a new friend or something, you always have a present for them. At home it is not that common that did you do this you present something on Easter or I don't know Christmas or maybe it is somebody's birthday, but that's it. And in Russia, even if you received something, even if it's a small thing from a Russian person, you have to thank them a thousand times, even if it's just a bar of chocolate and if you don't do that they would feel insulted. So yes, I guess there are misunderstandings even if you speak the language all the time.”

Same as for cultural differences, the code *Diversity*, demonstrates that an individual gained a deeper understanding of the diversity of Russia as a country and that there is much more to it, than one might see at first sight:

“all these people that I talked to have a pretty good sense of what there is in terms of what to see but then there's just so much that's underneath that you kind of need to be an expert in the area to know about it. I try to think of an example. Russia is so big and there's all these little small towns and all of them have such interesting things and it's sad that all these things can get overlooked by the popular culture.”

“I definitely realized now how vast it is and that there's so many different parts of Russia and its culture that is still to explore and learn about. Especially from a Canadian perspective, Eastern Europe and the Caucasus and the south of Russia in terms of Armenia and stuff was always kind of a blur to me and when I went there, it opened it up more to me, when I got to meet people who are living in Russia from Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. Just seeing these people as their own instead of, this sort of former Soviet countries.”

While these two codes came up nine times, the non-Russian speaking group received only one code for *Cultural Differences* and even none for *Diversity*. This could indicate that the latter group is not as aware of cultural differences than the first one or simply did not notice any.

In both groups, exactly 50% of the participants gave an answer to the question of any new realizations that was coded with the label *Different than Expected*. This had mainly to do with how they perceived the cities they went to and the fact that they did not expect to like it that much. All coded answers are positive and imply that the experience they made was better than expected at first.

The two labels *Safer* and *Politics* were each coded twice in the Russian speaking group, while none of them were coded in the non-Russian speaking group. The first code was used when it was mentioned that the country felt safer than expected, the second one was used in situations where participants implied they came to understand something new about Russian politics or connected to it.

The only code which was used for often in the non-Russian speaking group was labeled as *Better than Reputation* – which was used when it was specifically mentioned that something was better than expected and connected to what was coded as *Common Stereotypes*. Some examples of passages which were coded in this case are:

“Russia is not that bad as country as it is presented in the western media.

“I would say that I realized that what I believed before, the way how people are, this stereotype that people say that Russians are unfriendly, is absolutely not true. That is just their body language that makes them appear maybe not that friendly but if you talk to them they are also friendly and will help you. But people unfortunately believe in the stereotype that are out there.”

“Russian are friendly people and not as unfriendly as others say.”

The theme *Realization* illustrates clearly that, depending on which language group the interviewees belong to, it influences their realizations or new understandings differently. The coded texts of the Russian speakers are closer connected to cultural and social differences than what the non-Russian speakers acknowledged as a new realization. The non-Russian speakers seemed to focus more on the fact that they were proven wrong when it comes to the stereotypes and expectations they had before the trip.

- Perception

When asked how or if their perception or image of the country has changed, after they visited Russia, the data of the two groups was coded very differently. What surprises when evaluating the coded data is that four of the six questioned Russian speakers stated something similar to the following:

“Honestly, I don't remember whether I had or what was my perception before I went for the first time it, I didn't have anything to do with Russia so when I went, I think I had a neutral perception, but it changed over the course over of time. When I came there, of course it changed. It's the little things, (...) But then after a while you understand that every country has its upsides and downsides, (...) So, even though I don't know what I was thinking about Russia before, I am pretty sure that my perception has changed. Maybe the first time I had more of a negative impression and then over the time, when you come to understand certain things, it changes.”

More than 65% of the Russian speakers stated that their perception of the country has changed, while the same percentage of the non-Russian speakers are claiming that their perception has not changed at all. They say that all their expectations were met and nothing surprising happened during their stay:

“I think everything matched my expectations.”

“I think the trip had not a big impact on my image of Russia, except for how the city itself (Saint Petersburg) looks. But other than that, not.”

“I would say they are more organized when it comes to winter. (...) But that is normal, because they have proper winters here, not like we do in Greece. But other than that, I can't think of anything. So, I don't think anything has really changed.”

Only a little more than 30% stated that their perception has changed a little, in the Russian speaking group, as well as the non-Russian speaking one. This indicates that Russian speaking tourist might be much more aware of the image they have of the country before and what factors are influencing their perception. While the participants with no language skills, who did not plan to go to Russia, not properly prepare for their trip and had much less encounters with locals and positive experience, tell that their perception has stayed the same throughout the whole journey as well as afterwards, it seems that Russian speakers are gaining more insight, not only in the local culture and daily life, but also their own expectations and thoughts.

- Advice

The theme Advice includes codes that were used when participants gave any kind of advice or solicitation about visiting the Russian Federation. In this case, both groups had the exact same results after the coding process was completed. In both groups, three interviewees each mentioned that people should go and see Russia, that the country has so much to offer and everyone should at least see it once in their life. In addition, one participant of each group advised that anyone who is planning to go to visit the country, they should at least try to learn the language, a few words, or at least be able to read the Cyrillic alphabet.

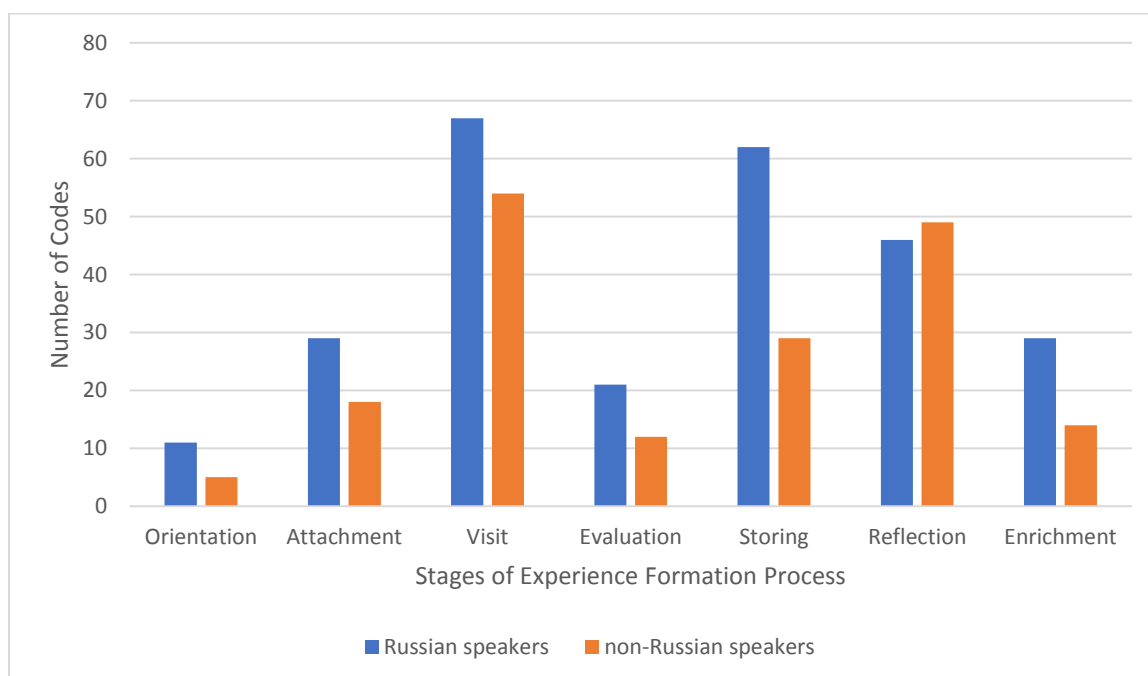
Overall, this last stage demonstrates how many new understandings were perceived by the tourists and what they will take from their trips, pass on to other people and possibly influence somebody else's Attachment stage. What was observed here is that the group of Russian speakers mentioned more new understandings or realizations that are connected to cultural differences and diversity within the country, while the non-Russian speakers realized circumstances are better than expected that they were wrong about their stereotypes they mentioned before. Moreover, contrary to the non-Russian speakers, most members of the group with language skills also stated that their perception of the country changed in a positive way after their visit. The other one mostly acknowledged that they did not experience a change in perception. It can therefore be said that the two groups did not only have different realizations after their trips, but also a difference in the development of their perceptions.

6.8 Stage Strength

While still being within the coding process, it already became clear that the seven stages have different levels of strength when evaluating the codes of both interview groups. Depending on how many codes have been identified for each stage. It has been discussed before that experiences cannot be measured but categorized (Aho, 2001). This has been done and through those categories, the codes, and themes in this case, they could be compared between the two interview groups.

To present this in a more visual way, the number of all suitable codes for each stage are illustrated in the graphic below. Suitable, because codes with a negative connotation which do not necessarily belong to the nature of the stage, have been subtracted for each stage. This includes codes such as Little/ No Preparation, No Image / Expectations, Forgot, etc. simply because the strength of stages is determined by what a tourist experiences while going through each stage. As, for example, at the Attachment stage, during which an individual prepares for a trip, codes for Little/ No Preparation cannot be considered because those codes would falsify the depth of the experience or the measures taken and therefore diminish the actual strength of the stage. However, codes such as Negative Experience for instance, have been taken into account since any sort of experience is crucial for the stage of Storing and therefore all of them have to be considered in the overall picture.

Graphic 4: Stage Strength



Source: Own work

As it is visualized in the diagram, in all stages, apart from *Reflection*, the group with the Russian speaking participants received a higher number of codes and therefore, those stages

are stronger than the ones from the group with the non-Russian speakers. It has been discussed before that the strength of a stage influences the strength of an overall experience.

However, as the specific impact of each stage on the overall experience cannot be evaluated (Aho, 2001), this diagram is meant to illustrate the difference in the strength of the experiences the two different groups made. The claims that have been made before that some stages are weaker than others, and that the strength of the stages define the strength of the overall experience on the other hand (Aho, 2001), are true if it is considered what has been summarized for each stage and where the experiences between the two groups differ.

As shown in the diagram, both groups covered all stages thorough their visit, which is a crucial factor in the experience formation. Moreover, as it has been mentioned before, this framework is not a tool to measure experiences but rather to determine which aspects are influencing an experiences and how certain experiences differ from another. In this case, as it was the aim of the paper, it was tried to identify the differences between experiences made by tourists who speak Russian, compared to those who do not speak the language, during their trip to the Russian Federation.

CONCLUSION

It has been established that language is everywhere, omnipresent and part of every human's daily life, it also plays a significant role when people are on vacation or travelling. Language barriers have been an issue ever since and people have been trying to deal with this issue, especially in tourism point of view, for a long time. This maser thesis survey was intended to answer the question of how much those language barriers influence tourist in making experience during their trip at a destination, where they are unfamiliar with the local language. In particular, how do the experiences tourist with no local language skills have differ, from those, who do possess language skills.

As it has been mentioned before, this work is trying to give a general overview on experience research. The topic of how experiences are formed, perceived, or even measured is too complex for the scope of this thesis. However, it must be kept in mind that this is one angle to look at experiences, and many more theories, frameworks, and methods are existent and used in this field. Moreover, the aim was not to thoroughly investigate experiences and their formation, but to classify and compare the experience of two groups with different language skills. Nevertheless, even though this provides just a basic understanding of the concept of experience formation, the results of the content analysis should provide sufficient useful results and a valuable base, which can be used as a starting point for further investigations into this field. It is important to further investigate the connection between experience formation and language barriers, since the tourism sector is continuously growing, and tourists are going further in less time than ever before. Because of this, chances that tourists have skills in the local language of the destination they are visiting are therefore decreasing.

This paper was intended to examine on how a destination is perceived, depending on how much a tourist is able to communicate in the local language. As is has been repeatedly mentioned, measuring experiences is rather impossible and therefore, tourist experiences have been categorized and further interpreted and compared. The two groups have shown significant differences in their experiences, not only from a language-related point of view, but also regarding cultural awareness and social engagement. Apart from this, the group with language skills seems to have much stronger, in-depth experiences which will become longer lasting memories. The two groups which were interviewed, and their interviews then analyzed, showed significant differences when talking about their experiences.

Firstly, the one that has no language skills seemed to engage less in the host culture and community, than the group with language skills. This already started before the trip when it came to preparations. The Russian-speakers prepared more in terms of acquiring additional information through reading or internet research. While on the other hand the tourists who were not able to speak Russian did not have any prior knowledge about the country, did not seem to care to acquire any, and had people they could rely on, when it came to plan and organizing the trip. This implies that there is no expectation to further engage with the local community to begin with. The fact that the non-Russian speakers would probably have more problems communicating when trying to engage is surely a crucial point, however, it was also discovered that those tourists actively avoided engagement by participating in organized tours for instance. The fact that they went on organized tours, while the Russian speakers did not mention any, demonstrates that they were trying to stay in their protective bubble and not have to face a situation where they might encounter a communication issue.

As no language skills were expected from the non-Russian speaking group, it has been no surprise that those respondents also had less social encounters than the group with skills. Nevertheless, social encounters are an indicator of how much a tourist engaged in a local community – the less encounters, the less engagement can be seen. Tourists who are able to speak and understand the host language obtain a deeper insight into the local community they are visiting, while those without skills seemingly only scratch the surface.

However, the encounters that were mentioned, evolved around language issues or have been of an uncomfortable, strange, nature or have even been describes as stressful. When comparing this to the group with language skills, it was observed that this group had only positive or neutral experiences at worst. Drawing back to the chapter about experiences, Pine and Gilmore (1999) mentioned that the more negative an experience is perceived, the less significant the memory of it will be and therefore it will be less lasting than memories of positive experiences. A question that could be raised here is however, if negative memories are easier forgotten, and positive ones are remembered in more detail, how come that the group with no language skills only mentioned negative experiences? Did they only have such experiences? Did the other group have them too, but only remember the positive ones as it is assumed by research? Do negative experiences need to have a certain strength of

impact to be remembered clearly? Or were they still exciting enough, so the tourists were tricked by their brain, which categorized them as something positive?

Coming back to the differences between the two groups, a second point to be mentioned is that the tourists who had no language skills and therefore engaged less in the local community did not seem to be aware of this. Maybe, they were not even aware of all the points mentioned above. They seemed less aware of social characteristics or less mindful about certain cultural differences than their Russian-speaking counterparts. This includes for example forgetting the name of places they visited or not mentioning any, apparently obvious, issues which were stated by the group with Russian skills., when it came to comparing Russia with other destinations. However, the most evident proof that there is a lack of awareness and mindfulness within the non-Russian speaking group is that the majority stated that there has been no change in their perception of the country after visiting. Especially since the Russian speakers mentioned how much their perception has changed and how many unfamiliar cultural and social peculiarities they came to understand, it is rather odd that the group with no language skills did not experience any change in their perception of the country. However, this could be due to the lack of engagement with the local community, which demonstrates that social engagement, cultural awareness, and language are interconnected.

What adds up to the lack of cultural awareness of the non-Russian speaking group is the fact that their travels focused on only two cities in the whole country, Moscow, and Saint Petersburg, while the other group explored more different places. By only visiting the two major cities, which are also the most developed places for tourism, the non-Russian speaking group did not get to explore what the country has to offer apart from those locations. Many tourists mentioned that, going outside Moscow and Saint Petersburg made them realize how much more is there to see and to explore. Only by going beyond those touristic destinations, they managed to experience the “real” Russia, a more authentic version, as they said. This experience and realization has been denied to the group with no Russian skills. They did not get to see the diversity that was mentioned multiple times by the other group. They did not get to experience the cultural peculiarities, that differ from their respective home countries. Or they might have and did not realize.

This leads to one last noteworthy observation, which is the difference in realizations the two groups mentioned. Whereas the one with skills talked about new understandings regarding cultural differences or the countries diversity, the other group only mentioned that the circumstances in the country are better as expected. The people seem nicer, the cities more European than expected and the metro is beautiful. This clearly demonstrates once again how language skills let a tourist gain a deeper insight into a host culture, while not possessing any skills means, one might only scratch the surface of what is there.

To summarize, it is possible to see differences between the Russian and non-Russian speaking tourist. According to the findings of this study, language barriers affect a tourist's

social engagement at the host location as well as their cultural awareness or the level of which one is mindfully perceiving their environment. However, this seems to have no impact on the individual's perception of their overall experience, and only shows differences when those experiences are compared to the ones from individuals who are able to speak Russian. Nevertheless, these findings are still of value, considering that they can be further evaluated from different angles, either the overall picture or the specific themes separately.

In addition, it seems that the issue of language barriers is not as big a problem when it comes to experience formation itself, since mostly all respondents stated they had an amazing experience and would like to visit Russia again. This means that, it is of no importance that they had a different, maybe even less authentic experience, they still enjoyed their trip. Even though, the non-Russian speakers had less engagement with the local community and clearly lack cultural awareness, or a deeper cultural understanding, the fact that they lack this awareness, makes them not realize what they might be missing. The actual problem, if one is searched for, is that the potential issue of language barriers is keeping tourists from even considering going to the country.

Especially in the case of Russia, with the findings of this thesis it can be suggested that putting a bigger focus in the issue of language barriers in tourism, can be crucial for the country's success in the tourism sector. As it has been mentioned before, Russia is still trying to put itself on the map when it comes to popular holiday destinations. It already receives an incredible number of tourists every year and those numbers are constantly growing. In addition to this, with the 2018 FIFA World Championship, which has just taken place in the country, it has received major attention on a worldwide scale, especially in terms of tourism. This momentum could be used for the country's advantage, to promote it even more amongst other, more popular tourism destinations. Still, many tourists seem to hesitate to go to Russia because of language barrier, however, all of those who went, had a good experience and nearly all respondents would visit the country again. If somebody has a good experience, then there is subsequently a positively connotated word of mouth, which could result in a more positive country image and more tourist arrivals overall.

As for future research it could be considered to have a closer look at tools that help people communicate in foreign languages. Even though in the data analysis of this paper, it was indicated that many non-Russian speakers did not use any tools, because they relied on other people. Some mentioned they did not use them, because they were not able to read Cyrillic anyway, which would be a crucial skill to use a dictionary or any app with similar functions. Moreover, in the beginning of the data analysis it was mentioned that many of the respondents who did not speak Russian, only went to Russia because they were given the opportunity and not directly planned to visit the country. However, the ones who speak Russian did plan, and this is where the focus could be put. To offer a tool or a service, that will already take away any potential fear of language barriers that might occur. If tourists know, there are tools to simplify communication during their travels within countries which have not only a different language but also a completely different alphabet, they might start

considering those places as holiday destinations. As for the experience in the countries itself, such tools would bring benefits to those who already decided to visit a country where they are not able to properly communicate and might have less of an authentic experience as they might have otherwise, no matter the fact if those tourists are aware of this or not.

To draw back to the initial research question, of how the experiences of tourists differ, depending if they speak the language or not, it is safe to say that tourists who speak the local language, have a much stronger, more meaningful experience which will result in more detailed and longer lasting memories. Moreover, the non-Russian speaking group lacks social engagement and cultural awareness during and after their trip, however, they seem not to be aware of this or least, this does not affect their overall experience negatively. What it does affect however is what was mentioned initially that tourists who do not speak Russian, are not actively planning to visit the country, and this is a crucial point, which might influence the country's competitiveness on the tourism market.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Codebook

Themes	Codes	Definitions	Examples
Reasons to Go	Interest	An interest in the country was mentioned	Because it is not that far away from Europe, and somehow it is still not Europe anymore and you have a lot of ideas of what Russia is like from the pictures you see on the internet or over the media. It seems to be kind of a weird country and that's what makes it interesting. I also wanted to find out if it is actually the way it is transported by the media. I've also been to Belarus before and that country kind of seem cold to me and I wanted to know how Russia is compared to Belarus.
	Love	One had a significant other to visit	(...) and then I had a girlfriend from Russia and that's it.
	Work	One went on a business trip or mentioned work related reasons for the visit	At that time it was because of my job, I was a travel journalist so I got invited by a company (...) I had to interview the artist there, so because of work reasons I went to Russia.
	Opportunity	One went because they had the opportunity to go, did not necessarily plan before	I was on Erasmus in Sweden at the university of Linköping and there was this wonderful trip organized by ESN and I used the opportunity to visit the biggest country in the world.
	Study & Practice	One wanted to improve their language skills, visited a language school, or summer course	(...) but I was studying Russian at that time and I wanted to practice my skills over the summer, (...)
Preparation	Prior Knowledge	One received or gained information prior to the trip, in a class, by a guide, by people who have been there, etc.; or one was given advice about the destination	I kind of knew what to expect. Since I was studying Russian, I already knew a lot about the country, the culture, the people and so on.
	Guidebook	One bought a travel guide or similar, to receive info about the country	I bought two travel guides because I love to read travel guides (...)

	Vocabulary Prep	Vocabulary was revised, a dictionary was bought, an app was used before the trip, a language class was visited, etc.	(...) I just polished up my vocabulary and I also bought a dictionary to take with me.
	Little/ No Preparation	One mentioned they did not prepare anything	Since it was an organized trip I didn't prepare much, (...)
	Other People	One relied on somebody else, other people, to help with planning and preparations	(...) we have a friend who lives here, so we were in contact with him. He helped us and told us, basically managed our trip. Helped with the visa, booked trains and busses, told us what to do, what to see, where to go and so on. He even helped us when we went to buy food.
	(Internet) Research	One conducted (internet) research about the destination they were going to	I was just looking up the cities on Google, that's all.
Expectations	Common Stereotypes	Commonly known stereotypes such as the cold, vodka, cheap destination, dirty, run-down, Eastern European, Soviet vibe, cold and unfriendly people, were mentioned	I had a feeling that the people may be very cold and not so nice (...)
	No Image/ Expectations	It was stated that there were no expectations or no certain image about Russia prevailing before, or one was not sure what to expect	And I actually had none I think. I haven't thought about it at all.
	Language Barrier	The expectation of language barriers was mentioned	I expected it kind of, like based on what my professor said, that it wasn't going be English friendly and that you have to try and speak as much Russian as possible otherwise you're going be very lost and confused.
	Culture	Expectations connected to culture were mentioned	(...) and at the same time with a lot of cultural things happening, (...)
	History	Expectations connected to history were mentioned	As a Chinese, I always considered Russia as an ally of China in political questions (...)
	More English	It was expected that Russian speak more English.	I believed that more people would speak English.

Activities	Museum	Going to a museum or similar, cultural place like ballet or opera was mentioned	Sure, we went to museums, (...)
	Church	Going to a church or similar was mentioned	I also visited Saint Isaac's Cathedral which for me, was one of the most amazing churches I ever visited.
	Exploring	One mentioned exploring the city, walking around, with no particular purpose	I prefer walking around in towns and then if I see something interesting, I have a look at it.
	Tours	Going on an organized tour or similar was mentioned	Also, we went on a bus, which was driving us around the city for almost 2 hours and a guide was explaining us stuff about each statue, significant building in the city, (...)
	Trans-Siberian Railway	Travelling with the Trans-Siberian Railway was mentioned	I was going with the Tran Siberian Railway sometimes by Пляцкарт sometimes by Kype down to Irkutsk to see Lake Baikal.
	Nightlife	Going out to a bar or a club was mentioned	Afterwards we went clubbing.
	Didn't Go	A place was not visited, due to language barriers or other concerns	There was this one stand-up comedy show which I did not go to because, of course I did not understand Russian.
Places	City	Cities were mentioned by their name	The first time I was in Saint Petersburg (...)
	Point of Interest (POI)	Sights or popular places were mentioned by their name	(...) we went also outside of the city to Peterhof and Pushkin.
Tools	Dictionary / Map	The use of a dictionary was mentioned	(...) I had a dictionary on my phone, because I always had to look up certain words.
	App /Internet	One mentioned they used an app or the internet	(...) I use my smartphone and I have a dictionary, not a book but an app on my phone and also the internet helps a lot.
	No Tools	One mentioned they used no tools to make communication easier.	Ok short answer is no.
Comparison	Unique	Compared to other countries/ destinations, Russia is unique	I would say it is somewhat unique.
	Different	Compared to other countries/ destinations, Russia is very different	And it is still very, very different, in terms of, I don't know, it's difficult to say.

	Harder	Compared to other countries/destinations, life in Russia is harder, it is harder to get around as tourist, etc.	(...) and it is definitely harder to find your way around than in other countries. There are many traps waiting for you I think. Not necessarily criminals but just, it's harder to find your way on your own.
	Urban destination	Russia is more of an urban destination	(...) so I say it's more like a urban destination, people who like cities, (...)
	Better	Compared to other countries/destinations, Russia is an overall better destination	(...) but then on the other hand they have things that I think are better than in Austria for example.
	Not Typical	Compared to other countries/destinations, Russia is not what is considered to be a typical tourist destination	I wouldn't describe it as a typical holiday destination because even if you do, you can go to Crimea or something, but it would be more, a city trip vacation probably (...)
	Cheaper	Compared to other countries/destinations, Russia is a cheaper destination	One other thing that is good too is that Russia is relatively cheap, cheap to traveled through from the perspective of (...)
	More Historic	Compared to other countries/destinations, Russia has more to offer historically	(...) who like historical landmarks, people who are interested in Eastern European culture or former, or Soviet history. I think it is very interesting and, I am one of those who is very interested in that so to me it was like heaven, (...)
	More Military	Compared to other countries/destinations, Russia has more military presence	And maybe because it was of that holiday, or not, you always saw military parades. And I thought, is that normal?
	Not That Different	Russia is not too different from other European cities	(...) but comparing to other European cities, other capitals, it was not that different (...)
	Worse Infrastructure	Compared to other countries/destinations - public transport, state of streets in general, safety measures in vehicles, etc.	(...) and yes of course the roads are not the best, or not in the best condition, or public transport is worse than back home, but (...)

Encounters	Daily Life	Encounters that happen in daily, ordinary life, not necessarily of touristic nature, e.g. one lived with a host, or Russian roommates, learned how to prepare a dish, went to a market, to the grocery store, etc.	But now, since I'm in Voronezh, I am in more contact with locals because I just have more time and I go to markets, I have conversations with the people there.
	Necessary Encounters	Communication with others happened because it was needed, e.g. interactions with bar/café/restaurant staff, in a shop, with work colleagues, etc. (nothing else had been coded before)	Yes, when were on the street or when we were in restaurants, talking to the waiters, or in shopping malls. But not that much, just a little bit.
	Casual Encounters	Communication with other happened on a voluntary basis, in a casual setting, e.g. meeting with friends, or friends of friends, casual conversations with strangers, etc. (nothing else had been coded before)	Sometimes when I went out with my friends we met some Russian people in a bar who overheard us speaking English, they came over and they started speaking English with us, like the little English they knew, but then at some point we would switch to Russian and just have a big, let's say, practice session.
Language	Use of Language	Explicitly said that one verbally communicated (nothing else had been coded before)	I also remembered that once an old lady came over to me in the city and was asking for the way and funny enough I knew where she had to go to, so I explained the way to her, as a tourist.
	Russian Term	Russian terms were used during the interview	If you travel on the Трансиб, by плацкарт, you (...)
	Language Issue	Mention of problems one could encounter when not speaking Russian, mention of not being able to communicate, it was explicitly stated that issues communicating in a specific situation occurred, or the language issue impacted other aspects of the trip	(...) we tried to get there by subway, but it was impossible because we didn't speak Russian and people didn't speak English and well, we finally cancelled, went back, and walked around the city center.

	Forgot	Explicitly said that they forgot a name of a place	I went to this place in Moscow I forgot the name and I think I went to a museum and I went to the famous place, the red wall?
Experiences	Positive Experience	It was explicitly stated that an encounter or an experience was funny, good, amazing, etc., or it was assumed by the given context	(...) I was sitting next to a guy who was quite boring, and I bought a chess game, a magnetic chess game, and he was really happy when he figured he could play with me. Then I heard some women singing and I went further down to have a look what they're doing, and it turned out they were traveling home from a Tupperware conference and they were super nice, gave me a Tupper box filled with fruits and сырок. They were showing me pictures of their kids, asking me if I am married yet and what my parents think that I am travelling all by myself, why am I doing this, why am I not married yet and so on. It was just the whole situation, very funny.
	Neutral Experience	An experience was told, but it could not be identified if it was positive or negative	When I entered the country, I was entering through the Latvian border which was not much used by non-Russians, so the Border lady doubted that I didn't need a visa. She was holding me for a while, she made some phone calls until she realized that Brazilians don't need a visa. I was telling her English, because my Russian was not efficient enough, but either she didn't understand English or she just did not want to understand English but after a while that was solved.
	Negative Experience	Bad, stressful, strange experience caused by communication issue/ language barrier or something different. It was explicitly stated or assumed by the given context	Yes, something weird. We were walking down the street and getting talked to by some random cab drivers inviting us to some red-light district or clubs. That was really strange. And uncomfortable.
Impressions	Rich Culture	It was mentioned that country has rich culture/ many traditions/ interesting history etc.	(...) I think the culture is very very rich in traditions and I could also see a lot of handicrafts and stuff like that.

	Low Standards	It was mentioned that Russia has lower standards regarding education, living conditions, cleanliness of streets, state of buildings, etc.	A lot is some just run down and not working and the places itself are very dirty, so it's not like the European standard in any way, (...)
	Good Food	It was mentioned that the food is good	Also, this is what I always mention to other people - I LOVE THE FOOD.
	Cheap Destination	It was mentioned that the country is a cheap destination	(...) and it's super cheap, most of the times at least, unless you want to have lunch at the Red Square.
	Good Metro	It was mentioned that the country has a good/ well developed/ nice/ easily understandable metro system	(...) it's usually a pretty easy system to understand and usually well developed and that was also the case in Moscow and St. Petersburg, it is very easy to get around and not get lost if you just use the metro.
	Not Safe	It was mentioned that Russia does not seem like a safe destination, or safety measures are not taken seriously in certain situations	I have to say I still feel Russia is somehow a dangerous and not safe country
	Old vs. Young	It was mentioned that the elderly seem very reserved or even grim, while younger people seem more curious and open-minded	(...) to be honest, a lot of Russians are just like the stereotype. I think this accounts for the older generation, the ones who actually grew up living in the Soviet Union, but the younger ones tend to be more open more open-minded and they are excited about other people from other cultures. They're very curious about what's out there in the world. And of course, there are the other the older generations, were you can tell that they have been through stuff, so you see difference in the people, but apart from that, (...)
	Nice People	It was mentioned that locals are hospitable, nice, and helpful	I think Russians are extremely hospitable, if you manage to be invited by them. Also, I think it's absolutely impossible to die because you are hungry when you are invited by a Russian. On first impression, Russians can be very cold, if you don't know them, but if you somehow manage to break the ice, to me they were always extremely friendly.

Language Skills	No Problem	It was mentioned that there were no problems regarding communication	I have had no troubles ordering food, or understanding the menu in the first place, (...)
	Different Treatment	It was mentioned that one receives a different treatment, as soon as locals realized they speak Russian	I'd also say that a lot of people treat you differently when they know you can understand them. It seemed at first, they were looking at me like a stupid tourist, who is just there to buy souvenirs, I am talking about a situation at a Russian market now, but when I started speaking Russian, even though it was not perfect, it was I turned a switch in those people. They were somewhat nicer.
	Easier	Mentioned that they had an easier time, think that one has an easier time speaking Russian, less problems if they speak Russian, also harder if you have no skills	I think if you don't speak Russian at all, in St Petersburg it's okay, you're going to survive but if you're go down to Tomsk or smaller places on the Трансиб, it is tough.
	Different Experience	It was mentioned that the experience is different, more authentic, or even better if somebody possesses language skills	No, I think it is different but not necessarily better.
	Lack of English	The lack of English skills of the Russian population was mentioned	Especially here, nobody really speaks English (...)
	Impatient Locals	Mention ppl are impatient when trying to speak Russian to them	(...) sometimes Russians tend to get angry easily if you are not perfect in Russian and they don't quite understand you, or you don't quite understand them. Even though I speak the language, I still have some problems. The older generations or older people tend to ask sometimes why I'm not speaking better Russian (...)
	No Difference	It was mentioned that it makes no difference, whether a person has language skills or not	I think, in St. Petersburg, they are so used to tourism, that it might not make a difference.
	Help	It was stated that there were no problems regarding communication due to help from friends, family, guides, etc.	We had one person in our group who was able to speak a little bit Russian and when we had problems at restaurants for example, (...)

Overall Reflection	Great/Amazing	It was stated that the trip/ country/ experience was great, amazing, life changing, etc.	My overall experience in Russia. I loved it. Honestly, I felt it was a great place to go, (...)
	Interesting/ Exotic	It was stated that the trip/ country/ experience was interesting or exotic	(...) I think it's a very interesting country (...)
	Challenging	It was stated that the trip/ country/ experience was challenging	Definitely interesting, and challenging, but I would go again.
	Want to Go Back	It was expressed that someone wants to/ will visit the country again	Definitely. The country is so big and there's so much that I haven't seen and haven't done. And I definitely want to go to Russia not as a student, at some point in my life. I would love to go there to work at some point.
	Might Go Back	It was expressed that someone might visit the country again	Maybe not that soon, because there are a lot of other things on my list. But maybe, at some point, I wouldn't exclude it.
Realization	Better than Reputation	Mention that it was better than expected, better than people say it might be, better than reputation, it was more beautiful, people were nicer than expected, etc.	I would say that I realized that what I believed before, the way how people are, this stereotype, that people say that Russians are unfriendly, is absolutely not true. (...)but if you talk to them they are also friendly and will help you. But people unfortunately believe in the stereotype that are out there.
	Different than Expected	Mention of that it was different than expected, more westernized, or international	Life here is happier than I expected, for sure, if you go further to the east it gets more difficult, but it's a lot different from what you would expect.
	Safer	Mention that it was safer than expected	Maybe just that Russia or the Russians are not dangerous.
	Authenticity	Mention of new understandings regarding authenticity and seeing the "real" Russia, mention of something that has to do with authenticity	I think only after living there I could only picture the country better, I could really develop a deeper relationship with people that I couldn't freely ask them more stuff related to politics or related to their daily life and so my first visit, I didn't scratch the surface of what Russia is so my impression was very generic and broad, but after spending longer time there and going to smaller cities and seeing the real Russia as they say.

	Diversity	Mention of something that is connected to cultural diversity	I definitely realized now how vast it is and that there's so many different parts of Russia and its culture that is still to explore and learn about. Especially from a Canadian perspective, Eastern Europe and the Caucasus and the south of Russia in terms of Armenia and stuff was always kind of a blur to me and when I went there, it opened it up more to me, when I got to meet people who are living in Russia from Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. Just seeing these people as their own instead of, this sort of former Soviet countries.
	Cultural Differences	Mention of new understandings regarding cultural differences, social or cultural understanding,	I think at least 50 or 60% of the people would have a horrible impression, because to really get to know people, create relationships, which is very important in Russia, and to get to know somebody very close, it takes you a very long time. After one week you don't know anybody and basically if you go there as a tourist you wouldn't meet people, because Russians are not very open to strangers.
	Politics	Mention of new understandings regarding politics	I know for example, one thing I learned that, especially in the last months, it has more to do with politics. Obviously, it's a huge topic, especially from the western perspective, looking at Russia, everyone thinks, there's a dictator there and everything is bad, but then you hear different opinions on this topic and you also understand what people think. And then you get a completely different understanding of the whole situation. For example, I wouldn't completely agree that they have a bad political system in Russia, it is probably, I would say, the political system that fits Russia the best actually.
Perception	Change	Mention that perception has changed	My perception has definitely changed. I expected it to change and I wanted it to change but before I just didn't have any chance to create a different picture.

	Little Change	Mention that perception has changed a little	Not that much but I would say it was somehow the way I was expecting it.
	No Change	Mention that perception has not changed	I can't think of anything. So, I don't think anything has really changed.
Advice	Go See	Explicitly stated that other people should go to Russia	I would, now after having been there, even more recommend people to go to the country.
	Learn	Explicitly stated that other people should learn Russian or Cyrillic	You should know at least how to read Cyrillic.

Appendix 2: Interview Transcripts – Russian Speaking Respondents

<p><i>Thank you so much for having this interview with me, let's just start with the first question - do you speak Russian or are you able to read Cyrillic?</i></p> <p>Yes, I speak somewhat Russian, I understand more than I speak, and yes - I can read and understand Cyrillic very well.</p> <p><i>Why did you go to Russia? Why did you decided or what made you decide?</i></p> <p>It was not so much my own decision as it was, okay it was my own decision, but I was studying Russian at that time and I wanted to practice my skills over the summer, so therefore I attended this Russian language school. I went there for a month and then a year after I went again, but just for fun. The first time I was in Saint Petersburg, the second time I went to Moscow, but also made trips to Suzdal, Vladimir, and Petrozavodsk.</p> <p><i>What kind of image did you have of the country and what did you expect?</i></p> <p>I kind of knew what to expect. Since I was studying Russian, I already knew a lot about the country, the culture, the people and so on. I still had the stereotypical image of Russia in my head, that people are very cold, everything is very grim, still very Soviet like. I also had a friend who went there, a year before me, and she already told me about the city, the school and what to expect from the living conditions that it is not as bad as it looks at first sight.</p> <p><i>How did you prepare for your trip?</i></p> <p>First of all, I bought two travel guides because I love to read travel guides before and know what to expect from the city and I also wanted to know where to go and what to see because I only had class in the morning and afternoon was pretty much free I also looked up what is there to do in Saint Petersburg and of course I also looked up the most common phrases I might have to use in Russia, since I already spoke Russian, I just polished up my vocabulary and I also bought a dictionary to take with me.</p> <p><i>And what did you do during your stay - when you were not in class?</i></p> <p>I made friends with the other people from the language school, so I spent a lot of time with them. We went to all the museums in the city, they also had pre-organized tours which I could also participate in, we went also outside of the city to Peterhof and Pushkin. Apart from that, we also just strolled around the city, had to look at the different buildings and as I</p>	<p>Study & Practice</p> <p>Interest</p> <p>City x5</p> <p>Prior Knowledge</p> <p>Common Stereotype x2</p> <p>Guidebook</p> <p>(Internet) Research</p> <p>Vocabulary Prep Dictionary</p> <p>Museum Tour</p> <p>POI x2, Exploring</p>
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<p>Piroshky and stuff like that, so this was fine. But when I was in a cafe or restaurant, people there would not understand what I wanted and then I explain to them that I only speak a little Russian, so they need to be patient or slowly repeat what they said. But then it usually worked, and it was actually good. Sometimes when I went out with my friends we met some Russian people in a bar who overheard us speaking English, they came over and they started speaking English with us, like the little English they knew, but then at some point we would switch to Russian and just have a big, let's say, practice session. I also remembered that once an old lady came over to me in the city and was asking for the way and funny enough I knew where she had to go to, so I explained the way to her, as a tourist.</p>	<p>Russian Term Use of Language</p>
<p><i>How would you compare Russia to other destinations? What is your impression?</i></p>	<p>Casual Encounter</p>
<p>I would say it is somewhat unique. I have not been to any other countries similar to Russia, but I think that all the old Soviet countries are the same. The first time I went, I had a culture shock, because it is a very different from what we're used to in Europe. A lot is some just run down and not working and the places itself are very dirty, so it's not like the European standard in any way, but still, I think it is better than a lot of people think it is. I think that many people still think of Russia as this Soviet country where nobody smiles, everything is serious, and that it is very dangerous. It is more dangerous than other places in Europe and I had certain situations where I felt not very comfortable, but I still like it, and I still think it's a place everybody should go to because it has such a vast culture and, to be honest, a lot of Russians are just like the stereotype. I think this accounts for the older generation, the ones who actually grew up living in the Soviet Union, but the younger ones tend to be more open more open-minded and they are excited about other people from other cultures. They're very curious about what's out there in the world. And of course, there are the other the older generations, were you can tell that they have been through stuff, so you see difference in the people, but apart from that, I think the culture is very very rich in traditions and I could also see a lot of handicrafts and stuff like that. I would also say, it is not the typical holiday destination for Europeans, because when I think of holiday destinations as places somewhere at a beach or so.</p>	<p>Use of Language</p> <p>Unique</p> <p>Different</p> <p>Lower Standarts</p> <p>Better than Reputation</p> <p>Not Safe</p> <p>Go See</p> <p>Old vs. Young</p> <p>Rich Culture</p> <p>Not Typical</p>
<p><i>Did you have any difficulties communicating or did you feel misunderstood at some point?</i></p> <p>It was hard the first time I went, to get acquainted with the language, people actually speaking it in a "normal" pace, not just like my teacher at uni. I also had some difficulties with</p>	

<p>small talk because I am only used to complex texts. I had to translate in class, so it took me a while but then I was mostly good. Of course, there were situations where people would not speak any English and I didn't know what they wanted to tell me, because my Russian was not too good, but I could at least tell them that I only understand a little and that they need to speak slowly and clear so it's easier for me. But in general, I would say I was doing fine.</p>	<p>No English</p>
<p><i>Did you use any tools for translating like any apps or a dictionary or anything?</i></p> <p>The first time I went to Russia, I had a dictionary on my phone, because I always had to look up certain words. The other two times I took a phrase book with me, which I looked through on the plane but not really afterwards. I get the most important things and sometimes I use google translate for individual words if I am shopping or so.</p>	<p>No Problems</p> <p>Dictionary</p> <p>Dictionary</p> <p>App</p>
<p><i>Do think you had a different experience because you were able to speak the language?</i></p> <p>To be honest, I have no clue how people who do not speak any Russian or read any Cyrillic survive. Of course, you can survive, it's the same like in every other country where you don't know the language, but still. I am glad I speak Russian and I really think I have a much different experience than people who don't. I have no troubles ordering food, or understanding the menu in the first place, I can ask for directions, things I am looking for in shops, just daily life things which others might not be able to or are too afraid of even trying. I'd also say that a lot of people treat you differently when they know you can understand them. It seemed at first, they were looking at me like a stupid tourist, who is just there to buy souvenirs, I am talking about a situation at a Russian market now, but when I started speaking Russian, even though it was not perfect, it was I turned a switch in those people. They were somewhat nicer. I could haggle prices down for souvenirs and ask for little things, such as different colors of stuff or whatever I wanted. But apart from that, I also think you can get a more authentic experience when you speak at least a little of the language, which is probably the same that goes for every other country but still. So overall, I'd say yes - if you speak Russian, you will definitely have an easier time and also be treated differently.</p>	<p>Different Experience</p> <p>Use of Language</p> <p>No Problem</p> <p>Different Treatment</p> <p>-/- (Use of Language)</p> <p>Different Experience</p> <p>Easier</p>
<p><i>How would you describe your overall experience? Is there any particular situation or encounter you remember the most?</i></p> <p>It was good, although it's always a new shock at the beginning when I arrive, because everything is so different than at home, but still, it was always good. I really like Russia and I would</p>	<p>Good</p> <p>-/- (Different)</p> <p>Go Again</p>

<p>like to see more of it. So far, I have only been to the Western part, in tourist areas and also to not so touristy areas. Also, this is what I always mention to other people - I LOVE THE FOOD. I could eat all day and it's super cheap, most of the times at least, unless you want to have lunch at the Red Square. About my encounters, there actually is so much to tell, I don't know where to start. I'd say, and this is a funny one, what I remember the most and probably will forever is, when the lady I was staying with for a while, tried to hook my up with her grandson. I was 22 back then and this is apparently considered old in Russia, so she invited her 19-year-old, skinny, ginger grandson. He never talked to me, only said доброе утро in the morning and спокойной ночи at night. For four days. That was it. When he left, he knocked at my door, said goodbye, and handed me a piece of paper, it had his name and number on it. It was hilarious.</p>	<p>Good Food Cheap</p> <p>Positive Experience</p> <p>Russian Term x2</p>
<p><i>Would you say your perception of the country has changed afterwards?</i></p> <p>Yes, I would say so, maybe not much, I had a certain expectation about the country itself and the culture, which turned out to be true, same goes for the people. As I said, the older generation is super cold and not very friendly usually, still depending if you speak Russian, because I talked to some that actually turned out to be nicer than I thought, but the younger people are definitely more westernized as I thought they would be. Also, I was of course a little scared, or more concerned about safety. When you think of Russia you think it's a dangerous place. Maybe with me coming from a very safe country, I would feel that even more, but I have to say it was not as scary and dangerous as I thought it will be. I travel a lot and know how to properly behave in big cities to be safe, but I think that a lot of people think Russia is more dangerous than it actually is.</p>	<p>Little Change</p> <p>(-//-) Different Treatment</p> <p>Different than Expected</p> <p>Common Stereotype</p> <p>Safer</p>
<p><i>Is there something you would say you have learned something new?</i></p> <p>I am not sure, I would say, maybe that, there is a lot more to see in Russia than the few places that get advertised in Europe, and that people should just go and see them. Not be so afraid to go because Russia has a lot to offer and as soon as you try to communicate with people, they are actually opening up and are not those cold, grumpy, stereotype Russians anymore. I met a few very helpful people and I heard from some friends that they were invited for tea and food. I had that experience too, when I took the train. People are actually pretty social when you try to engage with them or their culture. Of course, not everyone, but the majority.</p>	<p>Go See</p> <p>Nice People</p> <p>Better than Reputation</p>

Thank you for participating in this interview, let's just dive right in, my first question is - do you speak any Russian or are you able to read Cyrillic?

I am able to read and understand Cyrillic, and I have a fair vocabulary, I would say.

And you have been to Russia?

Yes, I have been to Russia on more than one occasion.

So why did you decided to go to Russia in the first place, what made you go?

First time I went was in 2014, I was travelling Eastern Europe and I had a themed travel route in my mind where I would travel through the former communist countries, so I wanted to start in Berlin and I wanted to finish in Moscow, so I spent about six days in Moscow in September 2014.

What kind of image did you have of Russia, and did you have any expectations?

The first time I planned to go to Russia was in 2010 when I was living in Lithuania, and eventually it did not happen, but I could get a glimpse of what Russia could be from living in Lithuania and traveling to other former Soviet countries like Latvia, Belarus, and Georgia, I met many Russians living in other countries and not in Russia, and they told me about how Russia is. I pictured Russia as a very rural country with very, hardworking people, lots of interesting cultural and historical things to do, just this huge continental country where you would need a lifetime to actually get to know the country. Since then it was always on my top list to travel and eventually I managed to go in 2014. I guess that's what I had in mind, this huge country with lots of empty areas and at the same time with a lot of cultural things happening, very very historical country, that played a major role in the world since ever, so that was like, the image I had of Russia before going.

Did you make any special preparations for the trip or did you prepare at all?

Not really. I got a Lonely Planet guidebook from Russia before going. When I told my friends, I was going to Russia, one of them gave me one. I did read it a lot, so I got prepared basically by reading this Lonely Planet guidebook but I didn't plan too much because I knew I wasn't going to stay for long, I am talking more about my first trip now, so I basically just went with the obvious, so I just went to Saint Petersburg and Moscow and I had some Russian friends who I met abroad, who also could help me, and I thought I could go along with only being able to read Cyrillic and have a small vocabulary

Interest

City

Prior Knowledge

Other People

Interest

Culture

History

Guidebook

Little / No Preparation

<p>for small talk and stuff, so that was basically my planning, the guidebook and revising my language skills.</p> <p><i>What kind of tourist activities did you engage in while being on your trip?</i></p> <p>When I got to Russia, I just went to the touristic places in Saint Petersburg, like the Spilled Blood Church, I went to see the bridges, I was couchsurfing so I was with locals and so they were taking me to some touristic places and the same time some local bars or something, nothing too deep, and I didn't go with any, like, guided tour or any booked tour or anything commercial, I was completely independent and going with the couchsurfer hosts I got, both, in Saint Petersburg and Moscow. I don't remember ever going anywhere, like anywhere that was not "not touristic" at all and at the same time, I also did not only go to just the touristic places.</p> <p><i>Did you use any public transport at any point and how was your experience with that?</i></p> <p>I used only public transport, especially in Saint Petersburg I used the subway, I got there by bus, I left for Moscow by train. I got some help to buy tickets for the train, because in 2014 the website, they had an English version, but I could see that they had different prices or something else was weird, I don't really remember. I used the subway a lot on Moscow, but my friend there, he was driving me a lot to several places as well, I only had one problem, when I was in Saint Petersburg, I needed to leave my baggage in the train station and the sign with prices was all in Russian, and I could understand hour or day, and I figured the price was for the whole day and when I came back my door was locked and I had to pay a fine because actually that was the hour rate and there was no one there who could actually speak English and explain that to me, and that was the only time I had a misunderstanding with the language.</p> <p><i>My next question would be, did you interact with locals and how did you interact, but you already mentioned that you were couchsurfing, where there any other encounters in shops or cafes or any other kind of this?</i></p> <p>Not really, I was basically getting acquainted with the friends of my couchsurfing hosts, I met my wife like that, in a park, in Moscow, I just started talking to her and that was it. But beyond that, not really, every time I needed to ask for directions I was stopping people to ask and if they could they would help but I don't recall anyone specifically coming to me to talk. I was doing all the talking if I had to.</p> <p><i>And that was usually without bigger problems?</i></p> <p>No, I usually understood people, and if not, when they couldn't speak English either, they were saying sorry, but</p>	<p>Vocabulary Prep</p> <p>City Church, POI</p> <p>Exploring, Nightlife</p> <p>Language Issue</p> <p>Casual Encounter Positive Experience</p> <p>Necessary Encounter Use of Language</p> <p>Nice People</p>
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usually they were all trying to help, I cannot remember anyone ignoring me or refusing to help me at all.	No Problems
<i>How would you compare Russia to other holiday destinations, is there something that makes it better or worse or unique in any way? What is your impression of the country, the culture, the people?</i>	
Difficult question. I think Russia attracts some very specific tourists, nature is beautiful but it is a bit difficult to reach, so I don't really see ecotourists going to Russia, I don't really see sun, sand or snow tourists going to Russia, even though it snows a lot in Russia, all the nature based attractions are too far from Moscow or Saint Petersburg, so I say it's more like a urban destination, people who like cities, people who like historical landmarks, people who are interested in Eastern European culture or former, or Soviet history. I think it is very interesting and, I am one of those who is very interested in that so to me it was like heaven, but I think it is very specific and perhaps there is one side which I didn't pay attention to too much could be very important which is the MICE tourism, business tourism, which I suppose in Moscow is huge, because Moscow is one of the most visited cities in the world and I wonder why, so I think what makes them different is basically that it is a well-structured city. Moscow is huge, 20 Mio. people and the subway all over the place, they have infrastructure for pretty much any kind of event they want to host, so I don't know. I think if I could point out one difference it is that Moscow is like a global city, ready for everything that they might encounter, and you don't see this everywhere. You can count maybe on one hand how many cities are well prepared like that in the world.	Not Typical
	Urban Destination
	Historic
<i>Did you have any specific difficulties communicating during your stay? I mean you already mention that one time at the train station but were there any other noteworthy encounters where you would say you felt misunderstood?</i>	
When I entered the country, I was entering through the Latvian border which was not much used by non-Russians, so the Border lady doubted that I didn't need a visa. She was holding me for a while, she made some phone calls until she realized that Brazilians don't need a visa. I was telling her English, because my Russian was not efficient enough, but either she didn't understand English or she just did not want to understand English but after a while that was solved. And then there was another situation I don't know if that counts but I was already with Vica and we were in Vladimir and we wanted to go back to Moscow, so we went to the bus station and the lady where Vica was buying the tickets she needed to provide our names and she said my name and the lady asked, how do I write this name? So, Vica wrote my name in Latin	Neutral Experience
	Neutral Experience

letters but the lady said something like, I'm sorry I cannot understand Latin letters I can only speak, well read, Cyrillic. I had to write my name in Cyrillic because otherwise the lady would not have known my name. I don't know, how you cannot know Latin letters? That is weird, but I don't know, I didn't have much other misunderstandings because most of the time I was not alone every time I was doing something, I was accompanied by Russians or friends of mine who speak Russian, or I could get through with my language skills.

**Help
No Problem**

Have you had any help to understand somebody or something or did you use any tools or anything to make communication easier, like an app or a dictionary?

Ok short answer is no. Because I usually always had help from people, but there was one time where my wife's father was visiting, he was there for a week and my wife was working during the day and I was alone with him in the flat during the day, he doesn't speak any English and I didn't speak Russian at that time and we were trying to talk, through Google translate. I was speaking, translating through Google, and showing it to him and he was reading the answer and doing the same to me, and the translation of course was superbad, Google translated super weirdly and every time he was reading my messages he was doing some funny faces, probably thinking, what the fuck is he telling me, sorry for the "fuck". I don't know if that counts but that was the only time I had to use a translator and it was very awkward and it was for a whole week and I hope I will never have to go through this again, it was really, really awkward.

**No Tools
Negative Experience**

Do you think that tourist who speak Russian have no problems during their visit or have a lot better experience than the ones who don't speak Russian?

I think yes, but I would say the same if you ask me if a person who can speak Portuguese will experience more Brazil, or a person who speaks English experience more Australia, I don't think it's more special than in other countries.

How would you describe your overall experience in Russia?

Great. Amazing. I made lots of friends, I eventually moved there and lived there for some months, I married a Russian, so I would say my experience was beyond anything I was expecting. Simply a life changing experience.

Good/ Amazing

Would you say your perception of the country has changed after visiting, or is there something you came to understand something new, or was there something you learned about Russia you weren't aware of before?

I think only after living there I could only picture the country better, I could really develop a deeper relationship with

Authenticity

<p>people that I couldn't freely ask them more stuff related to politics or related to their daily life and so my first visit, I didn't scratch the surface of what Russia is so my impression was very generic and broad, but after spending longer time there and going to smaller cities and seeing the real Russia as they say. Yes, my perception changed, and I understood that, it is not really related to that but, politics play a major role and it's not as democratic as we might think but it's also not as undemocratic as other people would like to paint it as well so, there is something between the two images of Russia that people try to paint abroad.</p> <p><i>Is there any particular situation or encounter you remember the most? Good or bad, it doesn't matter if it's about language or communication or anything else.</i></p> <p>Oh, in Russia, there were so many, I need to think about it, definitely there was, I don't remember anything exactly right now, but there were many. But I cannot think of anything in particular right now, I am sorry.</p> <p><i>So, you would go again?</i></p> <p>Definitely!</p>	<p>Politics</p> <p>Go Again</p>
<p><i>Thank you for taking the time to talk to me. As you know, I have some questions about your trip to Russia, but first of all, do you speak Russian?</i></p> <p>Yes, I speak Russian.</p> <p><i>Why did you decided to go to Russia?</i></p> <p>The first time I was there I went with my uncle because we have a business there and then I had a girlfriend from Russia and that's it.</p> <p><i>Where did you go and how long did you stay?</i></p> <p>The first time I went to Kirov, and then I went multiple times to Moscow and to Nizhny Novgorod usually for a week or two weeks or something like that. The longest was a summer school in Nizhny Novgorod which lasted for about six weeks.</p> <p><i>Did you have any expectations before you went? what kind of image Did you have of Russia?</i></p> <p>I felt it would be similar to my second home country, my mom is from Poland, so I thought it would be similar to that. So funny and a little bit, well back in economic development, I thought similar to Poland.</p> <p><i>Did you prepare for your trip?</i></p> <p>No not at all. When I went for the first time of course not but then when I went for the other times, I already had taken</p>	<p>Work</p> <p>Love</p> <p>City</p> <p>City x2</p> <p>Study & Practise</p> <p>Common Stereotype</p> <p>Little/ No Preparation</p> <p>Vocabulary Prep</p>

<p>Russian courses at the University so basically after the first time I went I was fluent in Russian the second time so if that counts as preparation then yes there was some preparations but apart from that nothing</p>	
<p><i>Did you engage in any tourist activities during your stay?</i> Sure, we went to museums, we walked around the cities, everything. I think one of the strangest things I encountered was in Nizhny Novgorod, where we went to a place, where I don't really remember the name, it was a local art museum or anything, and you have to wear plastic bags over your shoes. It was a very funny, I thought it is very strange, and then one of my favorite trips, we did it basically every time we went to Moscow, is there is Воробьёвы горы, it is next to the main university MGU. I don't know if it counts but it's not a typical tourist spot but it's very nice, right next to the university, you have the great view, you have people hanging out there and it's very nice in the summer. I think this is one of my favorite things to do.</p>	<p>Museum, Exploring Positive Experience Russian Term Forgot, Museum</p> <p>Russian Term, POI Russian Term</p>
<p><i>Did you use public transport at any time and how was that experience?</i> Yes, all the time depending on what do you count as public transport because we all know public transport in Russia is organized by private companies to a certain extent and so we used Машрутки all the time and the experience, I think my first experience was when I went to the first time to Nizhny with my girlfriend, I couldn't believe that this part of the world still counts as Europe because I think there were no security features in the vehicle, anywhere and I wouldn't say I was scared, but I just couldn't believe that this is happening. It was just very strange because the drivers, they are doing four things at a time, so they are driving, they are eating Симмчки sunflower seeds, they're talking on the phone usually and they're smoking, all at the same time, with two hands. It is very funny. And the busses, the Машрутки, they are usually from the 80s, it is something different. And of course, especially in Moscow, there are traffic jams all the time, this is a given thing. I mean this is related to public transport obviously, it doesn't matter whether you sit in a car or a bus, there is a traffic jam and you are stuck. And then the metro of course, in Moscow, I personally like it very much because it's beautiful just like the way it is designed, but on the other hand the windows are open, it's very loud, it smells bad, there's so many people, you know, this is my experience with public transport in Russia. And I think this experience it somehow typical, like an experience you often have as a western person in Russia. On one hand you think like this is not possible what is going on, but on the other hand it works somehow. You get from A to B with the Машрутки, and the first time you think</p>	<p>Russian Term Positive Experience</p> <p>Russian Term</p> <p>-//- (Russian Term)</p> <p>Different</p> <p>-//- (Russian Term)</p>

it's crazy but then you're thinking, okay, it works. The same goes for the Metro, it has this two sides in Russia, on one hand it's loud, it smells, there are so many people but on the other hand it is so beautiful, it is crazy, kind of surreal. I think this is typical for Russia.

Did you interact with any locals while you were there?

Yes, every time all the time. I never went completely as a tourist, because the first time when I went with my uncle, of course we had to deal with our colleagues from Russia from the Russian office and their friends as well, and then I basically always went with my girlfriend and of course she had her friends there and her relatives, so yes, all the time. I was interacting with all kinds of people - older, younger, whatever, students, people that worked, pensioners, everybody.

I guess you did not have any difficulties communicating during your stay or did you feel lost or misunderstood at any time during your visit?

Even if you speak the language, yes, you're lost sometimes. Not strictly because of the vocabulary, but there's always a logic behind the language, so if you don't understand certain concepts whether you were saying something or somebody else is saying something to you, sometimes you just don't understand each other because you have a completely different view of the world. That happened all the time, but I remember one thing because I was just thinking about it the other day. In Russia the whole thing with giving a present it is very important. When you go somewhere, you take a present with you or if you meet a new person, a new relative or a new friend or something, you always have a present for them. At home it is not that common that did you do this you present something on Easter or I don't know Christmas or maybe it is somebody's birthday, but that's it. And in Russia, even if you received something, even if it's a small thing from a Russian person, you have to thank them a thousand times, even if it's just a bar of chocolate and if you don't do that they would feel insulted. So yes, I guess there are misunderstandings even if you speak the language all the time.

Did you use anything that makes communication easier? You said you speak Russian, but the first time you went, did you use any app or dictionary or anything like this?

Not really, but that is we had one of our colleagues from the Kirov as a translator, he speaks German fluently and Russian and was able to translate and then the rest of the people at least speak some broken English. It worked somehow.

Necessary Encounter

Casual Encounter

Daily Life

Cultural Difference

No Tools

<p><i>How would you compare Russia to other holiday destinations, would you say there is something unique about it? What is your impression of the country, the culture, and the people?</i></p>	
<p>The impressions are completely positive, but I think if you go to Russia as on a typical holiday trip that would last seven days you will have, I think at least 50 or 60% of the people would have a horrible impression, because to really get to know people, create relationships, which is very important in Russia, and to get to know somebody very close, it takes you a very long time. After one week you don't know anybody and basically if you go there as a tourist you wouldn't meet people, because Russians are not very open to strangers. I wouldn't describe it as a typical holiday destination because even if you do, you can go to Crimea or something, but it would be more, a city trip vacation probably and it is definitely harder to find your way around than in other countries. There are many traps waiting for you I think. Not necessarily criminals but just, it's harder to find your way on your own.</p>	<p>Good/ Amazing</p> <p>Cultural Difference</p> <p>Not Typical</p> <p>Urban Destination</p> <p>Harder</p>
<p><i>So how would you describe your overall experience in Russia?</i></p>	
<p>Very nice. As I said, it also took me like at least three trips or something to get to a point, where I would say I feel really comfortable to go to Russia and I understand how everything works and how to talk to people and you know how certain things in general are done that is my experience. But as soon as I came through certain level and that also includes having friends there and understanding how people think, then I think it's a very interesting country and I'm already waiting to go the next time there.</p>	<p>-/- (Good/ Amazing)</p> <p>Cultural Understanding</p> <p>Interesting</p>
<p><i>That means you would go again?</i></p>	
<p>Definitely, I'm going in summer.</p>	<p>Go Again</p>
<p><i>Do you think tourist who do not speak Russian have more problems during their visit? Would you say you have a better experience because you speak the language?</i></p>	
<p>Yes definitely. There are many gaps in Russia, even the small things. Like using the public transport for example, of course things in general are getting easier because you have smartphones and you can use maps to navigate, but if you are in Moscow for the first time, even if you have an app for the metro, I think it is not the easiest thing to navigate there, because all the signs are in Russian, so all is in Cyrillic letters. It is really hard to find you way around. Small things like that, and then bigger things like misunderstandings, if you ask somebody for the way, as I said before that would not work like in other European countries probably and then, when you come to Russia for the first time, you think all the people, they</p>	<p>Easier</p>

<p>have these grim faces but it's not a grim face is just neutral. They are not particularly happy but they're also not like grumpy, they're just neutral. And in Russia for example, it's not very common during presentations at university or at work to be laughing all the time like in Western European countries and the US where it is very important to have a smiley face and laugh and be happy, but if you're grin all the time in Russia, people would think you are stupid and unprofessional and that is something that people mistake all the time. I think when they go to Russia are they might be saying, oh my God, everybody is depressive and suicidal, but that is not the case.</p>	Cultural Difference
<p><i>Is there any particular situation or encounter you remember the most?</i></p> <p>I think one of the funniest and most positive things I experienced was the first time, as I said I came to Russia with my uncle, we went to the karaoke bar and it was, I think 5 a.m. in the morning and we were completely drunk and the whole evening we were sitting at our table just the colleagues from our office, my uncle, and me but then as the evening progressed more and more people from other tables joined us, and the group got bigger and bigger. We ended up at in the apartment from one of the guys from our table and I never saw this guy again, his name was Pavel and as of this day I've never seen him again, but we swore each other, we would be best friends till death do us apart (laughs). We were there at his apartment, continuing to drink, he was preparing food, making some sandwiches, hot dishes, some soups and whatever. It was a very positive experience because I don't think that something like this would easily happen to you in anywhere else, but it was very funny and very nice. And then if I think of anything bad, I never really had any bad or really bad experience. Maybe last summer, when we went with my girlfriend and her parents from Nizhny to Yaroslavl by car, which is a way of 250, maybe 300 km. It is an 8-hour drive. In Austria this is like a distance from Linz to a little bit after Vienna, which takes you about two and something hours, but we were driving for eight hours, because the road has like thousands of holes and the speed limit was 70km per hour, that was a bad experience.</p>	Positive Experience Nightlife Negative Experience City
<p><i>Would you say your perception of Russia has changed after you visited the country?</i></p> <p>Honestly, I don't remember whether I had or what was my perception before I went for the first time it, I didn't have anything to do with Russia so when I went, I think I had a neutral perception, but it changed over the course over of time. When I came there, of course it changed. It's the little things, when I went with a Marshrutka for the first time, or when you walk around the city and you see the streets are</p>	No Image / Expectations Change Lower Standards

<p>completely damaged everywhere, especially if you're from Europe, you doubt all the time things like this can't be happening. But then after a while you understand that every country has its upsides and downsides, and yes of course the roads are not the best, or not in the best condition, or public transport is worse than back home, but then on the other hand they have things that I think are better than in Austria for example. So, even though, I don't know what I was thinking about Russia before, I am pretty sure that my perception has changed. Maybe the first time I had more of a negative impression and then over the time, when you come to understand certain things, it changes.</p> <p><i>Would you say you learn something new or you came to understand something new about the country itself apart from this?</i></p> <p>Apart from what I just mentioned? I know for example, one thing I learned that, especially in the last months, it has more to do with politics. Obviously, it's a huge topic, especially from the western perspective, looking at Russia, everyone thinks, there's a dictator there and everything is bad, but then you hear different opinions on this topic and you also understand what people think. And then you get a completely different understanding of the whole situation. For example, I wouldn't completely agree that they have a bad political system in Russia, it is probably, I would say, the political system that fits Russia the best actually.</p>	<p>Lower Standards</p> <p>Better</p> <p>-//- (Change)</p> <p>Politics</p>
<p><i>Thank you for talking to me today.</i></p> <p>No Problem.</p> <p><i>Before we start with could you tell me if you speak Russian or are you able to read Cyrillic?</i></p> <p>I am able to read Cyrillic and I speak Russian quite fairly.</p> <p><i>Why did you decide to go to Russia what made you go?</i></p> <p>Because it is not that far away from Europe, and somehow it is still not Europe anymore and you have a lot of ideas of what Russia is like from the pictures you see on the internet or over the media. It seems to be kind of a weird country and that's what makes it interesting. I also wanted to find out if it is actually the way it is transported by the media. I've also been to Belarus before and that country kind of seem cold to me and I wanted to know how Russia is compared to Belarus.</p> <p><i>Where did you go and how long did you stay?</i></p> <p>I flew to Saint Petersburg and stayed there for a couple of days and then I traveled by train to Moscow for a couple days, and from Moscow I was going by the Transiberian Railway</p>	<p>Interest</p> <p>City</p> <p>City</p> <p>Transiberian Railway</p>

<p>sometimes by Плащкарт sometimes by Купе down to Irkutsk to see Lake Baikal. Altogether, I was traveling about three weeks.</p> <p><i>The next question you partly answered already, which would be what kind of image did you have of Russia before you went or if you had any certain expectations about the country?</i></p> <p>What I still have in my head, is the picture of Putin riding a bear and I've actually seen calendars they sell here with this picture in on the front as a cover and I also saw a guy with a nice beer belly wearing a t-shirt with that picture (laughs). Apart from that, I mainly think about vodka, the cold, and maybe not really friendly or open-minded people, but also Babushkas with this kind of scarf around their heads, and Gopnik. Those are the typical clichés you have about Russia, but I knew they were not true. And Tchaikovsky, never forget Tchaikovsky.</p> <p><i>How did you prepare for your trip did you ask anyone, or did you do any research on the internet?</i></p> <p>I bought the Lonely Planet guide for the Trans-Siberian Railway, this book I consider to be really well written and it describes very well every part of the trip, like the distance, what cities are there, what you can expect and also how long it takes you between the different towns which is really, really good because in Russia you have a lot of time zones and if you try going from Moscow to Irkutsk and on the train, they will always have Moscow time. And if you have that on the ticket, when you need a hostel along the way, you don't want to arrive at 2am in the morning, even if says something else on the ticket, so you have to be very, very careful. It's a big help if you know how many hours are actually between the cities.</p> <p><i>What did you do during your stay, I mean you mentioned you went on the Transib, but did you also go to any other tourist places or did you do any other tourist activities?</i></p> <p>In Saint Petersburg, I went to Спас на Крови, which was really, really nice, I also visited Saint Isaac's Cathedral which for me, was one of the most amazing churches I ever visited. It's super amazing, you cannot compare it to anything I have seen before, and I have been to a lot of churches. Then, I have been to the Эрмитаж, in Moscow, obviously I have been to the Kremlin, and during my trip on the Transib, I didn't really have the time. I prefer walking around in towns and then if I see something interesting, I have a look at it. Usually I went to the Kremlin of every town I visited and if there was a church or something or anything that look really interesting I went there.</p>	<p>Russian Term x2, City POI</p> <p>Common Stereotype x4</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Guidebook</p> <p>Church, Russian Term Church</p> <p>Museum, Russian Term POI Exploring POI</p>
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Apart from the trains, did you use any other public transportation? How was that experience?

In Petersburg and Moscow, I used to metro. I tried to avoid buses, in general I try to avoid buses when I'm traveling. I just hate them, if I'm new to town I usually try the metro, I mean if there is a metro. Because it's usually a pretty easy system to understand and usually well developed and that was also the case in Moscow and St. Petersburg, it is very easy to get around and not get lost if you just use the metro.

Good Metro

Did you interact with any local people?

Mostly locals. If you travel on the Трансиб, by Плацкарт, you definitely get the chance to meet the locals, or at least Russians who are travelling, "local" is relative if they stay on the train for three or four days, but I had some interactions, some really nice conversations and discussions, they were all really nice and open people.

**Russian Term, (-/-)
Casual Encounter**

Would you say you got a good insight on Russian life by travelling the Trans-Siberian Railway?

Yes, I think so, for sure that does not represent the whole population because especially the people with more money would avoid "platzkart", but it is interesting to get to know the "normal" people.

And apart from the train, did you also meet any other locals, somewhere else? Or how did you act in cafes, shops, restaurants, places like that?

I have to admit, I didn't meet any other people, because usually if you go to a cafe, people there are in groups and I spent almost half of my time travelling on the train, there I already had a lot of interaction with people, and then I just enjoyed the time when I didn't have to talk to anyone.

Did you have any difficulties communicating during your stay?

A couple of times but they usually only lasted for a couple of moments. Usually as long as your smile, you are friendly, you smile, and you show them that you're trying to communicate, use your hand and your feet you're able to overcome every language barrier. I had an app which I used very often when I was stuck and couldn't find the right words. That was great for single word translations, if you're really stuck in a situation it helps a lot.

App

That would have been my next question, if you use any other tools like an app or a dictionary to make communication easier?

<p>Yes, I have an offline app and one for which I need internet and in those, I can type in whole sentences and will translated. I also usually use it if I'm not sure if I'm saying the right thing or if I'm using the right sentence structure. Or just to check if it's understandable what I'm trying to say.</p> <p><i>So, you wouldn't say you felt misunderstood or even lost at any point?</i></p> <p>At some point sure, I felt lost, but usually only for a couple of minutes and then I took a deep breath, and everything was fine again. This is normal when you travel by yourself.</p> <p><i>How would you compare Russia to other destinations or other holiday destinations? Is there something that is better or worse, or even unique about it?</i></p> <p>I was traveling in off-season. I arrived at Lake Baikal at the end of March, so the lake was still frozen. At the hostels I stayed, I was the only person staying there and usually I tend to travel in summer when there are more tourists around. But I would say there are generally less tourist. The further away you go from Moscow, it gets more difficult and it's cold, then also, people have a bad image of those places, the Russians have the same of Europe, I got asked a lot, why are you traveling here, and if I go to Spain, nobody asks that.</p> <p><i>What would you say is your impression of the country to culture and the people?</i></p> <p>The people are very friendly, and they try lot to help you and the country itself, it was cold. In the big cities it is nice but if you're somewhere outside of Petersburg or Moscow, for example I was at Тобольск which has about 100.000 people living there, where the next McDonald's was five hours away. And the next McDonald's is kind of an indicator (laughs) usually if I look for the center of a city, I look for where the McDonald's are located.</p> <p><i>How would you describe your overall experience then?</i></p> <p>It was interesting, and I would like to do the rest of the Transib trip all the way down to Владивосток. I would recommend it to everyone, but you also have to be aware that you going to be asked often if you are married yet and they're very confused if you're a girl and you're traveling all by yourself. The image of women is quite different to the one I am used to at home, it's one of the things I don't didn't enjoy that much.</p> <p><i>Do you think tourists who don't speak Russian at all have a lot of problems during their visit? Or do you think you have had a better or more authentic experience since you're able to speak Russian?</i></p>	<p>-//- (App)</p> <p>Nice People</p> <p>City, Russian Term</p> <p>Go Again Russian Term Go See Cultural Difference</p>
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<p>I think if you don't speak Russian at all, in St Petersburg it's okay, you're going to survive but if you're go down to Tomsk or smaller places on the Transib, it is tough. You should know at least how to read Cyrillic. Reading already helps a lot, just for example, the word for toilet is туалет, and if you can read it already helps.</p> <p><i>Is there any particular situation or encounter you remember the most?</i></p> <p>There are a lot of things that come to my mind but one of the most memorable one is it was at the beginning of my travels on the Transib, I was sitting next to a guy who was quite boring, and I bought a chess game, a magnetic chess game, and he was really happy when he figured he could play with me. Then I heard some women singing and I went further down to have a look what they're doing, and it turned out they were traveling home from a Tupperware conference and they were super nice, gave me a Tupper box filled with fruits and сырок. They were showing me pictures of their kids, asking me if I am married yet and what my parents think that I am travelling all by myself, why am I doing this, why am I not married yet and so on. It was just the whole situation, very funny.</p> <p><i>Would you say your perception of Russia has changed since you visited the country, or would you say you have come to understand something new or learned something new?</i></p> <p>Definitely yes. My perception has definitely changed. I expected it to change and I wanted it to change but before I just didn't have any chance to create a different picture. Life here is happier than I expected, for sure, if you go further to the east it gets more difficult, but it's a lot different from what you would expect.</p>	<p>Easier</p> <p>Learn</p> <p>Russian Term</p> <p>Positive Experience</p> <p>Russian Term</p> <p>Change</p> <p>Different than Expected</p>
<p><i>Thank you for having this interview with me. My first question is - do you speak Russian or are you able to read Cyrillic?</i></p> <p>Yes, I speak Russian. I am studying Russian.</p> <p><i>Why did you decide to go to Russia? Where did you go? How long were you there?</i></p> <p>Because I was studying Russian for five years and I like the language a lot, but then I was starting to study Spanish and I lost all my Russian skills, so I figured I need to go back and improve or practice my Russian again. I first went to Russia three years ago, to Moscow and St. Petersburg, and then I went to St Petersburg again after a year and now I went to Voronezh for a couple of months to study.</p>	<p>Study & Practice</p> <p>Interest, City x2</p> <p>City</p>

<p><i>What kind of image did you have of Russia before? Did you have any expectations?</i></p> <p>I didn't have any certain expectations because my Russian teacher back in school, she was a native Russian, so she already told us a lot about the country and the people and the culture, so I knew what I was expecting. But I was actually surprised about the situation then when I came here. The living conditions and how people basically live their everyday life. I expected it to be more western, but then when I came here, and there were a lot of people in little space let's say. It is quite different from what I'm used to in Germany.</p>	<p>Prior Knowledge</p> <p>Different</p>
<p><i>How did you prepare for your trip? Did you ask anyone?</i></p> <p>Before my first trip I got all the needed information from my teacher, so I did not look up anything, I just improved, or polished up, my Russian skills, just to be sure what to say in which situation, and for my second trip or for my other trips then, I did not really prepare anything because, I already knew what was coming and what I need to be prepared for.</p>	<p>-/- (Prior Knowledge)</p> <p>Vocabulary Prep</p> <p>Little/ No Preparation</p>
<p><i>What did you do during your stay? (any tours, museums, other activities)?</i></p> <p>My first trip to Russia was very touristy. We did everything you could do as a tourist, we went to Петергоф, to the Hermitage, and all the other sights in Petersburg, to the vodka museum, and basically everything you can imagine. And now, since I also study here, but this time I have more time to see other cities. I wanted to go to Sochi and Moscow again, then we went to Карелия and Кисловодск but also here in Voronezh, I already went to the different museums and checked out the sights they have and just, well you know, do the usual stuff.</p>	<p>POI, Russian Term</p> <p>Museum x2, POI</p> <p>City</p> <p>City x2, Russian Term x2</p> <p>Museum, Exploring</p>
<p><i>Did you use public transport at any point? How was that?</i></p> <p>Yes, I use a lot of buses and Marshrutki in Russia and it's kind of strange. The buses are not in a really good condition, not like in Germany, and they're quite dirty and they're never on time. There's basically no timetable. Also, they don't really care about safety, so sometimes they drive with open doors or they don't care if people are already on board or trying to get off, they just keep driving and you just have to kind of hop on or off depending on what you trying to do. But on the other hand, it is very cheap to use the bus and, probably the cheapest way to get around, and they drive basically 24/7.</p>	<p>Russian Term</p> <p>Lower Standards</p>
<p><i>Did you interact with locals? How did you act/behave in shops, cafes, restaurants, etc.?</i></p> <p>On my first trip I talked a lot in the shops with the shopkeepers or with waiters in cafes and stuff. Just to get whatever I want but there was not too much of a conversation just because, it never occurred. But now, since I'm in Voronezh, I am in more</p>	<p>Necessary Encounter</p> <p>Daily Life</p>

<p>contact with locals because I just have more time and I go to markets, I have conversations with the people there. They're not always good because, sometimes Russians tend to get angry easily if you are not perfect in Russian and they don't quite understand you, or you don't quite understand them. Even though I speak the language, I still have some problems. The older generations or older people tend to ask sometimes why I'm not speaking better Russian but most of the locals here, the ones I am in contact with, they are either nice or they also speak English. Sometimes we speak Russian just to practice. I would love to meet more locals to be able to practice more, but it's okay the way it is. I also have roommates who only speak Russian, so they are patient with me if I get something wrong or correct me.</p>	<p>Impatience</p>
<p><i>Did you have difficulties communicating during your stay?</i> I would say when I came here to Voronezh, specifically the first weeks in the dorm were kind of tough. I needed time to get back on track with my Russian, so I was having a hard time with my roommates, because I haven't spoken Russian in a while, so I forgot a lot of things and then I was actually annoyed that I did not study enough before I came here. Especially here, nobody really speaks English so I was a little overwhelmed at first but that got better single day.</p>	<p>Use of Language</p> <p>Daily Life</p> <p>No English</p>
<p><i>Did you use any tools to make communication easier?</i> Yes, I use my smartphone and I have a dictionary, not a book but an app on my phone and also the internet helps a lot. I'm also attending language courses, so whenever I need another word which I forgot, or if I want to check if I'm saying something right, and I use the internet basically. It helps a lot. And, my Russian colleagues never use the internet or Google translate or anything, they just explain certain things to me even five times if they have to, until I get what they're trying to tell me. That also works well, but I guess without the phone, it would be a lot harder.</p>	<p>App</p> <p>App/ Internet</p>
<p><i>How would you compare Russia to other holiday destinations? What is your impression?</i> I think Russia is not a typical holiday destination. I think it is mostly for people who like to see different cities and are interested in Russian history. I'd say for Europeans it's quite different. In my opinion, going to St. Petersburg or Moscow, or even living in Voronezh, it's nothing special, going to the countryside however, or the Caucasus, if you see people there, it's probably how people in Germany lived 50 years ago. It's strange, but then, it's such a big country and it has something for everybody. It has cities like Sochi, which is a beautiful place and also lots of Russians are traveling there, but I actually think that is not a holiday destination in the</p>	<p>Not Typical</p> <p>Historic</p> <p>Urban Destination</p> <p>Different</p> <p>-//- (Not Typical)</p>

<p>traditional sense because of the population. I think that a lot of foreigners or Europeans for that matter, think that Russians are quite unfriendly and impolite and mean. In other cultures, I experienced that people said stuff like, come to our country, see what we have. When you are here, they're more like, why are you here? What are you doing here? Especially if you are traveling outside of one of the bigger cities.</p>	
<p><i>Do you think tourists who do not speak Russian have an authentic experience? Or do you think you had a better experience because you speak Russian?</i></p>	
<p>Yes, I definitely think that if you know the language, you get in contact with the local people and they would also be interested to talk to you. I feel if you don't understand them, or if you don't speak their language, they just want to be left alone. I think it's much easier if you speak the local language, but I think that's the same in every country. It's also quite difficult to communicate in English in Russia, of course in St. Petersburg and Moscow you It probably will be fine, but in different cities, nobody really speaks English there. I think it's quite hard if you don't speak Russian, also I think they get annoyed quite easily. I would say, I speak Russian fairly well, but then again if they don't understand what I'm trying to say or don't understand what I would like to have or do, you can tell that they get annoyed and ask, why don't you speak it better. I think, in other countries, also in Germany, if you meet somebody who learns German or who tries to speak German, people tend to be more patient with them and be happy that they are even trying. And in Russia, I feel you either should be able to say something perfectly or you shouldn't even try at all.</p>	<p>Easier</p> <p>No English Different Treatment Impatience</p>
<p><i>How would you describe your overall experience in Russia?</i></p>	
<p>My experience in Russia is very nice but I also have to mention that a lot of the good stuff here is also because of the people I met at university, the other international students, not just Russians and it's not just Russia what is nice in this experience. Because coming here all by myself was first a little hard and in thinking that I would also have to travel all by myself. Russian's don't travel a lot because it costs money and they just don't have as much as let's say Europeans are able to afford. So, it is nice I have my international students to travel with and then the other Russians, the local people here, to just hang out with. Apart from that, I am interested in the history and might have seen a lot of nice places. I'm glad that I decided to come here.</p>	<p>Good/ Amazing</p>
<p><i>Would you go again?</i></p>	
<p>Yes, definitely. Probably if I stay for longer, then to a bigger city like St. Petersburg, just because here it tends to get a little</p>	<p>Go Again</p>

<p>boring and I'm a big fan of St Petersburg, that's why. I have actually already planned on coming back soon. But it's funny, every time I talk to people at home, they were astonished that I went to Russia all by myself because they cannot imagine why I would go. Also, my parents asked at first, if it is safe and please take care of yourself and now that I'm in Russia they have friends and neighbors asking, why is she there, is she okay, is she afraid, or aren't you afraid that she's there all by herself. It's weird but I know how it is here and I know it's safer than it usually sounds or sounds to them. Because a lot of them still think that Russia or the Russians are dangerous and to me it seems they have a completely wrong picture of what the country actually is but that happens to a lot of people who have not been here. Anyway, yes, I will definitely come to Russia again.</p>	
<p><i>Would you say your perception has changed since you came here?</i></p> <p>I don't think so. Maybe just that Russia or the Russians are not dangerous. I think I had this mindset. I mean you always kind of expect something, but I usually just try to go to a place first and then create a picture of it. The first time I went to Russia, I went only to Saint Petersburg, and now that I'm here in Voronezh, I can see that there's a big difference but you usually know that, St. Petersburg in particular, is a very European city and that the rest of Russia is just not like this, so I think I just came to see a different side of Russia or a more authentic Russia, let's say.</p>	<p>-//- (Go Again)</p> <p>Little Change Safer</p> <p>Authenticity</p>
<p><i>Was there any particular situation or encounter you remember the most?</i></p> <p>It was actually when I was picked up at the airport by Alex, who is responsible for the international students here, and we went to the dorm. When we came here, he opened the trunk of his car and there was an axe in there. Also, I saw and a shovel. This is basically how every horror movie starts but he saw my face and he was telling me that he always has this in his car, because he goes into nature a lot and it happens that trees falling from time to time or during a thunderstorm they fall on the streets and they're blocking the road. So, he has to have this in his car in order to be able to come back home basically. Because the firefighters or whoever comes to clean up are usually not that quick, but he needs to pass, so he just started to carry around all those tools in order to be able to get from one place to another. And I just love how stereotypical this picture is, this Russian guy in the middle of the woods chopping his way through, to get home.</p>	<p>Positive Experience</p>

Thank you very much for talking to me about your experiences today, before we start, I would need to know if you speak Russian?

Yeah, I have a higher-intermediate level of Russian.

And you have been to Russia, right? Why did you decide to go to Russia?

So the first time I went to Russia was in 2013, to Saint Petersburg, where we met, and I decided to go during that time because the idea of going to Russia has always been a scary thing, at least from a North-American perspective, it's very far away, different and difficult, so I thought going on an excursion with a school program would make it a lot easier and also for the experience that I wasn't getting in North America.

And what kind of image did you have of Russia before you went? Did you have any certain expectations?

When I usually travel, I tend or try to don't have any expectations but, I expected it kind of, like based on what my professor said that it wasn't going be English friendly and that you have to try and speak as much Russian as possible otherwise you're going be very lost and confused. So, from a language perspective, I expected everything in Russian, no one to understand English, and then I guess from a cultural perspective, I wanted to fight the stereotype that everybody drinks vodka and puts dill on everything. When I went to Kazan, in 2014/2015, that city is Muslim-Tartar, so that did really change all images I had from Russia. It was very different in terms of how the people treated you and the food that they ate and just the way that the city was organized. Everything was very different. Russia is so big, so every single corner has something to offer. I didn't really have any expectations but, St. Petersburg, I guess I assumed that it was going be what you see in popular culture but then travelling outside of that city made me realize that there is a lot more in Russia that people who don't know anything about Russia would never know.

How did you prepare for your trip? Did you do any research, or did you ask anyone?

I relied a lot on what my professor had said because he travels there a lot. He is a diplomat, he is in the consulate with the Russian Embassy in Canada so I really trusted what he had to say about it, but if I had my time back, at least the first time I went to Russia, I would have looked elsewhere, because his perspective of Russia was very much his experience being there during the Soviet Union in the 70s, so I think he still holds a lot of the prejudices of someone who has travelled

City

Interest

Opportunity

Language Barrier

**City
Change**

**Diversity
Common Stereotype**

Prior Knowledge

there a lot during the time of the Soviet Union versus, you know, someone going there in contemporary day, where there is a lot of new young people that are doing a lot of different things there.

What did you do during your stay in Russia in terms of tourist activities?

When we went to St. Petersburg, we had a lot planned for us, so we got to go to Peterhof, we got to go to Pushkin, we got to go to the Hermitage, we got to go to all these places and see all these things without really having to try ourselves. And I thought that was cool, but when you travel to Russia by yourself, or outside of a program, like I did when I went to Kazan, I felt I didn't do as much of that touristy stuff. It felt like it was more interesting to me to go to the bars I guess and meet many people and kind of be more immersive in society as opposed to being a tourist? Because I was there for a couple of months. I didn't want to feel like a tourist while I was there, I wanted to feel like somebody who lived there.

How was your experience with public transport, while being in Russia?

I can't really remember in St. Petersburg. We had to take the subway a lot to get into the city center, and I found that really easy in St. Petersburg. I had other people there, so it was always fine, but I think if I was there by myself, I probably would have been terrified at first. But then in Kazan, the building I lived in was outside the city, so I had to take a 45-minute bus and that was okay. There was only one subway line in Kazan so there was no way that you would ever be confused. But in St. Petersburg, it was definitely good that I had people to take it with and then eventually I got used to it, because at first, I would have been terrified, but then again, it's not Moscow, that's a whole other story.

Did you interact with locals during your stay? And how was that?

When we went to Saint Petersburg I can honestly say that I did interact with people at all. I felt very much like it was just a school trip and I was there with people from my university and then we met others like yourself and people from Poland and we were a group. I felt that it was very difficult for us to meet other people. I met one friend through the internet before, and we met up for a day while I was in St. Petersburg. We went to a show together and, that was like the only person that I met in St. Petersburg and we were there for almost a month. Other than my host mother, I didn't actually interact with any Russians a whole lot and I feel that made that trip not so helpful in terms of bettering my language abilities because even going to the store, we didn't have to do that kind

**POIx2
Museum**

Exploring

Nightlife

Good Metro

Casual Encounter

Daily Life

<p>of stuff that much. And then going to bars, when asking for a beer, you don't have to have any complex like language skills to do that. And then your host mother would buy all your groceries for you. You don't have to go buy groceries and deal with communication that way. But in Kazan it was a whole other story for me because, I was very much on my own at first. But then, I became friends with people who communicated in English most of the time, because we were mostly all from either Western Europe or North America. Whereas, there was a new kind of another group of students there, from Slavic speaking countries like Macedonia and Bulgaria, and instead of speaking in their respective languages or in English they all spoke in Russian, and I envied that, even though for those languages it is easier to speak Russian, because they are Slavic, but still. I was stuck with people who wanted to speak English all the time. So, I was with all these people from Western Europe and wasn't speaking Russian very much throughout the year. But when I go to the city and go to the grocery store and kind of exist as a human being, living in a Russian speaking country, I did so much to improve my language skills. When I go to the grocery store, I got to read everything. You do build a routine and you do get used to things and then anytime you have to say anything that's not normal for you in your routine, like going to the store getting on the bus, going home, all these things that you do every day that you get used to, it is a little scary at first but I felt, because I had communicated, even if it wasn't part of a routine, it made it a lot easier, as opposed to when we were in St. Petersburg. Anytime I had to speak Russian it was like, no I don't want to because I hadn't had to yet.</p>	<p>Necessary Encounter</p>
<p><i>Did you have any difficulties communicating or did you feel misunderstood at some point?</i></p> <p>At some points but it was usually because, I would be talking with me someone who's older and a little less impatient but anytime that it had to interact with other students learning languages, there were a lot like me. There were Russian speakers who were taking French or something and when I went to interact with them on a daily basis, it felt it was easy to communicate and if someone didn't understand anything you find a way even if you're just speaking in Russian, there was a way to get it across without having to switch to English. But yes definitely, when you have to deal with Babushkas, it can be quite difficult because I feel there is more judgment or something like that for pronouncing something incorrectly. The first time going to St. Petersburg, any time that I tried to say anything I think I was so hesitant to say a word that, when someone would ask what I said, I would just stop and not even try but then the second time around it was better. And it's</p>	<p>Daily Life</p> <p>Impatience</p> <p>-//- (Impatience)</p>

largely because, I went to Kazan a couple years later, I had done more Russian in school, I was more confident, whereas when I went to St. Petersburg I'd only done first year Russian. Going to Kazan, I definitely felt that, other than my horrible grocery store experiences I feel people were more patient, but I think they always were patient, I think it was just me feeling like I couldn't try without being embarrassed. Some people have this wonderful behavior, they just dive in, make all these mistakes even if they're going to be wrong, just because that's how you learn. But I wanted to be perfect from the beginning and I think after years I realized that that's not how learning a language work.

Did you also use any tools to make communication easier?

Even though it's common sense and a lot of people say this, don't use Google translate. Even though you feel it's a great tool to have and it is good for situations when you are in a grocery store and you want to make sure that you are buying fizzy water and not flat water or something, but in any case, in where you're actually trying to communicate with someone, it can be a real kind of crush. When I went to Kazan, I had to go to the hospital because I had a bladder infection. I was trying to communicate with the doctor about what kind of symptoms I was experiencing. I was trying to use Google translate to communicate to this person and it was awful. You can't use a tool like that when something is so important and serious, because if I get prescribed something or I have an allergy to something and she asks me, and I don't know. Those kind of situations, they are very very tricky, and I definitely regret trying to use Google translate in this scenario. But I have done Duolingo with Russian. I completed it. That app is great for vocabulary but not grammar and I would never recommend anybody to try to practice their grammar or anything through that app, but I think if you just need a refresher with vocabulary, when you've already kind of learned Russian, and you want to practice because you haven't done it in a while. But if you're just trying to start learning Russian, I wouldn't use that. There is also this really cool thing on Android phones now, where the camera will have this automated translation thing. You hold the camera over a text, that is written in another language and it will translate it. I tried it, I was using it over pretty simple sentences and the camera was able to translate it almost perfectly. I don't know, they're probably using Google translate as their software to translate but I thought that was really convenient and fast and that's the thing, when you try to use Google translate to translate in a conversation, you you're doing it so slowly that it's ruining the conversation, is not organic anymore it's very systematic and it slows it down. But other than that, I feel Russian is so grammatically complex and it's hard to have a

Negative Experience

Vocabulary Prep

-//- (Vocabulary Prep)

<p>certain app or tool for communicating. I would like to know what other languages have, so that maybe an app like that could be developed for Russian. At the same time, I feel the whole point of learning a language is to be able to do it without having a dictionary. I had a mini dictionary when I went to Kazan, but I didn't have one in St. Petersburg and was fine well, but it takes you longer to look up the word you'd like to use. I feel dictionaries and this stuff should be reserved for science and texts rather than a conversation.</p>	
<p><i>How would you compare Russia to other destinations or other countries in terms of tourism? What is your impression of the country the culture and the people?</i></p> <p>In terms of other destinations, I feel Russia does a good job at letting you know what it has to offer for tourist destinations. You talk to people who haven't seen Russian and they know about the Trans-Siberian Railway, the know about Lake Baikal, all these people that I talked to have a pretty good sense of what there is in terms of what to see but then there's just so much that's underneath that you kind of need to be an expert in the area to know about it. I try to think of an example. Russia is so big and there's all these little small towns and all of them have such interesting things and it's sad that all these things can get overlooked by the popular culture. I've had some friends who didn't study Russian, they had gone to Russia and they went to Moscow and they saw Red Square, but they would never know that there's all these smaller things in all these different towns. One other thing that is good too is that Russia is relatively cheap, cheap to traveled through from the perspective of a Canadian. I found I can get around and see things well because of the trains and there's always the shuttle buses to different communities. Usually you could go to St. Petersburg and you could see the surrounding towns pretty easily. The same goes for Moscow and when I went to Kazan it was the same. I can go to little towns on these little shuttle busses and they advertise it and you know it exists. They do a great job and know that you can take a little excursion. Petersburg is probably the best example for it. I wasn't in Moscow long enough to know if they had the same services but in St. Petersburg there's constantly advertisements to go to Peterhof or Nizhny Novgorod or wherever you want to go.</p>	<p>Diversity</p> <p>Cheaper</p>
<p><i>How would you then describe your overall experience in Russia?</i></p> <p>My overall experience in Russia. I loved it. Honestly, I felt it was a great place to go, and this is going to sound sad, but I'm just going to accept the small joy of it, I became closer with people who aren't necessarily Russian but people from different places and it took me going to Russia to meet</p>	<p>Good/ Amazing</p>

someone from Finland and get excited about Finnish culture and it took me going to Russia to make friends from the U. K. As someone who likes to travel, to meet all these people who are from all these different places, like me and you, we met five years ago, and we still get to see each other almost once a year and I think that's one thing that I take away from my trip to Russia. All these like friendships that I made, when have a mean when you travel, and you create all these relationships so fast and they become so close. Secondly, just how much I feel comfortable speaking language now. Going to Kazan I left as someone who is definitely more confident speaking it. Not that I necessarily learn more about grammar or anything, but that time there made me get rid of the fear of speaking the language without being perfect and I can make mistakes. Going to Russia maybe fear less going to really different places, because it's scary to travel to a place where you have to go through this intense visa process. It's incredibly difficult to go to Russia and after that experience I feel like I can go anywhere. Also, people in my family were worried when I went to Russia, because of how it is politically and what's happening there and stuff. When we went to St. Petersburg, I wrote a train every day on which someone put a bomb on a couple years ago. But that doesn't stop me from traveling because that could happen anywhere, and I felt going to Russia made me fear visiting or traveling the world less. One more thing, going back to your first question about expectations or stereotypes I had about the country. I definitely realized now how vast it is and that there's so many different parts of Russia and its culture that is still to explore and learn about. Especially from a Canadian perspective, Eastern Europe and the Caucasus and the south of Russia in terms of Armenia and stuff was always kind of a blur to me and when I went there, it opened it up more to me, when I got to meet people who are living in Russia from Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. Just seeing these people as their own instead of, this sort of former Soviet countries.

Diversity

So, would you say your perception of the country has changed, or did you come to understand something or learn something new?

Definitely. I definitely realize that there is a lot of different cultures and different people and I feel it's really important to realize that when we look at Russia it is critical and you have to understand that Russia is more of a geographical place than a country, because it's so vast and there's so many different cultures and different people and in order for us to understand Russia it has to be realized that it is made of a whole lot of different people and I am being redundant now but that is something that I learned. Not necessarily that I had that perception it's just that picture that, Russia as a country is all

Change

Diversity

<p>the same, and everybody is the same, I never really thought that, but I didn't necessarily know what all these different people, or how can I say this, it's just like Canada. Not everybody across Canada is the exact same. I come from a place that is quite different for people who live in Toronto and people who live in Vancouver, people who live in Calgary. I learned to think a little bit about THAT one small place, or, THIS group of people, which is an important, I think.</p>	<p>-//- (Diversity)</p>
<p><i>Do you do you think that tourists who don't speak Russian have a different experience? Is your experience more authentic because you're able to speak the language?</i></p> <p>I would never say more authentic, because I think any traveler's experiences are authentic and there's no hierarchy of how you experience a country. Just because I could speak the language I don't think that my experience was any better than of someone who wouldn't speak the language. I have a friend from school who went to Russia because she is dating someone who's from Sochi. She went back there a few times and got to see things that I never saw. And I envy that. I am a lazy traveler, I don't really want to go see all the things I just want to be lazy. But I think in some ways, having an understanding of the language helps you, because there's a lot of traps that you can get into in Russia in terms of the police and such. And if you have an insight, it might do you a favor, if that makes sense?</p>	<p>Easier</p>
<p><i>Last question. Is there any particular situation or any encounter you remember the most?</i></p> <p>Oh, there are so many. I have to think about this one, give me a moment. Good or bad, I could do a bad one, because, there is just so much that was good that it is hard to narrow it down to just one. So, when I went to Kazan, I was going out with friends and we were drinking, and we were walking from downtown back to one of the apartments that someone lived in and we're going to stay there overnight because, my place was outside of the city, so it was hard to access, because the buses stop running at 11pm. When we were walking back, we got stopped by police officers, who thought that we were being rowdy or something. They want to see your documents and the registration cards we had said where we lived, and because it said that we lived somewhere else outside the city, and that was not where we were going, they gave us like an incredibly hard time. That could have potentially escalated into something, but it was definitely not as bad as it could have been, and I felt that in that situation, knowing Russian definitely save me. It was a really stressful situation, because there's always those horror stories about people who have been stopped by the police in Russia but me being able to communicate where I live and that I'm staying at a friend's</p>	<p>Negative Experience</p>

house in the city center was helpful. It was really stressful though.

I actually forgot one question but that one is very short - would you go again?

Definitely. The country is so big and there's so much that I haven't seen and haven't done. And I definitely want to go to Russia not as a student, at some point in my life. I would love to go there to work at some point. Whether it is to work in a camp or work at a university or teach English or something, because I feel that, as a student, you're kind of protected and you have a community of people who are helping you out, you don't feel very on your own but I want to experience Russia as somebody who is renting an apartment, has a good job, just for a short period of time, a summer or something like that. Or just to go back and do the Trans-Siberian and see Lake Baikal. So, yes, I would go back.

Go Again

-//- (Go Again)

Appendix 3: Interview Transcripts – Non-Russian Speaking Respondents

<p><i>Thank you for taking the time to talk to me, before we start, one first question to know which group you belong to - do you speak Russian or are you able to read Cyrillic?</i></p> <p>No, I don't speak Russian and I know nothing about the language.</p> <p><i>And why did you decide to go to Russia or what was the reason for your travels?</i></p> <p>Well at that time it was because of my job, I was a travel journalist so I got invited by a company which was not related to tourism but they were in the field of arts, they imported Russian art to Hong Kong, so they wanted to promote their art that's why they invited me as a travel journalist to come and see the origin of the art piece and I had to interview the artist there, because of work reasons I went to Russia.</p> <p><i>What kind of image have you had of Russia before you went, or did you have any certain expectations before you went?</i></p> <p>Somehow it was very exotic to me because it's a totally different language and I heard something about the Soviet period before so I had a feeling that the people may be very cold and not so nice but at the same time I also was very interested in their culture because although they're famous for being very cold people that at the same time, they are popular for art and ballet and so on. I had some expectations on the culture side.</p> <p><i>So where did you go and how long did you stay?</i></p> <p>I went to Moscow and Saint Petersburg. In Moscow I stayed for three days and two nights and in Saint Petersburg I spent a week.</p> <p><i>Did you prepare for your trip or were you concerned about the language issue?</i></p> <p>For the language, I just checked if they can speak English because I won't be able to learn any single word in Russian and that's why I checked if they can speak English or if I can find a guide who can speaks English, because during the trip I wanted to have a guide who speaks either English or one who can speak Chinese, so later on I found one who could speak English.</p> <p><i>What did you do during your stay apart from your work did you go to any museums or did you participate in any tours, or any other tourist activities?</i></p>	<p>Work</p> <p>Unknown History Common Stereotype Culture</p> <p>City, City</p> <p>(Internet) Research</p> <p>Other People</p>
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<p>Yes, I went to this place in Moscow I forgot the name and I think I went to a museum and I went to the famous place, the red wall?</p>	<p>Forgot Museum, Forgot</p>
<p><i>The Red Square...</i> Yes, there, and I saw that famous church that is there and in St Petersburg I also went to this church, I forgot the name, but I can send you a picture later, also in Moscow I went to the white church right next to the river, do you know which one I mean?</p>	<p>POI Church x2 Forgot Church</p>
<p><i>Yes, I do.</i> Just because I tend to forget all the names. I went also to this big museum in St Petersburg, the very famous one I also forgot the name, the most famous one. I can't remember all the names, they're very complicated. I went there five to six years ago so I can't really remember anyway, I also went to this museum which was very interesting. Have you heard of this Easter egg of Russia?</p>	<p>Museum Forgot Museum</p>
<p><i>Yes, Faberge you mean?</i> Yes, I went to see this, I think it's private and it's run by a rich guy, I will give you the name later. I also went to see a ballet in St. Petersburg.</p>	
<p><i>Where there any activities you did not engage in because you thought you would not understand what is going on?</i> There was this one stand-up comedy show which I did not go to because, of course I did not understand Russian. But I went to the ballet even though it was in Russian, but you don't really need to understand, you just sit and watch and listen to the music. For the local tours I went to - the most are available in English, some were in Russian, but I did not go to them obviously.</p>	<p>Didn't Go Museum</p>
<p><i>Did you use public transport at any point?</i> I think not, because I lived in the city center and everything was pretty much walkable. I took the metro once, but I only went down because of the famous building that was supposed to be there, or the metro station and I found this was amazing but somehow it was difficult to find the location. I'm a little bit bad in that way but overall, I think it was more about orientation rather than the language because I think, as I remember they had English names on the metro maps, at least in Moscow.</p>	

<p><i>Did you also interact with locals? Or how did you act in shops, cafes, or restaurants?</i></p> <p>In Moscow, I had my guide and she is from Russia but of course she also spoke very bad English and she was very cold and honestly, I think, or I expect that you as a guide even though you cannot speak very fluent English, I expect that you speak some, and you should be friendlier, and she was very cold in and sometimes even rude. Maybe because we didn't understand her completely or she couldn't express herself completely to us. Also, in the restaurants I felt that the people in Moscow are not so open, they're not too eager to speak to you I don't know if it is because it is of the people or anything, but I felt the culture, or the atmosphere is different in Moscow than it was in St. Petersburg. Local people there speak better English, they are friendlier, and they are more open. I think this is also related to the geographic position, they are closer to Europe, so they have more tourists and speak better in English. So, the feeling is different in Moscow, somehow there it feels it is very closed, I don't know how to explain that, maybe it's because of the language or what is the difference. Obvious is that St Petersburg people speak better English than the ones in Moscow. I think at the same time it makes me more comfortable in St Petersburg and I felt more welcomed.</p>	<p>Negative Experience</p> <p>Different Experience</p>
<p><i>How would you compare Russia to other destinations? What is your impression of the country, the culture, and people?</i></p> <p>I still really enjoyed my stay and I hope I can go to Russia again and explore more of the other parts of the country. Compared to other destinations, Russia is unique. Still because of their culture and their art, are especially their art, and maybe also because of the language. The Russian alphabet is so cute, it's a mystery code that's why it is somehow it makes me feel the country is more mysterious and, because of Moscow is more in the eastern part of the country and St. Petersburg this more west and they already are different, and I wonder if it would be even more different the further East I go. I also think there's no country that could compare to Russia I think language is very different and I think their culture is very traditional, but I like that.</p>	<p>Go Again</p> <p>Unique</p> <p>Different</p>
<p><i>Did you any difficulties communicating or if you felt misunderstood at some point?</i></p> <p>No, I always had my guide with me.</p>	<p>Help</p>
<p><i>Were there any other language difficulties where you felt you're lost or not even your guide can help you or she was not there?</i></p> <p>The problem was more obvious in Moscow. For example, in cafes, it was so difficult to order because I don't know what is</p>	<p>Language Issue</p>

<p>on the menu, they don't have pictures and they didn't have a translation, so it was kind of difficult I only ordered coffee all the time because for sandwiches for example they would ask me what kind of sandwich I would want but I don't know because I could not understand. It was very difficult. But for accommodation for example it was not that hard because in hotels people were able to speak English, but it was very hard with the food in the cafe or in a restaurant.</p>	
<p><i>Did you, apart from your guide, you use any other tools for translating anything?</i></p> <p>No because not for translating English to Russian I never tried and then for Russian into English I didn't know how to try because I don't know how to type Russian or I don't know how to do it in Cyrillic.</p>	<p>No Tools</p>
<p><i>Do you think that tourists who speak Russian have had it a lot easier or do you think you had a different experience because you were not able to speak the language?</i></p> <p>I think if I can speak Russian it is much easier. I can get much more from the country. For example, I wanted to know where the local young people went, where are the secret spots, the off-track locations, not so touristy places, and it's difficult but I'm sure there must be some like this and where other locals go, what they're usually do or what you can do which is not so touristy related.</p>	<p>Different Experience</p>
<p><i>How would you describe your overall experience? Is there any situation or encounter you remember the most?</i></p> <p>I remember that in St Petersburg there was one woman coming towards me and my guide told me not to look her in the eyes because she was a gypsy and she was somehow trying to hypnotize me. They hypnotize people that's what my guide told me - don't look into her eyes because even though she doesn't speak to you she can still hypnotized you and somehow you will start doing whatever she wants you to do.</p>	<p>Negative Experience</p>
<p>What I also remember is that I went to a flea market and there were many gypsies in and they looked at me and my photographer and they stared at us while we walked over the market and they were also following us, so I was feeling a little weird. The market was full of local people, so nobody spoke English but some of the storekeepers were pointing at us and the cameras and gesturing something, so I tried to understand their body language. Somehow, we realized they were trying to tell us to be more careful because the gypsies they wanted to get our camera so does the locals wanted us to be more careful and were trying to somehow communicate with us. I have to say I still feel Russia is somehow a dangerous and not safe country</p>	<p>Negative Experience</p> <p>Not Safe</p>

<p>How would you describe your overall experience of the trip? I would say very mysterious and amazing, eye opening, and kind of exotic.</p> <p>Would you say your perception of the country has changed afterwards? I think everything matched my expectations.</p> <p>Is there something you would say you have learned? I think I learned the difference between the religions that Russians are orthodox, and I learned why there's gold color in those paintings of people, those icons. So mostly religious things I would say.</p> <p><i>But not culture-wise or or regarding the people there?</i> I think what I realized is that people in St. Petersburg a very similar to the people in the other parts of Europe, so there was not too much of a difference, it was more Moscow where people were completely different.</p>	<p>Amazing / Interesting</p> <p>No Change</p> <p>Authenticity</p>
<p><i>Thank you for being here with me today, before we start, let's just start right away - Do you speak Russian, or can you read any Cyrillic?</i> No, which was quite a problem in Russia</p> <p><i>Why did you decide to go to Russia? What made you go?</i> I was on an exchange semester in Sweden and we took a trip the 72 hours Visa free trip, so it was a culture trip organized by a tour operator.</p> <p><i>Did you have a certain image of Russia before you went, or did you have any expectations?</i> As the typical Eastern European country. We didn't expect much of a clean city or, expensive stuff or anything like this. We had an expectation of a low-budget destination you could say.</p> <p><i>Did you prepare for your trip did you ask anyone before you go did you do any research or anything like this before you went to Russia?</i> Since it was an organized trip I didn't prepare much, the only thing I had to do was make sure that they have all my documents to get the visa free entrance, so I checked if my passport is still valid for at least six months and that was it.</p> <p><i>Were you concerned about the language which issue?</i> Since we're traveling in an organized group, not that much.</p>	<p>Opportunity</p> <p>Common Stereotype x3</p> <p>Little/ No Preparation</p>

<p><i>What did you do during your stay? What kind of tourist activities did you engage in?</i></p> <p>In St. Petersburg we did a city tour and, what was the name of it the that big museum in St Petersburg? That is or something I can remember, I'm not sure what the name is. We also walked around in the city, went to another museum in Petersburg which I don't remember either and we went to see Catherine's palace, a little bit outside of the city.</p>	<p>City, Tour, Forgot Museum Exploring Museum Forgot POI</p>
<p><i>Was there anything you did not do or not participate in because you don't speak Russian?</i></p> <p>Not that I can remember, we had some issues in a restaurant because we did not understand what kind of food they had but apart from that, nothing.</p>	<p>Language Issue</p>
<p><i>Did you use public transport at any point?</i></p> <p>Yes, we were travelling a lot with the subway.</p>	
<p><i>And how was that experience?</i></p> <p>Quite surprising, we didn't expect that it is so well built, quite far reaching, you can reach every point in St. Petersburg fast with the subway and we were surprised how deep the system is. You travel down, I don't know how many meters, but deep underground. And I can remember we had issues with the ticket system, because we could not understand it.</p>	<p>Good Metro</p> <p>Language Issue</p>
<p><i>Did you interact with any local people? Did you talk to anyone?</i></p> <p>We tried to talk to the waiter in the restaurant, and in the coffeeshop, they didn't understand us at all. And we had some talks with some random people on the streets.</p>	<p>Language Issue</p>
<p><i>Did you have any other difficulties communicating during your stay?</i></p> <p>The biggest problem was, when we went out in the evening and tried to find back to the hostel, we were not able to communicate the street names because, we couldn't type it into google and we were not able to read the map, that was quite hard.</p>	<p>Language Issue</p>
<p><i>How would you compare Russia to other holiday destinations? What are your impressions of the country, the culture, and the people?</i></p> <p>I think St. Petersburg is different than the rest of Russia from what I heard. From what I remember, it was kind of Venice, it looked European, but of course it is different than any other beach locations like Egypt, Turkey, Italy, Greece, but</p>	<p>No Difference</p>

<p>comparing to other European cities, other capitals, it was not that different, apart from the different language.</p> <p><i>What would you say is your impression of the country, the people, or the culture?</i></p> <p>My expectation was not met in the end. It felt European, what we didn't really expect. Because from what is left from the Tsarist empire, so the whole city felt not that different than expected. I had the impression that the people are not that different than in other Eastern European countries, but few people were able to speak English, they were all only speaking Russian, at least, we only met that kind of people.</p> <p><i>Have you had any help to understand people or did you use any tools to make communication easier? A dictionary or an app or something?</i></p> <p>Nothing, digital. We had one person in our group who was able to speak a little bit Russian and when we had problems at restaurants for example, we sometimes found another waiter who was then able to speak at least some English and could somehow understand us.</p> <p><i>How would you describe your overall experience in Russia?</i></p> <p>Really good. I really liked it. I was surprised, as I said I expected something completely different, but I really liked it.</p> <p><i>So, would you go again?</i></p> <p>Not to Saint Petersburg, because I think I covered the main stuff, but I really want to go to Moscow or any other place, but I don't know any other big cities in Russia.</p> <p><i>Do you think tourist who speak Russian have no problems during their visit?</i></p> <p>I think if you understand Russian and can talk to the people, it is easier and if you can read the street names, it is definitely easier.</p> <p><i>Do you think people who speak Russian would have a better experience?</i></p> <p>No, I think it is different but not necessarily better.</p> <p><i>Is there any situation you remember the most? Good or bad, doesn't matter.</i></p> <p>Yes, something weird. We were walking down the street and getting talked to by some random cab drivers inviting us to some red-light district or clubs. That was really strange. And uncomfortable.</p>	<p>Different than Expected</p> <p>No English</p> <p>No Tools Help</p> <p>Good -/- (Different than Expected)</p> <p>Go Again</p> <p>Easier</p> <p>Different Experience</p> <p>Negative Experience</p>
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<p><i>Did they speak English?</i> Yes, they did. They identified me as a tourist and then tried me to get me in their car to drive me to the red-light district.</p> <p><i>Would you say your perception of the country has changed? Do you think differently of Russia now, since you have been there?</i> I think from a touristic view yes, but not much, from other point of views, like politically, not at all. I think the trip had not a big impact on my image of Russia, except for how the city itself (St. Petersburg) looks. But other than that, not.</p> <p><i>And would you say you came to understand something new about the country?</i> Not really. Because I didn't have that much contact with local people to change the image. So, it felt more like seeing "the old Russia" than the current one.</p>	<p>No Change</p>
<p><i>Thank you for taking the time to talk to me, before we start, I would need to know if you speak Russian?</i> Unfortunately, not.</p> <p><i>And are you able to read Cyrillic?</i> Nope.</p> <p><i>And you have been to Russia, right?</i> Absolutely.</p> <p><i>Why did you decide to go, what made you want to visit?</i> I was on Erasmus in Sweden at the university of Linköping and there was this wonderful trip organized by ESN and I used the opportunity to visit the biggest country in the world.</p> <p><i>And now where did you go and how long were you there for?</i> We took a ferry from Stockholm, and we stayed there for 72 hours, there's a special visa or some visa free entry to Russia. We went to St. Petersburg and on the last day we also went to, I think it's outside of the city, Catherine's palace, the second wife of Peter the Great.</p> <p><i>What kind of image did you have of Russia or what kind of expectations?</i> Expectations. Cheap. A cheap country for us, West/ Middle Europeans, and that was true, when I remember when we went to restaurant or so, it was much cheaper than Austria for example. Then, that people don't speak much English, but nevertheless they tried to help us. On the street for example, and the streets are quite broad, there are many people in St. Petersburg as well, but in general, I really liked the city.</p>	<p>Opportunity</p> <p>City POI</p> <p>Common Stereotype Cheaper Language Barrier</p> <p>Amazing/ Good</p>

Did you have a certain image of Russia before you went?

As a Chinese, I always considered Russia as an ally of China in political questions and since I was a child, I was always a fan of Russia because, I just liked it and was interested in the country.

Did you prepare anything for your trip?

I just checked some sightseeing stuff of St. Petersburg and that's all, just to have some sort of base.

And what did you do during your stay, what kind of touristy things did you do?

It has been three years already. We went with the ferry, then to the hostel. I don't remember the name, but it was quite fancy quite beautiful for us to believe it was a hotel. We went to this huge shopping mall, there is a huge a shopping mall in the city center, and then we went to the Hermitage, which I really enjoyed. Also, we went on a bus, which was driving us around the city for almost two hours and a guide was explaining us stuff about each statue, significant building in the city, I really enjoyed it. On the first evening, we used the opportunity to book an optional limousine tour for two hours and we stopped at each site and had some champagne and made photos which was quite cool. Afterwards we went clubbing. On the second day, we went to the Hermitage, as I said, and then we had time explored the city. And we wanted to go a bit outside of the city, to a special subway station which looks like a bunker. So, we tried to get there by subway, but it was impossible because we didn't speak Russian and people didn't speak English and well, yes, we finally cancelled, went back, and walked around the city center.

Did you use public transport besides the subway at any point?

No, just the subway.

Did you interact with locals?

Yes, when were on the street or when we were in restaurants, talking to the waiters, or in shopping malls. But not that much, just a little bit.

And how was that usually? Were there many misunderstandings?

I remember that the young people spoke English, they understood us, we understood them, they could really help us, but the older generations were hard to understand because they did not speak English, so they communicated with us through body language, the usual way to express yourself when you don't know the language.

**History
Interest**

POI

**Museum
Tour**

Tour

Nightlife

**Exploring
POI**

Language Issue

Necessary Encounters

Young vs. Old

<p><i>Did you have any other difficulties concerning communication?</i></p> <p>Not really, we had a good guide and the tour was well prepared I would say. We had a map, we had explanations, we had emergency numbers, which we never used because it was not necessary, and where we were living was quite clear to get around. It was good, there weren't any problems as far as I can remember.</p>	<p>Help Dictionary / Map</p>
<p><i>Did you use any tool during your stay to make communication easier?</i></p> <p>No not really because, well I had my phone, but I didn't have internet connection there, at least not on the street, there are WIFI spots everywhere, but we rarely used them, because also, if you go travelling you should not stick on your phone the whole time, you should enjoy the environment. We didn't use any, or at least I didn't use any other tools.</p>	<p>No Tools</p> <p>-//- (No Tools)</p>
<p><i>How would you compare Russia to other holiday destinations? What is your impression of the country, the culture, and the people?</i></p> <p>The history I would say is quite interesting, especially the 17th century, with Peter the Great, when they were expanding and defending themselves against the Swedish Empire. Also, I feel the Russians, somehow, they still have this little value of the Soviet Union, it's still a little in them. To me it seems like that. That the people still, at least the older generations, the younger, or our generation is maybe different, but the older generations, for them life is still, I feel the people are still, because they grew up with the Soviet regime, and they still have somehow that kind of thinking in their head. But in general, I would say it's a very valuable country to visit, not only because it is the biggest, but St. Petersburg has great history and the Hermitage is also great to visit, I really enjoyed the tour - also the Fortress of Peter the Great, and the food was good. I nearly forgot that! Very important!</p>	<p>More Historic</p> <p>Young vs. Old</p> <p>Interesting Rich Culture</p> <p>Good Food</p>
<p><i>So how would you describe your overall experience then?</i></p> <p>Russia is not that bad as country as it is presented in the western media. If anyone has that opinion. I'd say go to Russia, talk to the people, at least if you find someone who can speak English and make your own picture. Because, according to the media, especially America, and Western Europe, they try to present Russia, or they put Russia into a bad position, as the bad guys, which is not true in my opinion because just because of politics, if someone thinks about Russia like that, then they should visit it because it is a great country in my opinion.</p>	<p>Better than Reputation</p> <p>Go See</p> <p>-//- (Good)</p>

<p><i>So, you would go again?</i> Yes, definitely!</p> <p><i>Do you think that tourists who speak Russian have a better time in Russia or a better experience than you might have had?</i> I would generalize this, if you go to a country where you speak the language, of course it is easier to communicate, but I would not say it is a better holiday necessarily because it depends first on the people you travel with, or if you go alone. I would say it depends what you do for example, we had a tour guide, so we didn't need to communicate in Russian, maybe if you go alone, by yourself you would need to speak Russian, or well, know the language to get what you want or need.</p> <p><i>Was there any situation or encounter with somebody, you remember the most?</i> The hangover on the second day actually that was a really terrible hangover, probably the worst of my life. Because, during the limousine tour, we thought we were smart to buy vodka before and take it with us, and I had the best idea ever, to drink the vodka without mixing it with Red Bull or any other soft drinks, and I believe the hangover would be less if I leave out the sugar of the soft drinks, but no, it was not like that. We also lost one friend, and the next day, it turned out he went to a brothel.</p> <p><i>So, would you say, your perception of Russia has changed in some way?</i> Not that much but I would say it was somehow the way I was expecting it. I would, now after having been there, even more recommend people to go to the country.</p> <p><i>Would you also say you have learned something new about the country?</i> Not necessarily something new, but I would say that I realized that what I believed before, the way how people are, this stereotype that people say that Russians are unfriendly, is absolutely not true. That is just their body language that makes them appear maybe not that friendly but if you talk to them they are also friendly and will help you. But people unfortunately believe in the stereotype that are out there.</p>	<p>Go Again</p> <p>Easier</p> <p>Help Learn</p> <p>Little Change Go See</p> <p>Better than Reputation</p>
<p><i>Thank you for taking the time to speak to me – to dive right in, please tell me if you speak Russian or are you able to read Cyrillic?</i> I can read Cyrillic but speaking Russian is, I tried to learn it, but my level right now would probably be A0+. I understand</p>	

<p>a little bit, but it is extremely hard to understand any of this language or to even speak it. Whenever I try to pronounce something, it is completely wrong.</p>	
<p><i>You have been to Russia, right? What made you go?</i> Now I have been 13 times to Russia, so this is not just one answer but several, but the very first time, it was because of a girl, so I was visiting Moscow several times. This year I was travelling through Russia for the first time. I was going with a friend from Saint Petersburg to Moscow, and all the other cities to Lake Baikal and this was just because I wanted to see more than just Moscow. Which is just one of the two cities which are rich, and everyone always tells you, if you see Moscow, it is not Russia, you must go to some other places too, that's what I did.</p>	<p>Love</p> <p>City City, POI Interest</p>
<p><i>Do you remember before you went for the first time, if you had a certain impression of Russia or any expectations of the country?</i> Yes, I remember the first time I went, I had certain expectations or at least an image, since there was a lot of propaganda about Russia where I grew up, you could still feel the influence of the past, but I didn't try to expect too much.</p>	<p>History</p> <p>No Image/ Expectations</p>
<p><i>How did you prepare for your trip? Did you do any certain preparations for your trip?</i> What I did before I went the first time, was learning the alphabet, the Cyrillic alphabet. I tried to learn the language too, but I was incredibly slow, so my knowledge of the language was basically 0. I could say да, нет and спасибо. Sure, I read a bit about Moscow, but I went on a very short trip, so I didn't prepare too much. And for the long trip this year I prepared a lot, so I tried to get some unusual spots which I wanted to see a rooftop tour in St. Petersburg or to get some nice museum which are not all touristy or nobody ever goes, also I got an accommodation via Couchsurfing in St. Petersburg. So, I was always trying to get in contact with locals and to get a local point of view.</p>	<p>Vocabulary Prep.</p> <p>Russian Term x3</p> <p>Little/ No Preparation</p> <p>Tour</p>
<p><i>Did you do any tourist activities during your stay?</i> Actually, I had a lot on my list, but I didn't manage to do much stuff, especially in St. Petersburg, in Moscow we did a sightseeing tour, a short tour with the local ESN team, so we had an official guide, and all the other stuff was just walking around with locals, watching some buildings, hearing stories about them and going for coffee. The last thing which I managed to make was something completely non-touristic, my girlfriend managed that we could enter the Moscow State</p>	<p>Tour Tour Exploring</p> <p>POI</p>

<p>University and just wander around in it and look out the windows, it was very nice because it is apparently not easy to get in there. Somehow, we managed, and I love stuff like this, the unusual stuff you cannot necessarily find in any guidebooks or on websites.</p> <p><i>Was there every any activity you did not do because you didn't speak Russian?</i> If so, then I don't know or remember.</p> <p><i>I guess you also used public transport?</i> Yes!</p> <p><i>How was that experience?</i> Wonderful. It was the first time in Moscow when I use the metro I was really impressed about the logistics. I remember one morning we used it and the complete platform was crowded, and I thought it will takes us forever, but we managed to get on the third train just five minutes later. So, I wonder how many people can fit in one train. I was really impressed about the logistics and the trains are coming in such short intervals and how organized this is and how many people can be transported by the metro without too much stress. But I also must mention, public transport is really loud in Moscow. You can read a book or listen to music but watching a film or listening to an audiobook is absolutely impossible, except in the extremely new trains, they are much less noisy. And going by bus in the rush hour is, well, you will probably be stuck in traffic all day. Does trains also count? I was travelling from Petersburg to Moscow and then from Moscow to Lake Baikal. It was a wonderful experience on one hand because we had 3rd class tickets and so we met a lot of people but what I understood on the first ride that not all the beds are made for people who are as tall as me, so if you understand this, then everything is fine.</p> <p><i>Since you don't speak Russian, how did you interact with locals?</i> First, I highly recommend getting in touch with locals if possible. Then I tried to speak English, which is basically not possible outside of Moscow and Saint Petersburg, so I used a lot of translation apps, sometimes I just pointed on stuff and just tried to translate texts on menus. I remember we have been to a Chinese restaurant and nobody there could speak English and the card was without pictures so we just didn't know who to go through with this, so we just translated the headlines - so this is rice section, this is the noodle section, and then when we roughly knew what we wanted we started translating every dish in the section and the first we understood, we ordered.</p>	<p>Good Metro</p> <p>Positive Experience</p> <p>No English App</p> <p>Language Issue</p>
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Apart from that, did you have any other situation where communication failed?

Yes, there was one where I felt lost. It was in Ekaterinburg, I went to the train station and wanted to catch my train, I was there half an hour early, I was approaching to the train building and tried to find my train. But on the monitor, I could not find it, so I was a bit worried. I tried to ask the guard in the cash counter, she answered me, but it was Russian, so I thought, well what do I do know? What I understood was something about that I must go to the third floor, but that building didn't have so many floors. I started asking everyone I could find, I started showing people my ticket and finally someone spoke a little English, it was a guy who was ordering taxis for people, so this guy was able to speak English and he told me that this train station was under construction and that it has two entrances which was not announced anywhere. I managed to reach the other one, with my full bag pack, I had to run. Then I had another challenge to find my train on the monitors there to see from where it started but, in the end, I managed to get on the train. This was very stressful. But all other situations were not stressful, just translating some pictures, texts, that's it. I was usually just smiling.

How would you compare Russia to other holiday destinations? What is your impression of the country, the culture, and the people?

As I am not a typical tourist who books club holiday, I just usually book an accommodation where I want to go, and I organize by myself how to get there. In Europe I usually go by car and then I just find my accommodation and then plan short trips around it or do a city tour or whatever, so in Russia I by myself didn't have any bad experiences directly with people. Most of the time I had really good experiences so, I met a lot of people who tried to help me, especially when I tried to speak a little Russian. Always people tried to communicate when I needed help or anything. I never felt being in danger, but perhaps it's just because I didn't understand the people around me so. Sure, I saw places where I thought, ok at night you should not go this way, but you also have that in every town. I think Russians are extremely hospitable, if you manage to be invited by them. Also, I think it's absolutely impossible to die because you are hungry when you are invited by a Russian. On first impression, Russians can be very cold, if you don't know them, but if you somehow manage to break the ice, to me they were always extremely friendly. They are, how do you say, they are emotional, sometimes, it's my impression they could be impatient, this is

City

Negative Experience

Nice People

Nice People

Impatience

just about the folks itself. And for Russia, the country at the moment, it's cheap to travel, I highly recommend everybody to forget about all the bad pictures they have imbedded and just go. Especially the European part, there is a lot to see and a lot to experience, and usually you are not completely lost. It takes a bit more time. By the way, I consider Russia as part of Europe, so when I say Europe I just mean the EU.

My next question you already partly answered, how would you describe your overall experience in Russia? If you have anything to add to this?

This is a very open question. Most of the time it was wonderful. Perhaps that's just my approach on how to travel, I always try to get in contact with locals either via Couchsurfing or through people I already know. One time I went somewhere with Blablacar, it was very funny to talk to the people in there, or, not talk to them. It was really funny. But when it comes to living conditions, what we are used to is not what you can expect as an average level of living there, also the average level of income is a completely different story, also when it comes to education or more or less everything, when you get outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg, it's a completely different level, it's not European standards. What I was negatively impressed by, was how awful people treat nature. You can see a lot of garbage everywhere in nature, sometimes I saw old washing machines in the middle of nowhere. I don't understand this, but yes, this is normal there. Perhaps it's part of the education system, the political system, whatever ...

Would you say that tourists who speak Russian maybe have an even more authentic experience of the country than you have? Or do you think they would have it a lot easier or experience different things? Just because they can speak the language?

Definitely. It is much easier to understand things. I remember one situation when I used a toilet on the train for the first time and couldn't read the signs so I press the button or not, which one then and so on. Surely you will have less surprises and will probably be a bit more relaxed and able to know what you are doing but perhaps that's also the thing that you miss. Not speaking the language, you have another approach, you don't need to necessarily ask other people, you don't need to get in contact with them, so you start a storyline that will be completely different, but it will be much easier. I remember the first time when I was in Moscow for the first time using the metro, I was completely lost, I could not read anything and then announcements I didn't understand, the running letters on the screens also not. Yes, if you speak Russian it is much

**Cheap
Go See**

Good/Amazing

**Positive Experience
Low Standards x3**

**Easier
Language Issue**

-//- (Easier)

Language Issue

**-//- (Easier) Different
Experience**

<p>easier to orientate and get around by yourself but, I think you will have a complete different experience.</p> <p><i>Would you say that now that the perception you had before you went has changed?</i></p> <p>Actually, I think now I know a lot more people than I knew before I went to Russia. Before I knew some exchange students and now I know a lot more people there so, I think even more that most of the time, Russian are friendly people and not as unfriendly as others say.</p> <p><i>So, you would say you have learned something new about the way of life basically?</i></p> <p>About the people yes. But I don't know everyone so, it's surely just my point of view. And about the country, I didn't expect that more or less everyone is throwing away so much garbage in nature, for me it was completely crazy to see that. On the one hand, you see that super expensive Porsche, BMW, Mercedes, with black windows and I don't know and on the other hand directly beside it there is an old Lada where you think, don't come near it, it will break down when you drive by it too fast. This is something which is completely impressive. What I also noticed is that, they have so many security controls, in the metro, in the airport, the universities, the shopping centers and so on, but we know that those checks are not really improving the security but only raising your security perception. If somebody really wants to do something, he will manage, we have seen this in the last years. But I know from a lot of Russians that they came here and were completely shocked that there is no entrance control at our universities and everyone can go there. This is where I saw a difference.</p> <p><i>Is there any particular situation or encounter you remember the most?</i></p> <p>There were so many things, I had so many good encounters. There were so many situations where, in the first place I didn't know how I will manage and then I improvised, and something worked. I would just like to mention that the best way to go to Russia is to forget about plans.</p>	<p>Better than Reputation</p> <p>Cultural Difference</p> <p>-//- (Cultural Difference)</p>
<p><i>Thank you for being here with me today, before we start, let's just start right away - Do you speak Russian, or can you read any Cyrillic?</i></p> <p>No.</p> <p><i>Okay but you've been to Russia?</i></p> <p>I have been to Russia, yes.</p>	

Why did you decide to go to Russia, what made you go in the first place?

Honestly, because the flight was cheap. We wanted to go abroad, a little bit more east, so we checked Checkfelix and it suggested a multi-stop route including Russia, so we decided to go.

Where did you go and how long did you stay?

When we did that vacation, we stopped in Estonia, in Latvia and then we came to Russia and we stayed in St. Petersburg for four days and in Moscow for two days.

What kind of image did you have of Russia before you went, or did you have any certain expectations of the country?

Good Question. We expected it to be cheap and maybe not very friendly people, given that we don't speak Russian and that might cause a problem. We had someone in our group who spoke a little bit of Russian, she learned it during her studies, but she was not that proficient. We thought let's see how friendly people are, considering that we're tourists, not knowing anything about Russia.

How did you prepare for your trip? Were you concerned about the language issue?

Well the one person who did speak a little bit Russian, she's been to Moscow and St. Petersburg before. She knew a lot of these places and basically prepared that part of the trip. We didn't really prepare very much. We quickly googled the most important things, the visa and stuff, but that's really it, maybe the currency, but that was it.

What did you do during your stay in terms of tourist activities?

We did the classic touristy things I would say, we went to Hermitage, we did a boat tour in Saint Petersburg, a free walking tour in both of the cities, we walked around a lot, and we tried to eat typical things. In St. Petersburg, there was also this weird celebration, it was some sort of national holiday, that was about the navy. I don't know what the official name was, but everyone was dressed like a sailor. And everyone was super drunk. It was very absurd. It was during the day and people got really wasted. They dressed in sailor's clothes that were way too small for them. That was really strange. What else did we do? We did more than that. What did we do in Moscow? Basically, a lot of walking around. And we went to a pub crawl in St. Petersburg one night.

Opportunity

**City
City**

Common Stereotype x2

**Other People
Little/ No Preparation**

**Museum
Tour x3
Exploring**

Negative Experience

Nightlife

Was there anything you did not do because you couldn't understand the information that was given, or you were concerned that you would not understand anything?

Not really. I cannot think of anything.

Did you use any public transportation?

Yes.

And how was that experience?

I have got a funny story about that. It was on the first day in St. Petersburg and we bought tickets that we thought are valid for the whole public transportation system. We used them on the bus, and then the lady on the bus tried to tell us that the tickets are not valid, and we just tried to explain to her that we just bought them, they had to be valid. We didn't get what the issue was, and then, most of the people standing around us, tried to help us but no one really spoke English proficiently enough. And we didn't speak Russian. And then, an old lady, she told me that she understands English, but she can't speak it very well, but she can speak French. I am able understand French, but I don't speak it, so she explained in French, and I answered in English, and this is how we realized that, the tickets that we bought, were only for the underground and not for above-ground public transport. So, we had to get new tickets for all the buses. But that was a funny conversation.

Positive Experience

Did you also interact with locals, besides that encounter on the bus?

Yes, when we did the pub crawl, which was organized by the same guys that organized the free walking tours. Those people were locals and a tour guide during the walking tours, which was like a private walking tour because no one else showed up. We spent three hours with this guy who showed us around. That was in St. Petersburg. We could ask him anything we wanted, so we asked him a lot about going to school in Russia, what he thinks of Putin and stuff like that. And on the pub crawl, normally you would expect that this would be a very, very, international thing. It turned out that, 90 percent of the participants were Russian. There were us four girls from Austria and two more, they were from Ecuador, and the rest were Russians. We did interact with the others obviously, since it was a pub crawl. It was fun.

Casual Encounter

Casual Encounter

How did you act or behave in shops, cafes, or restaurant for example?

We were pointing a lot. We also had this one friend who could speak the basics, so she could translate the every-day thing. It wasn't really a problem. Sometimes, we weren't quite sure what we were ordering and one time, it was only three of us, and our Russian speaking friend wasn't with us, and we went

**Language Issue
Help**

to a restaurant, the boss of one of my friends recommended us this place, somewhere in Moscow. He called it ethnic. We shouldn't wear short skirts, or we should cover our shoulders. We did that, and we went there. And when we went there, we realized that the whole the whole restaurant was full of men, and everybody looked Arabic. I was not even sure whether Russian would have helped us. One waiter decided not to do our table, then a younger colleague came by and took our orders, using google translate. But I think even if we spoke Russian, that wouldn't have helped us that much. I don't know. And for ten minutes, there was no light, in the whole place, we didn't really know what was going on. But we survived.

Did you have any other difficulties communicating during your stay?

Yes, I have another story. And this one was at the airport. When we booked the flights, the luggage wasn't included so I booked it extra. Then the airline changed our flights. The day before leaving, I looked at my documents and I realized that the luggage that I paid extra wasn't on the document of our new flight. So, I was already a bit worried that something might have gone lost during the process. I had this expectation that there might be an issue. As we waited in the queue, for quite some time, there was only one person at the check-in and she didn't seem very motivated. That was in St. Petersburg, we flew from St. Petersburg to Moscow and from Moscow to Vienna and it was all booked with one return flight, but with an overlay in Moscow for two days. So that lady said – Luggage, only Moscow. That was all she did. And then I thought, this is now the problem that I anticipated that for part of the flight, the luggage wouldn't show up in the system. And I tried to explain, first very politely, but she only repeated – Luggage only Moscow. And I tried my best, and maybe it wasn't my politest moment, also because she really wasn't helping, she had zero face expression, and my friend tried as well, but as I said, her Russian was very limited. After a while, she got her phone and showed me the calendar, and tried to talk, in really broken English. And then we realized she wanted to know, whether we want to pick up our luggage in Moscow or if she should check it through to Vienna. Apparently, everything was fine. It was just communication that failed. But she was still kind of rude, from the beginning, but I guess that's just Russian facial expressions.

Apart from your friend translating for you, did you use anything else to make communication easier? Any tools, an app for example or a dictionary or something?

Yes, google translate, sometimes. When we had internet.

Neutral Experience

App

How would you compare Russia to other destinations and in terms of tourism? What would you say is your impression of the country the culture and the people?

I think what makes it unique is, apart from other things that it still belongs partly to Europe, the part we went to, at least from a geographic perspective. It's what you learn in school right. You have the Ural and that is the border of Europe. And it is still very, very different, in terms of, I don't know, it's difficult to say. Television and stuff like that. I remember in the first hostel we went to, they always had the TV running. And maybe because it was of that holiday, or not, you always saw military parades. And I thought, is that normal? I wasn't quite sure, maybe it was just a special weekend. So, maybe this sense of indoctrination that you could feel was a bit different from what you would usually expect. We were curious about it, so we asked young people, because we couldn't really comprehend, what was going on.

Unique

Different

More Military

Do you think that the tourists who speak Russian have a different experience when visiting the country?

I would say I don't know because I can't compare. I think, in St. Petersburg, they are so used to tourism that it might not make a difference. They see you are a tourist and they see you have the money to spend, maybe, and that is the same basically everywhere you go. Maybe it's a bit more obvious there because of the language barrier, but I don't know.

No Difference

How would you describe your overall experience in Russia?

Definitely memorable. Maybe even more beautiful than we expect, to be honest. We expected it to be a bit more run down. Also, maybe because everyone told us that Saint Petersburg is so beautiful, and Moscow is a bit shabby or boring, but all of us agreed that it was kind of the other way around. From my point of view, St. Petersburg was a bit too much. It was July, it was hot, it was that navy festival, everyone was getting drunk. It was a little bit like a mixture of Paris and Vienna on steroids. And Moscow was more international than I thought it would be. The feeling there in general. Also, the whole city was a construction site, with no kind of safety matters, so don't text and walk, because there were holes, just on the sidewalk. And a lot of places seemed kind of newly renovated and very modern. That was a bit surprising, but we also forgot that the football world championship is this year, and someone told us this is where all the money goes. I don't recall the championship welcome someone told us that this is where all the money goes, so maybe that was the main reason. I don't know. And I will always remember the subway stations. The nicest ones I have seen so far.

**Better than Reputation
Common Stereotype**

Different than Expected

**-//- (Different than
Expected)**

Nice Metro

<p><i>The alphabet?</i> Oh, yes.</p> <p><i>Why did you decide to go to Russia?</i> I wanted to see and to experience a different country and the difference in our cultures, between the Russian and the Greek culture. This and I heard the climate is much colder here than in Greece. I wanted to experience this as well.</p> <p><i>Where did you go?</i> I have been to Voronezh, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Sochi, and Karelia.</p> <p><i>What kind of image did you have Russia before you came?</i> I actually had none I think. I haven't thought about it at all.</p> <p><i>Did you have any expectations before you came here?</i> I believed that more people would speak English.</p> <p><i>Did you prepare for your trip? Did you ask anyone, or did you do any research?</i> We, because I am here with my boyfriend, we have a friend who lives here, so we were in contact with him. He helped us and told us, basically managed our trip. Helped with the visa, booked trains and busses, told us what to do, what to see, where to go and so on. He even helped us when we went to buy food. I was just looking up the cities on Google, that's all.</p> <p><i>We're concerned about the language issue?</i> I wasn't concerned until I came here, and I realize that they don't speak English. Then I was pretty surprised and a little frightened.</p> <p><i>What did you do during your stay? You said you went to all those places, what did you do there?</i> We walked a lot and went to, basically every single museum. We went to a lot of museums and churches, did the typical sightseeing, looked at a lot of buildings, the Kremlin or course, and everything.</p> <p><i>Was there anything you didn't do it because it was all in Russian or because he could not understand what it is about?</i> Not really, but in all the museums we went to, or the tours, all of the guides were speaking Russian and a lot of the descriptions were in Russian, so I didn't understand most of the parts of the tours we went on.</p> <p><i>Did you use and public transportation?</i> Yes, a lot.</p>	<p>Interest</p> <p>City x5</p> <p>No Image /Expectations</p> <p>More English</p> <p>Other People</p> <p>(Internet) Research</p> <p>No English</p> <p>Exploring, Museum Church POI</p> <p>Tour Language Issue</p>
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<p><i>How was that experience?</i></p> <p>Okay so, the metro is not that bad. It's nice and clean. But the buses are horrible. I hate them. You have to pay when you go in, or when you go out, it's always different, you never know. They have no air conditioning, and it is hot. Sometimes they start driving with the doors open, sometimes you try to go on and they start moving, as you get on. It's awful.</p>	<p>Nice Metro</p>
<p><i>Did you also meet any local people or interact with any locals?</i></p> <p>Yes, we talked to some. Well, I would say, we talked to, enough. Sometimes, when they spoke English, they helped us communicating with others.</p>	<p>Necessary Encounters</p>
<p><i>How did you act in cafes, shops, or restaurants?</i></p> <p>Some of the cafes or restaurants would have an English menu, so we could make it somehow. But for those who did not, we used Google translate and tried to understand somehow.</p>	<p>Language Issue</p>
<p><i>Did I work?</i></p> <p>It worked. If you have nothing, then you have something, it was okay. But, we also got used to some words, so we started being able to order some stuff at least.</p>	
<p><i>Did you have any other difficulties communicating during your stay in Russia? Did you feel lost at some point?</i></p> <p>A problem for me was always, when you want to buy something. Because you can't ask for whatever you need. And if you ask, they won't understand. At least in Voronezh or Karelia for example, but in bigger cities such as Moscow or St. Petersburg, they speak English, or many people do. So, it is not that bad, but in the smaller cities or towns, it was a problem.</p>	<p>Language Issue No English</p>
<p><i>Did you used any tools to make communication easier?</i></p> <p>Yes! Google Translate for the menus. Does body language count?</p> <p><i>That would have been my next question - if you had any other help to understand somebody or something?</i></p> <p>Yes, people's body language mostly. And our friend, when he was with us.</p>	<p>App</p>
<p><i>How would you compare Russia to other countries? Or other destinations?</i></p> <p>I haven't been to any other countries. I usually do not travel a lot. Or, at all. But, for example, if you compare it to Greece, it is different of course. I don't know if it's a bad or good different, I think I still have to find out.</p>	<p>Different</p>

<p><i>What is your impression of the country, the people, or the culture?</i> I would you say that most of the people are nice, or at least some. But others are very rude. Especially if you don't speak Russian. But I'd say, mostly they are nice.</p> <p><i>How would you describe your overall experience in Russia?</i> Interesting. Definitely interesting, and challenging, but I would go again. But to one of the big cities, Voronezh seems a bit boring. There is not so much to do, and nobody speaks English. Or I will have to learn the language.</p> <p><i>Do you think that tourists who speak Russian have a better experience here, or have a lot of a different experience than you have or had?</i> I would say yes. It's easier for them to communicate of course, to find things, to go to the museum and understand everything. But also, the little things like food shopping or ordering at a restaurant. And it would save so much time. Not having to translate everything on the menu and just order. Everything must be so much easier, but still, not too much of a difference in experience.</p> <p><i>Would you say your image of the country has changed even though you were not thinking about that before? Or maybe you learn something new, or came to understand something new about Russia you weren't aware before?</i> I would say they are more organized when it comes to winter. In winter conditions they have way more people to work and get things, let's say, back to normal and they city won't just stop and freezes, if there is snowfall. But that is normal, because they have proper winters here, not like we do in Greece. But other than that, I can't think of anything. So, I don't think anything has really changed.</p> <p><i>Is there any particular situation you remember the most?</i> I remember mostly good things, so I will also try to remember something bad. Okay, I have a story. It was on the bus, it was super crowded, and I didn't know where to go, to let people out, so I stepped out of the bus, so others can pass, but before I managed to get on again, the bus left. That was so frustrating. I will never do that again. People here don't do that, they just stand, and others need to push themselves out. But I have a good memory too, when I went to St. Petersburg, I really liked that it was never dark during the night. We went on a boat trip, around midnight, and it was just like after sunset. It was super weird, but also really beautiful. I have never seen anything like this before.</p>	<p>Nice People Different Treatment</p> <p>Interesting Challenging Go Again</p> <p>Easier</p> <p>No Difference</p> <p>No Change</p>
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