



Event Report

International Scientific and Practical Conference

REVOLUTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY HISTORY:

**FACTS, INTERPRETATIONS, EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES, DIFFICULT ISSUES IN
HISTORY**

Centennial of the 1917 Russian Revolution



27-28 October 2017

Saint-Petersburg, Russia



Всероссийская общественная организация
АССОЦИАЦИЯ УЧИТЕЛЕЙ
ИСТОРИИ И ОБЩЕСТВОЗНАНИЯ

Санкт-Петербургское отделение



Setting the scene

The year 2017 marks the centennial of the Russian Revolution; exactly one hundred years ago the events that took place during the revolution, lead to the establishment of the first communist state. The Russian Revolution of 1917 is considered to be the first significant revolution in Russian historiography. This revolution brought dramatic changes not only to the people of Russia, but completely modified the world order and determined much of the course of history for the following seventy years. The aftermath of the Russian revolution can still be observed in current domestic, international and global politics, cultures, economies and societies.

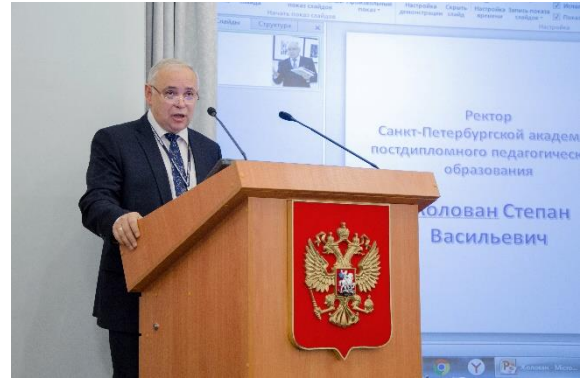
To commemorate this significant historical event, EUROCLIO, in cooperation with the St. Petersburg Academy of In-Service Teachers' Training, and the St. Petersburg Branch of All-Russian public organization "Association of teachers of History and Social Sciences", has organised the international scientific and practical conference *Revolutions in contemporary history: facts, interpretations, educational strategies. Sensitive questions in history teaching practice*, which took place from 27-28 October 2017 in the city where it all began: Saint Petersburg, Russia.

About 170 participants from more than 20 countries, illustrated on the map below, attended the conference to share knowledge, views and teaching practices on the Russian Revolution. In the conference the participants had the possibility to gain additional information on the causes, progress, context and consequences of the Russian Revolution and the evaluation of its historical heritage. Furthermore, it served as an opportunity to discuss methods, approaches, views to the teaching of the Russian revolution. And, with St. Petersburg as a backdrop, it was a unique chance to visit the historical places of 1917.



Conference Aims

- To encourage the (Europe wide) debate on how the Russian revolution influenced both world, European, Russian and other national histories in the course of the 20th and the 21st centuries
- To evaluate what lessons can be learned from the case of the Russian revolution in order to make sense of the past revolutions as well as those that are taking place in the most contemporary history (e.g. Velvet Revolutions in the CIS region and the Arab revolutions in the Middle East)
- To compare and contrast views, perceptions and perspectives on the Russian revolution in Russia and beyond as well as teaching techniques, approaches and strategies to teaching the Russian Revolution in the 21st century
- To facilitate theoretical knowledge exchange in the field of studies of the revolutions
- To explore the teaching techniques, approaches and attitudes of history educators from Russia and beyond towards the Russian revolutions as well as its influence on the national histories of Europe by spreading the questionnaire and consequent data analysis
- To develop a common understanding of responsible history teaching in the current world dynamic as a bridge for peace, citizenship, human rights and democracy education
- To strengthen the capacity building and professional development of local Russian and international educators in a multicultural learning environment
- To foster cooperation and networking between European and Russian history teaching associations and individual history educators



The Russian Revolution Revisited

The conference kicked off in the beautiful historic building of the St. Petersburg Academy of In-Service Teachers' Training. After the welcoming words and music, the conference started with a plenary session with presentations by different speakers to provide the participants with the necessary background information and current research in the field of the Russian Revolution. The first speech of Doctor of Historical Sciences, Associate Professor of the Department of Social Education of St. Petersburg Academy of In-Service Teachers' Training¹, Inna Yevgenyevna Barykina, was devoted to the problem of patterns and randomness in history with reference to the events of 1917, as well as the opportunities for gradual, evolutionary transformations that were missed in Russia at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, like the failed revolution of 1905.

In his presentation "*Russian Revolution revisited. Overview of the historiographical changes and ideas for today*", Dr Henk Kern lecturer at the University of Leiden, outlined the most prevalent scholarly views on the events of 1917, and showed how these can be used by students. He emphasised the



need to broaden the context of the revolution by including the subsequent Russian civil war (1917 to 1922) in teaching as a part of the Russian Revolution, as opposed to a separate subject – as it is frequently taught now - in order to debunk soviet mythology surrounding the Russian Revolution. According to Kern, the civil war was key to building a new order, and crucial to the establishment of the Soviet Union.

Prof. M.A. Vladlen Semenovitch Izmozic agreed with Dr. Henk Kern in his presentation "*Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and the 1917 Great Russian Revolution*", underlining the need to incorporate the civil war in the historiography of the revolution. Additionally it tied in to the point of debunking myths, by outlining the personal qualities of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin as a key figure in

¹ Herein after referred to as St. Petersburg AISTT

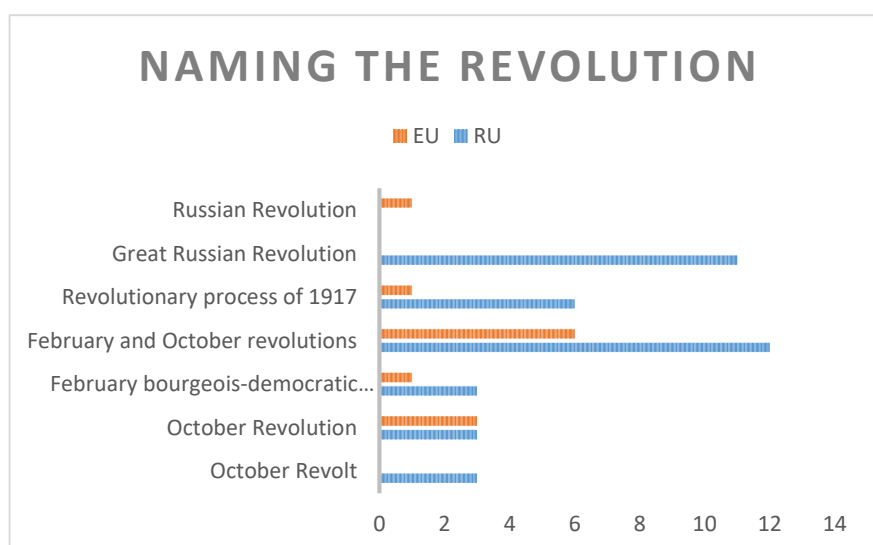
the 1917 revolution. What stands in the way of a common, transnational understanding of the Russian Revolution, Prof. Izmozic stated, is a common terminology about 1905-1922.

Teaching the Russian Revolution

The first plenary session of the conference was concluded by Konstantin Bityukov, associate professor at St. Petersburg AISTT and Vera Ande, EUROCLIO research trainee connected to the Centre of Historical Culture of the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, presenting the results of a survey done on the teaching practices of the participants. In order to identify and compare how the Russian Revolution is currently taught in schools throughout the European Union and Russia, the participants were asked before the conference to fill out a survey on their teaching practices.

The survey aimed to give the participants some background information for the teaching conference and for the participants to gain insight into practices, methods and techniques to teaching the Russian Revolution. As the survey was available in both Russian and English, it proved an opportunity to compare approaches from educators with different backgrounds and identify interesting differences and similarities in their teaching.

The most interesting differences between Russian and European educators appeared in the naming of the revolution; only Russian educators referred to the revolution as the Great Russian Revolution, an issue that also arose during the previous session. The frameworks in which the revolution is taught also differed substantially; European respondents tend to teach the revolution more in the framework of the creation of the USSR, the rise of communism, and the rise of totalitarian states, whereas Russian educators tend to teach the revolution more as a separate topic. Another interesting finding from the survey was that most European respondents try to deal with the topic impartially, while Russian respondents are more inclined to try to pass on certain values.





On the basis of the results of the survey it was concluded that because the Russian revolution had direct and indirect impact on the Russian Federation, it is dealt with more depth and care in Russia than in the EU.

However, apart from differences between how the revolution is dealt with in the

EU and Russia, there were substantial similarities.

Both Russian and European educators refer to the events of 1917 as February and October revolutions. Both reflect on the role of ideology, the social conflict between rich and poor, and the consequences of violence. Additionally, almost all educators indicated in the survey that they strive to provide their students with a multiperspective approach.

The full plenary session was recorded and can be found at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0IPkaBRPuIcdTBQWURYVkhaOG8/view>

Parallel Sessions: How to Engage Young Students?

After the opening speeches, the participants had the opportunity to partake in one of the three parallel sessions, of which the third session is highlighted in this report.

The third session was focussed on the Cultural memory of the revolution. The Russian Revolution not only changed the daily life of Russian citizens, it also brought about a revolution in Russian Culture. In the workshop “*Cultural memory: destroy to the ground or build a new world*”, the question of culture was tackled in different ways. Russian history teacher Sergey Kushnir shared his strategy to teaching 1917: as part of an assignment in the module about the Russian Revolution, he lets asks students to be “tourguides” in revolutionary St Petersburg of 1917, and to prepare a tour of revolutionary sites, and connect them with short excerpts on experiences from historical figures, as well as ordinary civilians. As all of his students are from St Petersburg, he utilizes their everyday surroundings to make the events of 1917 more personal and closer to their own experience.

On the other hand, Italian teacher Adriana Ferrarini explained how she uses literature to highlight that culture and the revolution were very much intertwined, and that the dream, the utopia, revolutionaries hoped to achieve, became a reality in literature. She shows her students that the revolution made art available to and for all, and that it was no longer strictly associated with bourgeoisie. Her approach raised some questions amongst the Russian educators about the use of literature in history, as it was seen by some as an elective subject and not a part of the curriculum. Adriana Ferrarini explained, however, that for her students the events of 1917 are

WORKSHOPS

1. «Personalities and common people in revolutions. Great events through the prism of everyday life».

What are the limits of the influence of the individuals in the revolution? What myths are created about them? Everyday life.

Moderator **Dr. Vladlen Ismozic**

St. Petersburg State University of Telecommunications
Contributors

Dr. Alexey Tzamtali

Tatiana Pashkova

Dr. Boris Kolonitskiy

Dr. Henk Kern

Konstantin Bitukov

2. «Violence and freedom in revolutions».

Violence in the revolution. Revolution in history - interpretation, evaluation and memory.

Moderator **Sergey Rudnik**, Saint-Petersburg State Mining University

Contributors

Frans van Rump

Tatyana Andrejevskaya

Yuri Ryabov

Evgeny Derbenev

3. «Cultural memory»: "destroy to the ground" or "we will build a new world".

"Black square" and "Bathing of the red horse" – a premonition of the revolutionary upheavals and cultural symbols...

Moderator **Alexey Boyko** Russian Center of Museum Pedagogics and Children Creativity of the State Russian Museum

Contributors

Adriana Ferrarini,

Irina Egorova

Sergey Kushnir

Elena Stankevich

Sofia Kudriantseva

very far away from their own experience, and difficult to relate to, contrary to the students of Mr Kushnir. She uses literature – which is secondary to the curriculum – to engage her students more actively. The difference in engaging students regarding 1917, as seen from the examples of Mr Kushnir and Ms Ferrarini, proved to be an interesting subject, but due to time restrictions a more in-depth discussion was not possible in this workshop.



Museum of Political History

Following the parallel workshop sessions at the St. Petersburg academy was a custom tour of the small museum that is integrated in the academy building. In the tour the guides explained how education in Russia has changed since the early nineteenth century, during the Soviet era and how it is still evolving after the collapse of the Union in 1991.

After the parallel sessions and the tour participants had the chance to catch a glimpse of revolutionary sites of St. Petersburg on the way to the museum of Russian Political History. En route to the museum the bus stopped at a number of sites that were significant to the October Revolution like the Hermitage and adjacent winter palace, and the battleship Aurora, the ship that signalled the start of the revolution with a blank shot.



The main attraction, however, was the visit to the Museum of Russian Political History, which proved to be one of the highlights of the conference. Here the educational staff shared how they handle the question on how to motivate children to study historical events, a recurring question during the conference. Six educational modules for schoolchildren were presented in the museum, which offered an accessible, playful and interactive form to study the historical events of the middle of the 19th century, the "Great Reforms", the First Russian Revolution of 1905-1907 and the formation of parliamentarism in Russia, the revolution of 1917 and the Civil War, the era of Stalinism and the Khrushchev Thaw.



Panel discussion

The second day of the conference was held at the St. Petersburg Gymnasium No. 209 - Pavlovskaya Gymnasium. After a custom tour of the gymnasium conducted by students, the programme proceeded with the panel discussion *"Why is learning about the Russian Revolution of 1917 urgent, important and complex for school students?"* moderated by Olga Zhuravleva. The discussion showed the commonality of problems that concern both Russian and international history teachers, revealing many common assessments of the revolutionary transformations and the Civil War. The panel touched upon questions such as the interpretation of history, clashing ideas about the meaning of the revolution, the dilemma of conveying personal values through teaching, what the role of the educator should be in actively engaging their students and

combatting old soviet mythology in both teaching practices as well as the own understanding of the Russian Revolution. On the other hand, it also gave participants an opportunity to have a particularly open debate on more sensitive subjects, such as the politicisation of history in schools and the value of patriotism in the classroom. Many participants believed this to stand in the way of objective teaching and that it influences image-building of history, while others underlined the importance of patriotism in teaching history to let their students discover their national identity.

The panel concluded that teaching history should be utilized to debunk existing myths surrounding historical events. The role of the history teacher is in this sense to foster understanding of historic and current events

PANEL EXPERTS

- Inna Evgenyevna Barykina, doctor of historical sciences, associate professor of the social education department of SPbAppO
- Ruslan Grigoryevich Gagkuev, historian and editor-in-chief of the corporation of Russian textbooks
- Igor Albertovich Karachevtsev, director of gymnasium No. 166 in St. Petersburg
- Christopher Rowe, historian, editor of Historiana.eu
- Dr. Robert Stradling, editor-in-chief of the online teaching tool Historiana.eu, senior research fellow and director of the project research center at the University of Edinburgh



"I love history, but not the politics of history." – Russian history teacher

"The role of the history teacher is to 'infect' students with ideas." – Ruslan Grigoryevich Gagkuev



Parallel Sessions: Connecting through Historiana



After the panel discussion had come to an end, participants were again invited to attend one of the three parallel workshops at the Gymnasium.

One of the concluding sessions in this series of workshops focused on the digital portal Historiana.eu and was led by Dr. Robert Stradling and Christopher Rowe. Participants of this workshop were asked beforehand to bring five primary sources concerning the Russian Revolution(s). They were challenged to find sources that reflect how the historical events of 1917 were perceived in their country and, if possible, reflect different responses towards it. The workshop started with presentations by Jim McBride on the historiography of the Russian Revolution, and Lulzim Abdiaj on the impact of the Russian Revolution in Albania, which served as examples for the source collections. Participants of this session were asked to create a collection based on the sources they brought.

The participants were then divided into three groups, consisting of a mix of Russian and European educators, assisted by a translator. Together, they had to combine their sources to form a transnational narrative and think about how they would teach these topics in their classrooms in an interactive way, based on the Historiana principles outlined by Dr. Stradling. After the time for the assignment had passed, the groups were asked to present their results. Despite the language- and cultural barrier, all participants enthusiastically discussed the sources and actively engaged in discussions in their groups. It was interesting to see how the Russian and European educators cooperated in groups, how they discovered shared approaches to teaching, but also how their vision on what meaningful history education entails differed. Afterwards, many participants expressed how

WORKSHOPS

1. «Visualization of history as information source of studying history». *Training in the analysis of documentary, publicistic and feature films, media reports and home videos.*

Moderator Michael Balashov, St. Petersburg State University of Industrial Technology and Design.

Contributors

Dr. Tatyana Polyakova

Riitta Mikkola

Natalia Lazukova

Oleg Volgin

Andrey Khoroshilov

Olga Soboleva

2. «Animation and counterfactual history: animated films and computer games in the study of history. Reconstruction of historical events »

Moderator Enver Abdullaev, Chief Editor of "Teaching History in School"

Contributors

Svetlana Kudryavtseva-Karaskaite

Sergey Agafonov

Il'sia Fokeeva

Svetlana Alexandrova

Larissa Syromyatnikova

Section 3. «Use of international internet sources for teaching history on the example of Historiana ».

Moderator Dr. Robert Stradling, Chief Editor of Historiana.eu

Contributors

Chris Rowe

Rivka Otten

Anastasia Bitkina

Alexey Agraskin

happy they were to be able to personally engage with their peers who did not speak the same language.



For the workshop

"Visualization of history as information source of studying history. Training in the analysis of documentary, publicistic and feature films, media reports and home videos" moderated by Ph.D.

Michael E. Balashov, there were over 60 conference participants present. The



participants showed genuine interest to the topic connected with images and art, a non-standard approach to the revolution. After each speaker there were a lot of questions, showing the urgency of the topic.

Riitta Mikkola, Finnish teacher, told about usage of computer technologies in teaching the Finnish Civil war. There is an almost complete database of Civil war participants. Teachers use this database through either student research of their relatives' fates during the war or doing projects on position of representatives of different social strata in the Civil war. During the discussion Russian participants mentioned that such projects can be made in Russia on the database of the Great Patriotic war (Second World War) soldiers. Such researches and projects are important because they have personal importance for students.

Dr. Tatiana N. Poliakova presented methodology of using poetry at the lessons about Russian revolution of 1917. She also demonstrated significance of poems as a historic source. She surveyed the topics of students' researches on the poems of the beginning of the 20th century. In Russia named the "Silver Age of poetry".



Dr. Natalia Lazukova researched middle and high school students' illustrations as their representation and knowledge about the Russian Revolution of 1917. The analysis showed that some middle school students' representations do not have a touch with reality (Vladimir

Lenin is a hero of a computer game).

Dr. Olga B. Soboleva analyzed illustrations and images of the revolution in foreign History textbooks. The most relevant illustrations she found in History textbooks of India. In most textbooks illustrations are more relevant to the present day consequences of the Revolution than to the historic events.

In the conference section "*Animation and counterfactual history: animated films and computer games in the study of history. Reconstruction of historical events*" history teacher Svetlana Kudryavtseva-Karauskaite presented her passionate experience of school historic theatre. She has been staging historic plays performed by students for over 20 years. She described the process and result of staging "Assassination of Rasputin" play. Il'sia Fokeeva from Tatarstan Republic of the Russian Federation told about electronic resources which teachers use to present events of the Revolution with the local national background. Svetlana Alexandrova, Senior lecturer from the AISTT told about usage of infographic in teaching historic events.

Walking in the Footsteps of Revolutionaries

The working programme of the conference was completed with a guided tour of the new temporary exhibition in the Hermitage Museum named "*The Winter Palace and the Hermitage in*



1917. History was made here". It offered the participants a unique view of the Hermitage, allowing them to literally walk in the footsteps of both Tsar Nicholas II and the Bolsheviks. The exhibition presented the participants with many more historical sights, reminiscent of Sergei Eisensteins iconic, though historically incorrect, 1928 film "October". The participants were shown the exact places where the revolutionary events of 1917 unfolded in the palace. It started with a reconstruction of the daily life of the royal family, with personal items, clothing, toys and drawings of the Romanov princesses. Gradually, the exhibition showed how the communists gained more momentum in the capital and finally were able to seize power after the turbulent



revolutions of 1917. The Hermitage offered a very impressive exhibition, with beautifully displayed items from the Hermitage collection. Providing the participants with even more background information, and, of course much more food for thought on what the

revolution actually meant to the people at the time, and what it means today.

After the impressive visit to the Hermitage all participants, from both Russia and beyond, had the chance to truly engage with each other on a more personal level in the social programme. In the hotel where also the gala dinner would take place, participants formed groups and were given different topics to discuss such as the educational system, shared history, current affairs, life the universe and everything, and of course the Russian Revolution. Though some groups experienced a bit of a language barrier, many interesting conversations arose, extending well into the gala dinner, and many contact details were exchanged.

“Before the next conference, I will definitely have to improve my English!” – Russian history teacher

Conclusion

Over the course of the conference, participants were showered in information and different understandings of the Russian Revolution. What became clear to the European participants, is that the Russian Revolution is still a sensitive and politicised subject to teach, both in Russia and the other European countries represented in the conference.

For two days, historians and teachers from Russia and beyond have sought with interest to find similarities and differences in the teaching of the subject, which sometimes resulted in heated discussion. And even though discussion might have been heated, at the end of the conference it became clear that though countries use their own professional terminology, the meaning that is given to the Russian Revolution and understanding of the events are very close.

EUROCLIO, the St. Petersburg Academy of In-Service Teachers' Training, and the St. Petersburg Branch of All-Russian public organization "Association of teachers of History and Social Sciences" look back at a successful and impactful event and look forward to further cooperation in the future.

"It has been an incredibly interesting conference, not only because of all things that were discussed, but also for what has been left unsaid. Over the last days it has become clear to me how difficult it is to deal with a painful past, and has made me rethink how we approach our past in the Netherlands." – Dutch history teacher

"I hope we can come to a common terminology for the events of 1905-1922." – Prof. M.A. Vladlen Semenovich Izmozic