

Detailed description

In the Labyrinth of National Identity: Russia and Europe

Aims and objectives

The aim of this course is to explore national identity and nationalism in Europe and Russia disentangled from the news and to reveal hidden historically embedded patterns. The course will be built on texts and data of recent research materials. Interdisciplinary, comparative and empirical, its overall objective is to raise participants' awareness of the synergy resulting from interdisciplinary, comparative and empirical approaches. Course faculty has been selected based on the balance of academic excellence and disciplinary competence.

The course's basic idea stems from the FP7 Project EUinDepth started in 2014. The aim of this project is to bridge the cultural, political, and social psychological gap between Russia and the countries of the EU. The summer course in 2016 will continue to take up these issues and explore them further by inclusion of experts both from within and outside of the FP7 project. The course will provide cutting edge knowledge concerning the change of the patterns of national identity worldwide. National identity will be conceptualized in constitutional, political, economic, anthropological, sociological and social psychological contexts. Quantitative as well qualitative methods of investigation will be used.

The course pursues the following objectives:

- (i) Enable participants to understand patterns of national identity in the countries of the EU and in Russia from a comparative perspective provided by comparative perspective.
- (ii) Establish necessary parameters of constitutional solutions in the individual nation states resulting in the legitimacy of the newly established capitalist systems.
- (iii) Outline standards of distributive justice, minority rights and citizenship in the European Union.
- (iv) Discuss how the dissolution of the Soviet Union has influenced the status of the Russians minorities.
- (v) Delineate the anthropological aspects of identity formation and the creation of the borders between groups in Europe and in Russia.
- (vi) Discuss social conflicts distorted and disguised as ethnic, national and ideological conflicts.
- (vii) Reflect on the recent political upheavals in Russia and in Ukraine in a more complex interdisciplinary context.

By the end of the course participants will be required to make use of concepts and tools, combined with their earlier knowledge and experience, in order to develop a project of improving intergroup relations for the region which may include specification of objectives and target groups, identification of means and partnerships, suggestions for dissemination and methods of monitoring.

Basic questions

1. Similarities and differences of the Russian and Western/European national identities. What are the factors which have continuously brought about destruction and conflict that from time to time have the tendency to resurface (as it is happening now) resulting in a crisis?
2. What is the role of the law in the relationship between the Russian and Western/European national identities? What is the function of the constitution, citizenship, and human rights in the formation of national identity in Russia and in Europe?
3. The relationship between minorities and the majority in the society. Are the minorities considered as part of the nation or not? What is the nature of the relationship between the category of “Russian” and the category of “a citizen of Russia”?
4. What is the historical background of the formation of the Russian and the Western/European national identities? Can we say that the theory of Jenő Szűcs on the three historical regions is still valid?

Reviews of current trends in the literature on the area between Russia and Germany have demonstrated that the lands in this zone were stages of murderous regimes. Perpetrators, victims, bystanders have coexisted and survived without examining the impact of the past on the national identity of the people living in the area, whose name “bloodlands” was coined by Timothy Snyder. Consequently, the conflict potential of the region has not diminished. One of the key aspects of the overall transformation of the societies in the region is the realization that the building of an open society requires mentally sane social and legal infrastructure including the rule of law, tolerance, and ability to cope with the collective traumas of the past inflicted by the people/s upon each other. Improving the mental and legal infrastructure would ensure cognitive stability, but, at the same time, it increases political extremism fuelled by ill-conceived constructs of national, ethnic and religious identities.

Course design

This course takes an interdisciplinary approach starting with a distance learning component, which will comprise a number of readings and datasets. Participants will be asked to identify a collective identity case from their own country.

The 10-day residential component of the course will make use of a dynamic mix of lecture-based and interactive methods, customized to satisfy the needs of an interdisciplinary program. Participants will focus on understanding the various facets of national identity in the area under study and will be instructed to understand and apply conflict resolution methods. Lectures, group discussions, individual presentations and outstanding works of Russian cinema will serve to develop competencies in designing, implementing and monitoring public communication, social media and education projects related to a tolerant and open society that is much needed in each country of the area.

Teaching methods

The course will employ the following teaching methods:

- Pre-course reading assignments
- Lectures by course faculty

- Use of the datasets at a basic level
- Seminar style discussion of key topics and assigned readings
- Participants' presentations of the key conflicts
- Discussion of future scenarios
- Small group work focused on key problems
- Group presentation, discussion and evaluation.

In addition to lectures and discussions, on the two days (Monday, Tuesday) of the second week students will present well developed research plans. They will be advised to include into the presentation a research outcome or public policy proposal. The proposals of short presentations will be discussed by the group and evaluated by the instructor. The best presentations will be considered for publication in the framework of the EuinDepth project.

Main topics

- Russia and Europe, differences and similarities of political culture
- The nationalizing process. Anthropological Perspectives
- Patterns of national identity in Europe and in Russia in comparative and longitudinal perspectives
- Contemporary national identity, nationalism, national sovereignty and constitutionalism; Citizenship theory, standards of minority rights protection and distributive justice
- Russians living outside the Russian Federation-Coexistence of the "titular groups" with the Russian minorities
- The relationship between the EU and the Russian Federation: conflicting values of morality and pragmatism