

Culture of the Russian North

5 ETC, Russian Studies (None-degree program)
Institute of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences, NArFU
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Course goals:

- Present the basic aspects of the Northern Russian culture, as expressed in folklore, art, religion, daily life, architecture, music, and their historical development
- Show diverse forms of Russian adaptive strategies and patterns developed at the marginal Northern territories.
- Recognise the major figures and movements in Russia's cultural history, gaining special expertise in their connection to the Northern European region of the state.
- Define and evaluate the religious, spiritual, intellectual and aesthetic ideas that make up the Northern Russian culture, and trace their development over time.
- Identify the northern symbols and images expressed in the textual and artistic representations of Russian culture.

Part I. “The Russian North” as geographic, cultural and historic phenomenon.

Focuses on general understanding of the “Russian North” cultural phenomenon

- Brings forward the complexity of regional ethnic traditions of the European North of Russia.
- Reflects the representation of the regional culture at the national scene as one of the main sources of the Russian authentic natural and spiritual experience.
- Demonstrates the special symbolic status of the European North in the context of national Russian culture.
- Focuses on a variety of different local cultures and meanings attached to (the concept of) culture in the context of the Northern Russian territories

Part II. The Northern Russian ethnic traditions and folk cultures.

Is oriented to description of material and symbolic features of rural and traditional cultural landscapes of the European North of Russia

- Shows the formation of local Russian rural subcultures, that transformed the core elements of Slavic peasantry to adapt to the new conditions of northern climate and nature.
- Demonstrates a wide range of traditional plans and wooden architecture of the northern villages (preserved since the 18th century until the modern time), folk costume, cuisine, crafts, calendar and family holidays.
- Includes a study-visit to the Arkhangelsk school of folk crafts or the Arkhangelsk museum of the local history.

Part III. Russian orthodox traditions and cultural heritage of the European North.

Shows the sacral (religious) components of the northern Russian cultural landscapes: Orthodox architecture, icon painting, literature and music

- Demonstrates how the Russian orthodox «vision of the World» had transmuted in the northern Russian population mentality and reflected in the local traditions of church building, icon painting and calendar rituals.
- Reveals the unique “northern” history of Christianity, revealing the existential experiences of the spiritual revelation of different local communities (monks, pilgrims, peasants, seamen, merchants and so on).
- Includes an excursion to the Arkhangelsk art museum (the Russian Orthodox art exposition).

Part IV. Modern artistic and intellectual representations of the Russian North.

Concentrates mainly on the modern mytho-poetic dimension of the “Russian North” representation

- Reveals and describes the ‘cultural edge phenomenon’ - elaborated within the modern renewal in Russian literature, music, visual arts and multi-media performances (end of the 19th – beginning of the 21 century).
- Demonstrates, how artistic and academic texts of the 19th – 20th century represented the Northern Russian culture as the territory revealing secret, shadowed and gradually disappearing Russian archaic worldview and lifestyle.
- Includes study-visits to local art museums and galleries.

Planned learning activities and teaching methods:

Lectures, seminars, group work, presentations and individual work.

- Analysis of a variety of sources (text, film, music, visual art, architecture, objects).
- Readings, sometimes from historical anthologies, other times from works of literature.
- Film screenings and excursions (to local museums) both inside and outside of ordinary class meetings.

Students are presented with a set of questions that will prompt them to explore connections between historical and ethnographic material and the works of art, literature, architecture, design, or music.

Assessment methods and criteria.

- Class participation: 40% (Students will be expected to have read the assigned literature prior to class and to participate actively in the discussion).
- Midterm task presentation (PP 5-6 slides): 30%: “Russian cultural sources of the northern identity”; “The Northern Russian landscape: artifacts and symbols”, based on the independent studies about the Russian identity (literature is provided by teacher).
- Final Paper (max. 10 pages): 30% The topics will be appointed as the result of individual consultations with the lecturer, taking into account both the content and character of the course, and each student’s academic background.