

STEPS Students Report

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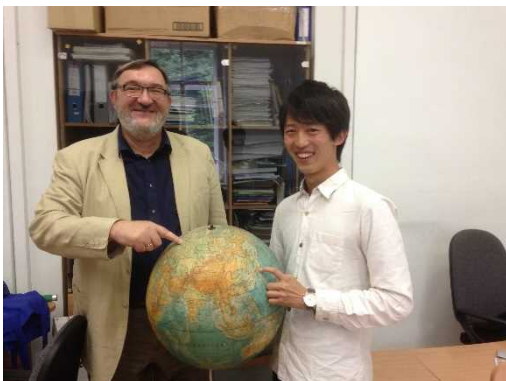
International Relations is a discipline that has always captivated me and Russia was a country where I became interested in such context after the Ukrainian conflict. This program to study in Russia (in my case in St. Petersburg) was therefore definitely an attractive opportunity for me.

As for the academic preparation, I participated in special Russian intensive courses that were held three times a week in February, held by the School of Science in the University of Tokyo. Being a fourth year student in the Department of Civil Engineering and busy working on the graduation thesis, I could not participate in all the courses; still it was a great benefit for me to learn basic grammar from a native teacher and it made me easy to study by myself afterwards. Though the classes and the research in St. Petersburg were mostly held in English, some basic skills of the language helped me a lot in living there.

In Russia, the study could be divided into two activities: attending lectures and researching. First, the program allowed me to attend the lectures that the university provided for both undergraduates and postgraduates. I attended such lectures as "Cold War", "Russia in International Regimes: arms control", and "Russian Language".

Generally, lectures were taught in English, and they were interesting since they were taught from the Russian perspective and not from the Western point of view.

Second activity in Russia was doing research with some help from the host professor. I was interested in the Russian views on conflict resolution processes in Crimea (by incorporating into Russia) and in Eastern Ukraine (by signing mediation agreements in Minsk). The research was performed through literature reviews, discussions with the host professor, and interviews and distribution of questionnaires to some professors in the



university. Those activities gave me inspiring and fruitful outcomes, allowed me to Russian values in various aspects.

Aside from study, I got lots of experiences. As for fun experiences, I enjoyed a variety of ballets and many museums (in incredibly reasonable price as a student); I went to some famous cities such as Moscow and Novgorod; I participated in Football competition held by Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Russia as a Japan national team; and I also participated in a volunteer activity in Pskov region, where I engaged in forestry as well as enjoyed traditional Russian country life such as *banya*. As for unpleasant experiences, there were times when hot water stopped running due to water pipe construction which forced me to boil some water to take a shower; and there were policemen who would never help even if I asked.

All in all, even though there were such challenging moments as is always the case with living abroad, I remember only the nicest moments that I experienced. After spending three months in Russia, I started to see good aspects of this country (such aspects as kind but shy Russian national characteristics) contrary to the images that most Japanese people may have. The program was not just fun and profitable, but it has also strengthened my motto "Seeing is Believing". I will try to keep seeking the truth in International Relations or other fields, not affected by other opinions, but by seeing myself.

