

# Interview with Ronald Inglehart: Why I am in Russia and What I think about This



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— **It is really nice that you agreed to give me an interview. So, the first question will be about the Laboratory for Comparative Social Research (LCSR). As a founder of this Laboratory, could you say a few words about it: How did it come about? Why did you choose HSE? How was it established?**

— It started out in 2010. I was looking for a really strong team in Russia to work on the World Value Survey (WVS). We have had really good teams in many countries: Germany, Sweden, Canada, etc. But we did not have a very productive team in Russia. We have been turning out the WVS in Russia and the Surveys themselves were excellent, but we did not have colleagues who were analyzing the data and preparing publications, that's a very important part of WVS. So I was looking for a strong Russian team. I consulted my colleague Prof. Zimmermann, a specialist on Russian politics, he recommended some people here in Saint-Petersburg, probably the best people to work with. So, I get in touch with Eduard Ponarin, Daniel Alexandrov. And I think Bill's advice was very good. I met them at the conference in Moscow, back in May 2010, and we agreed that we'd work together, doing the WVS in Russia. Then, it just happened that a Russian government grant from the Ministry of education and science to bring a leading

scientist to Russia was opening up and being announced. They said why do we not put in an application to cover the WVS in Russia and bring you here. I'd never thought of spending a long time in Russia. I don't speak Russian, I speak several languages but not Russian. So I thought: "I don't think I'd like to spend 4 or 5 months here". But they argued and convinced me that the grant program was so attractive, as you know, research support was so excellent, covering WVS in Russia and in former soviet countries, which is a huge help to WVS, and would provide funding for me to be here. And the idea of spending some time here was interesting. It's just I have many other things to do. But I decided I would, so I came in December and signed the contract, then I came back in April 2011 and spent 4 months here. I must say the idea of working with the Russian group *turned very good well indeed*. Bill had given excellent advice and this program is extremely good. It's new to me, but this program is going to train young PhD level Russian social scientists in international level research techniques and I thought it was a great idea. One of the goals of WVS, besides monitoring changing values and cultures, is learning about how the world is evolving and how people's motivation is changing, because clearly they are. Also, the secondary and the primary one is to spread social science techniques among other countries around the world and to build a global network of social scientists, that was a very important direction, we really needed a Russian component. It is a large country, an important country, we didn't really have a strong partnership here yet. Now we have a really strong partnership. I've been working very happily with Eduard and Daniel and with wonderful students like Egor, Boris and many others. My Russian colleagues (Eduard and Daniel) recruited very good students. There was a national competition in Russia and some were recruited from Belorussia,

Ukraine, and Turkmenistan, and they recruited highly talented BA students. Initially we had 40 people and the next year we got additional 40 researchers. So, now we have a large number of people working on this project. The goal is to have each person doing his or her own project, which they had to design in order to be recruited. Then we gave criticism and suggestions on how they could improve the design. Then we met in April and they were given further feedback, they presented findings and results. We have had a very good and promising group project, as you know. I was able to work not only with strong Russians but I had the chance to bring some colleagues from other countries: from Germany, UK and USA. And the group as a whole is given a feedback, so I have a very good team to provide the students with feedback. They are extremely good students, I've been working with them and I'm really glad to see what progress they've made. Every one of them will produce a list one published paper based on research in this project. They have to undertake the quantitative cross-national comparative research we require. We emphasize comparative methods, advanced quantitative analysis workshops. Last year we brought Professor Hermann Duellmer here to teach multilevel analysis in HLM (Hierarchical Linear and Nonlinear Modeling). And this year we brought Peter Schmidt to teach SEM and some other very solid people. We have training workshops at the summer school where students were given intensive training and they worked hard learning advanced analytic techniques. During these 2 periods they were getting feedback and improving their papers, several already have publishable ones and I think every one of them will be publishable, and published in international journals, peer-reviewed to a high standard. Realistically, we will not achieve 100% success, but we will have a high rate of success. In fact we have some students who didn't make any prog-

ress. But I think we made really good progress in producing a core of young, talented, well-trained Russian social scientists to write internationally peer-reviewed articles. It is very nice to see and it is very nice for WVS to have strong scientists. We need to spur on the WVS in the whole world. I would be foolish to say that I know everything about the whole world; I do not. We have to work with people with inside views, who know their countries extremely well, and we do. I'm working here with my partners, as you know, and producing some publications. We've come up with plans to continue our work on happiness in Russia, which is very interesting...

— **That was my next question...**

— I should mention that we moved towards analyzing the influence of genetic factors on well-being and political ideology. We found, rather to my surprise, that it seems to be a significantly important factor. My previous work emphasizes the importance of economic conditions, which are clearly reversible factors. There is a huge difference between belief systems in rich and poor countries. It's no surprise if you know something of modernization theory, when people expect problems, they get them. There is a huge difference between motivations, belief systems and values of people living in low and high income societies and it's linked to the level of economic security. There is, we found, also a lesser, but significant genetic effect. That is what we are doing right now. I was in contact with a geneticist from Moscow working on that side.

— **Let's move to another question. Could you, please, tell me about your impressions of working with Russian people, academic culture? Does it differ from what you are used to and in what ways?**

— I think Americans work harder, they are very competitive and rather individualistic. My impression is that there is more interaction between Russians. But Americans work very hard. The most striking thing about Russia is how helpful people are. I was, again and again, really quite impressed by Russians being sponta-

neously helpful. Like yesterday when I arrived. 3 of my students in the Lab came to help by meeting me and my wife, when we arrived, and getting our apartment contract signed and things like that. There are many, many examples of people with whom I work here being extremely helpful. Last fall when I had pneumonia, one of my colleagues spent a lot of time finding a good medical specialist to take care of me. One of my students invited us to Pskov for a visit, that part of Russia that tourists usually come to see: old monasteries and castles. It was so striking why Russians are so helpful, that I was wondering why that is. Being a social scientist I fabricated a theory that under the old system, the USSR life was so difficult, that Russians really needed friends to help each other to cope. So they simply became accustomed to cooperation and help.

On the other hand, I have to say the bureaucracy is really complicated. Let me say that I spend far more time filling in forms and signing papers than I do in the USA. There are more bureaucratic procedures here than in the States, and I think there are more than is really needed. When I'm turning my grades to the students I teach, I sign one paper 14 times. I think: "In the USA I could sign it once". I don't really understand why I need 14 signatures on one piece of paper. This is one example. I think Russia hasn't fully recovered from the shadow of this

long tradition of bureaucratization. And this is one thing which I find less agreeable. But in general it's very nice to work in Russia.

— **What about Academia in Russia? I mean the university structure for example. Do people do the same things here or not?**

— No. I think one of the reasons why I was brought here was because they don't do the same things. HSE is one of the most advanced research institutes in social science, certainly, one of the most advanced in Russia. But in general, the use of quantitative techniques is less advanced here than in the USA and Europe. It is hard to introduce some of the most advanced techniques, including some techniques that are new to me, they really are new.

— **So, you have some experience of working with sociologists in Russia, what do you think, which topics or theories are the most interesting? What can you recommend to improve or develop?**

— One of the interesting things about Russia and why I've already written some analysis on it, is the fact that Russia is going through dramatic changes. It has gone through dramatic, difficult changes. That is an experience I don't envy but it's very interesting. Seeing how people cope with collapse of political and economic systems, collapse of the ideology, which is the basis for society. The collapse of



economy, the breakup of the Soviet Union: the breakup of law and order. All these are huge changes. Historically they are very unusual. Russia has this climbing, subjective well-being. I've done research on how happy people are and how they contribute subjective well-being to happiness. I think it is a more important aspect of life, which is beginning to be recognized by economists. Initially it was viewed as a very shallow volatile thing. We've done enough research to demonstrate that it is actually a very central part of people's lives and the level of subjective well-being reflects their whole, in many ways a better indication of how well *gross-national product...* GNP, per capita contributes to subjective well-being, but it does so

in a very interesting way. As you move from extreme poverty to being *fairly prosperous* about the level of Portugal, there is a huge increase in subjective well-being along with the economic development. Above that level it takes off and gets weaker and weaker and subjective well-being is no longer determined by economic factors, it is much more freedom of choice, living in a town and society, the social relations you have, the quality of life. When you are starving, happiness depends on whether you have enough to eat. When you have enough to eat more and more, other factors shape how happy you are. So, to equate people's well-being with how much money they have at the early stage of development is pretty realistic. But in

highly developed societies it is less and less realistic and money contributes less and less to how well off they are. And understanding these other factors is really important. In this context Russia is a particularly interesting case.

In most countries subjective well-being is really stable. We've studied it for 40 years. Most countries are very stable in having high or low level of subjective well-being. For example, Denmark is consistently one of the highest countries in the world. Then there are, not surprisingly, Tanzania, Togo, and some very, very poor African countries. Especially as in the case of Zimbabwe: badly governed, there is crime, corruption and collapse, AIDS. It is not really surprising that they have really low levels, but it tends to be consistent that Denmark, decade after decade remains pretty high and generally poor countries are low. But what is interesting, Russia has had very big changes. The notion that it is built into the culture of the land is obviously not true, because Russia has moved in well-being. The earliest survey in Tambov oblast in 1982, we found (and we've been told that this is representative of the whole Russian Republic) Tambov oblast was above what was expected in terms of its economy. It was about where its economic level was each day. Subjective well-being fell very sharply by 1990 before the Soviet Union broke up. Russia was showing quite low levels of subjective well-being and many other symptoms, like alcoholism and declining life expectancy. The break of the society by 1995 was low. Now it is been recovering. In more recent surveys subjective well-being in Russia is recovering, but it is still *not up to the point* you would expect of its economic level but it is getting near to that. It shows that in this 20 years period there were dramatic changes, it doesn't surprise me at all. It is not just that the economy broke up, it did break up, because the economic level fell, *about 40%* of its former level in terms of GNP per capita, but also life expectancy fell, and I think the important element, which tends to be a belief system's collapse. Once upon a time the communist ideology, that gave meaning and purpose to life in the sense of;



Professor Christian Welzel



“we know where we’re going, we’re building a new and better society for Russian people”. By 1995 it was gone. And it is interesting to see these factors, it isn’t a classic case, Russia is an extreme case.

The USA is a boring case! In the sense that we had a really high level of subjective well-being. Since we began measuring, this indicator has moved neither much up nor down. We’ve been pretty prosperous with some ups and downs for the last 60 years. Russia’s had dramatic changes. I’m really sorry that the Russian people had to experience it, but it is also something to be studied. I can’t find a more dramatic case: a more dramatic collapse of well-being and its recovery.

— **Let’s talk more about the results of WVS. Do you think there are any similarities between Russia and other European countries in attitudes or values? You told me about these changes in subjective well-being, maybe you can briefly name other aspects?**

— Russia is a one of the countries that experienced communism. That was a huge factor shaping belief systems. You probably won’t be surprised, Russia has been a very religious country before, then it had been secularized. The government made huge efforts to secularize society, to repress and step up religion. And, by and large, communist rule in this way was a common experience that made Russia, Ukraine and other the ex-soviet countries rather similar in many

ways, but all of these countries: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, the countries that experienced communist rule, tended to have somewhat similar belief systems. It varies, depending on their cultural heritage. The communist’s rule is one very big factor; orthodox countries versus catholic countries versus protestant countries were somewhat different. But within this Russia is similar to the ex-soviet, to some degree to the ex-communist countries, although more like the Orthodox tradition.

— **And what about attitudes to freedom, abortions and other things like this?**

— We have a cultural map that reflects scores of beliefs measured in WVS. There are 2 big dimensions across national variation; of course there are many additional, but only 2 big dimensions of cross-cultural variation. One is from traditional/secular-rational values. Russia has relatively high secular-rational values. Although it has been moving to become more religious. I think the degree to which the historical and cultural heritage persists is surprisingly robust, I wasn’t really looking for that, when I began to study values. I was more interested in how the economic development changes values, but the evidence is quite clear. Having once been orthodox, or protestant or catholic, this is a measureable impact on the values measured today. Culture is very path dependent, to the degree I underesti-

mated initially. Russian values are changing *from secular-rational values, when Russians were relatively more open to divorce, abortions and things like this than to traditional ones*. There is another mentioned: dimension survival/self-expression values. Russia and other ex-soviet countries, partly because they experienced economic collapse and now they are recovering (this economic collapse was very important), were roughly and likely to have survival values.

— **I think you have heard about new economic sociology, what do you think about this science? When you use economic and sociological approaches toward analyzing social reality.**

— They are extremely useful tools. I think, economics has developed some very strong tools for analyzing economic factors. Economic conditions have a big impact on religion, culture and motivations, gender roles etc. The use of these tools became strong in political science. There is no doubt they are useful tools. What is interesting, later on, or recent economists in USA, have recognized the importance of religion and historical traditions. That means that economic factors can’t explain everything. Using these tools, and not only using them as economic factors, can be a way to build better models on how societies function.

— **Now let’s talk about Russians a little bit more. You agreed that Russia is a paradoxical country, so**

**how did you notice these paradoxes? What is your impression about the mystery of the Russian soul, for example?**

— I should start by saying that I'm not an insider, Russians know about Russian soul more than I do. But as an outsider, perhaps, our opinions are more pragmatic than Russians' are. It is interesting that Russians are in search of new belief systems. Communism was a huge factor that shaped the 20 century. Russia is now seeking a new identity. Part of this is an impressive search of religion; our Survey shows that. Interest in religion is growing in Russia, there's a significant grade for that. Russian people now are more religious than French people. It's a little bit ironic. After 70 years of systematic attempts to wipe out religion, it is back in Russia. On the other hand, the French revolution also tried to put down religion. But several years of prosperity seem to have done more to eradicate religion in France than 70 years of repression did in Russia. So, that is a paradox. Though Russia certainly moved to being secular, it is moving back towards traditional beliefs. It is interesting to what degree religion *didn't* disappear in Russia.

**— There are also many myths about Russia; I mean bears on the streets and vodka. Were there any expectations that didn't come true? Did you have any ideas about Russia before you came?**

— I have to admit: I'm an old guy. I lived through World War II when Russians were friends. Those days Russians were good guys: they fight against the Nazi. Then I lived through the Cold War. Even though I was trying to avoid being stereotyped. But movies that I loved were about Bond struggling with rough Russian agents. When I came to Russia, first of all I'm a Russian agent, I'm working for the Russian government. That is a kind of amusing thing to say, I went over to the other side, but actually it wasn't the other side, because it's a very different world and I'm working for the Ministry of education and science. But it's a very interesting experience; I mentioned I was surprised how helpful Russians are. Because in spite of trying not to be victimized by media stereo-

types, to some degree it is all I heard! So I had this sense that Russians behave like people in cold war movies and James Bond films, but they don't! Russians I have known are the most helpful people. It's a really surprising and pleasant discovery. On the other hand, Russian bureaucracy has not vanished.

**— You've been to both cities: Moscow and in Saint-Petersburg. Which did you like more? What are the differences?**

— They are both powerful historical cities. Both of them have played an important role. When I visited Saint Petersburg one of the things I went to with my son was the Leningrad Siege museum. Those 3 years of siege were the most horrible in history for the population. Most of the population vanished, people were starving. This is a huge historical thing.

The Hermitage is a huge historical landmark, I visited that. They have the greatest fine art collection; unforgettable experience. Many interesting things happened in Saint Petersburg. I remember I was walking along Neva, and realized that Rasputin had drowned here after stabbing and poisoning, etc. That was a dramatic event. I'm aware of the history of Saint Petersburg and Moscow. Huge historical events happened here as well: the Napoleonic invasion and Nazi invasion.

Both cities have very impressive metro systems. They are much more elaborate; far better decorated metro stations than others I've ever seen. In fact one of my helpful friends, one of my students in the Lab took my son and me on a tour on Saint-Petersburg's metro. I've spent less time in Moscow. But it is a very dramatic city: Red Square, The Mausoleum. The tragedy and trials of Russia have been great. Both Saint-Petersburg and Moscow impressed me. Moscow also strikes me with these very big, horrible traffic jams on the way from the airport!

**— Thank you very much for the interview.**

— It was a pleasure. Nice to see you again. 

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Interviewed by Tatiana Karabchuk



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**Interrupted development**

Russian sociology has experienced turbulent periods in establishing and maintaining its identity. It was born at the end of 19th century and borrowed a lot from the positivism of Auguste Comte at that time. The Russian Sociological Society was established in 1917. The first teaching department of sociology was opened by Pitirim Sorokin in 1920. Then, in the 1920s, the new Bolshevik political regime sent a number of leading sociologists out of the country on the famous "Philosophers' steamboat" and later repressed some of them in the 1930s. Sociology was identified with the orthodox Marxist social science. Its development was largely interrupted. Sociology was formally re-established by the late 1950s, closely supervised by the Communist party. The social sciences were acknowledged as a tool in the ideological struggle during the Cold War years. To face this ideological challenge the first group of Soviet sociologists was sent to the International Sociological Association (ISA) Conference in 1956. The Soviet Sociological Association was launched a couple of years later in 1958. The first special Institute of Concrete Sociological Studies was established in 1968. But after Soviet troops invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, the ideological pressures increased. The best sociological research teams were dismantled and "Sociological renaissance" was stopped.