



"Hope  
Smiles from the threshold of the year to come,  
Whispering 'it will be happier!..'"

— Alfred Tennyson

## Dear colleagues,

Russian customs connected with winter holidays don't differ much from those followed in Europe and the Western world in general. Having said that, we need to mention that some things don't work here the way they work in other countries. We celebrate Christmas after the New Year's Day, which is the biggest and longest holiday across the country, from Kaliningrad to Vladivostok. Our Santa Claus – Ded Moroz - has a granddaughter who is his irreplaceable companion; our traditional New Year's table is incomplete without caviar and "Soviet" champagne, that strangely enough became part of the tradition during the harsh socialist period; and there is a countrywide tradition of annual watching of a movie about a man who confused Moscow with St. Petersburg and mistakenly flew to another city where he found his beloved – nevermind that he was engaged to someone else. Another tradition we have is fortune telling and wish making. Here are some things you might want to try during the festive season:

- Take a good book. Think of a question you would like the answer to, open a book to a random page and point to a line without looking. This line is the answer to your question. You may try several questions on several different books. We would recommend leaving scientific books aside as they usually give very boring answers to questions. Try poetry or fiction instead!
- Take a candle and a bowl of water, melt the candle in a tin, pour the melted wax into the water with one quick movement and let it harden. Take the form out and see what it looks like. This form is a hint as to what is waiting for you in the New Year.
- Make a wish and write it on a small piece of paper. Burn this piece of paper and put the ashes in a glass of sparkling wine. Drink the wine with the ashes to the bottom. The important thing is – you need to do this whole operation starting with the first sound of the big Kremlin clock tower counting down the last seconds of the old year and swallowing the ash before the clock stops. All major TV channels broadcast the Kremlin clock, so you don't have to go to Red Square to do this.

Being an international collective, we are collecting and absorbing winter holiday traditions from around the world and most of our findings were kindly shared with us by international professors and postdocs. Let us borrow one American tradition and open the list of New Year resolutions with something we will be committed to next year:

- We will keep on explaining to our newcomers how life here works, get to know each other better as colleagues and friends, and follow your scientific achievements and tell the whole world about them!

Happy holidays!

Department of Internationalization Team

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## Academic New Year's Resolutions

- Stop and ponder more to produce more thoughtful research. At the HSE, and I think in Europe in general, there is an emphasis on producing lots of work quickly. But I think there is sometimes a danger in this. Sometimes it takes more time to produce a piece of work that has deeper implications and ultimately will have a greater impact, even though you might spend much longer working on it. **Seth Bernstein**
- Make progress in my research and my ballet lessons. I want to polish my forward and straddle splits. And I will get there! **Spring H. Han**
- Balance work and life and find more time for loved ones! **Natalia Karmaeva**

# Holiday Celebrations Around the World: HSE professors discuss their countries' traditions

## Brazil

**Renira Gambarato, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Communications, Design and Media:**

I wish all of us a New Year with more stability and less uncertainty in Russia.

"Christmas in Brazil is in the middle of summer, not in winter, but the European references are still very strong. My family is of Italian origins, so our main tradition is to get together for Christmas. Not just very close relatives, but also uncles, cousins, grandmothers and grandfathers: everybody meets to celebrate the holiday together. Besides cooking a big suckling pig every single year, my family always comes up with a non-traditional Christmas tree. For example, last year it was done with origami."

## Korea

**Spring H. Han, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Management:**

Although we are facing turbulent times I wish that the New Year comes with glows of hope in our minds. Wishing everyone a promising, fulfilling and very happy new year in 2015!

"In Korea, people celebrate both the calendar new year as well as the Lunar New Year, also known as the Chinese New Year. Lunar New Year is typically a family holiday, a time to visit family or make a visit to your hometown. Many Koreans dress up in colorful traditional clothing and perform an ancestral ritual. On New Year's Eve, a huge crowd gathers near Bosingak, a pavilion where a famous bell is located in Seoul. They count down the seconds to midnight and listen to the traditional ringing of the big bell 33 times. On January 1, people love to see the sun rising over the sea or from a mountain top! People make a wish and a resolution to do something in the New Year."

## USA

**Seth Bernstein, Postdoctoral Fellow at the International Centre for the History and Sociology of World War II:**

I hope my colleagues are able to enjoy Russia and are able to treat the time they have here as a cultural experience as well as an intellectual opportunity at the HSE.

"I really like holiday food, especially sweets and eggnog. When I taught in Ryazan I invited my students to my apartment for a holiday party where I made my own eggnog with real eggs.

I don't think I convinced them that eggnog is delicious but at least no one got sick from raw eggs.

My dad is Jewish and my mother is Christian and they mostly observe Judaism. However, we do both regular Christmas and Jewish Christmas (a popular set of traditions among Jews in North America). Regular Christmas is just the normal secular gift-giving ritual that we do with my mother's family. Jewish Christmas is more fun though. We go to a movie every year and then get Chinese food. There are NBA games on TV all day so we watch those after we get home from the movie. I'm not sure where Jewish Christmas comes from, although lots of my Jewish friends observe it. My understanding is that we just do it because movie theaters and Chinese restaurants are the only things that are open on Christmas."

## India

**Bhuvanesh Awasti, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for Cognition and Decision Making:**

I wish my colleagues a brighter and lighter New Year on the planet and that their hearts shall be filled with contentment.

"The New Year is celebrated in various parts of culturally diverse India in equally diverse ways. Besides the Gregorian New Year on January 1 that is celebrated all over the country, there are others based on different calendars, traditions and religious festivals. Many of these coincide with harvest festivals, change of lunar cycles or the vernal equinox. The adherents of Sanatana Dharma (also called Hindus) as well as the Sikhs celebrate the New Year in mid-April. This is the day when the Sun enters into the constellation Aries. It is celebrated variously in several states of India. At times, the dates may vary in accordance with a particular calendar. Besides being a grand festival of lights with religious and cultural significance, Diwali (in October or November) is also celebrated as a New Year by the merchant community — more commonly amongst the Gujaratis, Marwaris and Jains, which signifies hope and new beginnings. The Zoroastrians celebrate Navroz (mid March), Rosh Hashanah (mid September) is celebrated by the Jewish community and Moharram is the New Year in accordance with the Hijri Islamic calendar. Most festivities include activities and greetings of goodwill, the cleaning and decoration of homes and front doors, new clothes, exchange of sweets, gifts and visit to temples, mosques and synagogues, organizing feasts and dances, donations to the needy and the initiation of new ventures. Importantly most of the above are national holidays, too!"

## Russia

**Natalia Sliossar, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Humanities:**

Since the New Year is such a family thing for me, I would like to wish everybody to celebrate it with your closest family or friends and to spend the coming year likewise, supporting people around you and supported by them. New Year is also the right time to dream, so in terms of work, let me wish everybody to have dreams, to aspire and to dare, and to see at least some of them come true.

“For many Russians, New Year is a family holiday, something like Thanksgiving. Like millions of other Russians, we meet the New Year with my family, then rush to see my husband's family, and then go for a walk or visit a couple of friends. The moment when the New Year comes is very special for many people: in most families, people listen to the peal of the Kremlin bells and pour Champagne into glasses to be able to raise them with the last strike. Tables groan with food: it may take a whole week to finish it all. Many families have a special New Year dish, in our case it is a goose with apples. We also follow another tradition: we bake small pies and put a coin in one of them. All guests and family members take one pie, whoever finds the coin is believed to be especially lucky in the coming year. Sometimes I see this tradition in a more complex form: a sweet pie for a great year, a salty one for a difficult year and a pie with a coin for a profitable year. Another popular tradition is to meet the New Year having some (maybe, really tiny) brand new piece of clothing on.”

**Natalia Karmaeva, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for Institutional Studies:**

I offer my seasonal greetings to you and your dearest ones!

“New Year's Eve is a special celebration in Russia. It is a secular holiday, but is an amalgam of Christmas with a special dinner with family with a Christmas tree and Ded Moroz, the Russian Santa, and the public celebration of the new year's beginning. That is why the clock's chiming at midnight is the central moment of the celebration. Interestingly, this moment becomes a point for self-reflection for everybody, people watch the president's speech on TV, regardless of their political views, and offer toasts to each other. On December 31st people begin celebrating when the New Year comes to Vladivostok in the Far East, and the most enthusiastic revelers begin clinking their glasses at about 6 p.m. Unlike Catholic Christmas, there are no limitations as for when to start eating and drinking – so don't wait until the first star and enjoy! Christmas is celebrated later than the Catholic or Protestant tradition. The reason to that is that the Orthodox Church did not adopt the new (Gregorian) calendar. Another interesting thing is the tradition of celebrating the Old New Year according to the Julian calendar, on January 14. I guess this tradition remained because people in Russia like long festivities and the New Year celebration definitely take longer than one day.”

## Germany

**Michael Rochlitz, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences:**

“On December 24th we go to church, then we go home and light the candles on our Christmas tree, exchange presents and have a traditional Christmas dinner, which is potato salad, sausages with lots of mustard, and beer. On a Christmas day, December 25th we have goose traditionally served with dumplings and red cabbage (Klöße und Rotkraut). Every year after Christmas my family goes to Bavaria for a couple of days, until New Year. And at New Year, we gather with friends, watch Dinner for One, and play board games until midnight. At midnight, we go outside with a bottle of sparkling wine to greet the New Year and watch the fireworks.”

## Italy

**An Anonymous Expat's Bergamasque Homage**

“Once upon a time in a former, academically-untroubled life of mine I used to join the group *La Pastorèla* on Christmas Eve. Mandolins, guitars, a mandola, a flute and a contrabass went around the village of Gandino and joyfully played at the main crossings and the most popular places by shepherd's heirs. We were dressed in our grandfathers' heavy cloaks and hats (this was the case for me at least). We thus used to brighten the atmosphere for the inhabitants and were very grateful to be offered during the cold night, some vin brûlé at an old osteria in Cirano or at the alpine trooper's vigil in the historical Palazzo Giovanelli. Later I tried the German variation of this Christmas drink, Glühwein. Along with well-known Christmas music, our most characteristic piece was the Pastorèla (dialect name for “pastorale”) of Gandino. This Pastorèla is played only in our village; in the neighboring village they played a different version of it. In the Pastorèla's glorious past, guitars and mandolins weren't the only instruments that belonged to this genre, but also a violin and a campanine (a sort of xylophone) and less often the baghèt (local bagpipe), which has been newly rediscovered.”

Christmas is not only a religious celebration, it is also an opportunity to be confronted with popular culture and deal with diversity in space and time. Are you intrigued? I suggest that you read *Pimpi Oseli*, a narrative of everyday hard life in the Orobian valleys. But for Christmas you can listen to old and recent records of the Pastorèla, which are still performed!”

Find the [link](#) to the Pastorèla records shared by the author at [http://ifaculty.hse.ru/the\\_hse\\_look](http://ifaculty.hse.ru/the_hse_look)

# Welcome Aboard

**Matteo Feurra** comes from Italy where he studied experimental psychology and defended his PhD dissertation at the University of Florence in 2009. While pursuing his doctoral studies Feurra worked in London under the supervision of Prof. Vincent Walsh, an international expert in brain stimulation at the University College of London (UCL). In 2009 - 2011 he did research as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Siena in Italy. In 2011 Feurra won a national grant to work as a principle investigator on his project "Memory Enhancement by Advanced Non-Invasive Brain Stimulation: A Project on the Neuro-rehabilitation of Patients with Memory Diseases." In September 2014 he joined the HSE School of Psychology as an Assistant Professor. In his free time Feurra loves playing tennis, listening to blues, jazz and classical music and looks forward to seeing a ballet at the Bolshoi Theatre.

## What is the focus of your research in psychology?

Basically, my topics are memory and motor control. To study memory I started with cognitive processes and recognition processes. I used faces as a research object because they represent very complex items to remember and recognize. They activate the whole network in our brains: there are certain areas that respond very well to faces compared to other objects. We can recognize faces thanks to our visual perception, but this also has to be integrated with the semantic context related to the person. My research aims to understand how semantic context affects face recognition. When I was working in London I investigated how much personal information is important for face memory.

## Some people are very good at recognizing people they have met, while others find it hard to remember faces. What are factors here?

Context is very important for memory functions. We call it the butcher-on-the-bus phenomenon. You go to the butcher shop to buy meat, so you always see that person in that particular context. But if you meet the butcher on the bus you can't recognize him because you've lost the semantic background.

## Will you continue studying face recognition?

I have moved away from this topic a little bit because I was attracted by another brain stimulation technique, transcranial magnetic stimulation. I extended my field of interests to memory for objects and landscape in order to get a deeper understanding of how the network underlying memory processes works.

In London I met an interesting Japanese researcher, Ryota Kanai, who was like a second mentor for me. Together we pioneered a new advanced technique of brain stimulation, the transcranial alternating current stimulation. Usually psychologists use

brain stimulation to interfere in various brain areas in order to build functional maps of cortical networks. My purpose was to change the way we use brain stimulation and to start using it for boosting brain processes.

I went back to Siena and continued with this new technique. Finally, I mastered it and published a paper. This allowed me to get a young investigator grant in Italy as a principal researcher. The grant was awarded by the Ministry of Health as this method can be used as a neuro-rehabilitation technique for patients with memory diseases, motor disorders and other kinds of impairments. I got consistent funding for three years to create my group in Siena and this project is still ongoing.

## Can people train their memory to remember things they usually tend to forget?

I also encounter this kind of problem. Sometimes I am so focused on work and things I have to accomplish during the day that I forget where I parked my car. You need to develop some routine so that you can remember things using your procedural memory, the kind of memory you use when you learn how to ride a bike, for instance, and for other automatic processes. Besides, you need to stay focused and not get distracted by thoughts. Nowadays Google maps and electronic devices can help as well.

## Why did you apply for this position at the HSE?

I went to the lab during my first visit and I saw that this university has modern equipment that will allow me to go further with my research and lead my group. That's the plan – creating my group and doing research in brain stimulation by combining different techniques. I could also see other professors' interests in what I do, I felt welcomed and this is important for me personally. Later on I began reading about the institutional development program and learned that the HSE is committed to growth and science.

## Is there a list of things you would like to accomplish during your first years at the HSE?

I am planning to move along further with the existing projects. I have an experimental plan for memory and motor control studies. It includes experiments on the mirror neurons system, memory and more basic research related to the neuro-imaging technique. All these merge into the big topic of brain stimulation with the focus on improving cognitive processes. Now I have to understand what it is that PhDs might be interested in, in this sphere. I had a seminar with Master's students and they seem to be very interested in my topic. I plan to engage them in something practical, to demonstrate brain stimulation in action which might be interesting and even striking for them. So my plan is to continue the projects I started in my country and find the right people to work with on them here.