

# **“Language of the most brilliant writers”: why do foreigners study Russian culture at SibFU?**

During the autumn semester, the staff of the School of Philology and Language Communication (Siberian Federal University, Russia) developed the concept of Sibir Tochka Ru international centre (Eng.: Siberia Dot Ru) within a grant from the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation. The idea was ambitious indeed, as they conceived the project that would bring together specialists of separate spheres, i.e., lecturers of Russian as a foreign language, literary scholars, and linguists. The main objective was to popularize the Russian language and culture in foreign countries.



The registration of the participants was completed quite fast, as, despite the enormous competition among online-courses, the number of applicants was huge. In total, more than 1400 listeners from different countries took part in the project, including China, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Germany, Sweden, India, the USA, Mexico, Nicaragua, Cuba, Colombia, Venezuela, Guatemala.

## **There were several courses of different levels for participants to choose from:**

- Your Siberian Holidays for beginners (7 groups, more than 500 participants);
- Country Study of Russia for Russian speakers;
- About Russian in Russian for advanced learners;
- Pro-Reading – classes in the Russian literature.

In addition to the main program, the participants could apply for online workshops in Siberian cuisine and Russian toy-making, a music lesson, and Walking Through Russia and Philological Football games.

Not only students from different countries applied for the courses but also the teachers of the Russian language who appreciated the high level of organization of the curriculum, interactivity, and different forms of the educational process. For them, the project became not only repetition but also advanced training.

To ease the communication, the organizations started several chats which turned out to be so homely, that talks on weather, news, and traditions are still ongoing. It turned out to become a real community, and the participants ask to keep chats operating even after the end of the courses.

The students of the courses appreciated and supported the creative mood of the organizers, and everybody noted a state of joy, while lecturers shared not only academic knowledge but also emotional warmth through the screens.

The participants were eager to share their impressions with lecturers and motivation to study, for example, the Russian literature.

Siberian Federal University fellow worker told about their feelings on the organization of the project:



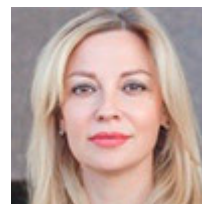
*"For us, this project became a challenge. Within so-called distantionka (Eng.: distant learning) process we had already used various software and technology, however, working with foreign participants demanded additional efforts; we learned a lot en route and are satisfied with the result. About Russian in Russian course brought together students from many countries with different levels of the Russian language, and this became the main problem to deal with within the project. The lecturers had to share the knowledge the way it would be interesting for everyone. The lecturers and students' feedback speak to the fact that we have succeeded!"* said **Ms Irina Evseeva**, head of the Department of the Russian Language and Conversation, School of Philology and Language Communication SibFU.

*"We are pleasantly surprised by the results of Pro-Reading course for foreigners ('Pro' in the name of the course not only corresponds to the Russian prefix meaning 'about', but also hints that the course is about professional reading). The initial orientation toward popularizing Russian literature and giving must-read recommendations did not work, as already at the first lesson, we encountered students of all skill levels starting with attentive spectators of film adaptations of Russian literature as well as professional philologists from different countries. We tried to target the aurea mediocritas so that it was both enlightening and entertaining for everyone. The lecturers were required to be one-hundred-percent involved, they had to rewrite their lectures to give information to a different addressee from a different angle. The target group got in touch on its initiative, took part in the discussions, and positively affected the course of the classes. The tasks for students also turned out to be non-standard and spontaneous, and the sincere interest to the subject cheered the lecturers. We have achieved an amusing dialogue beyond the course that can result in fresh formats in future,"* said **Mr Kirill Anisimov**, deputy head of the Department of Journalism and Literary Studies, School of Philology and Language Communication SibFU.



✖ *"We observe the great interest of the course students to Krasnoyarsk and our University, and we hope to see the familiar faces soon again becoming students of the preparatory department, masters or postgraduate academic programs at Siberian Federal University. The project was aimed at motivating people to learn Russian and get aware of Russian culture. We are delighted that the first applicants were on the same wavelength with us and could appreciate the depth of content provided within a light modern form. The project has already received loads of feedback, and people are asking us for the continuation, and we are relying on further support from the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation,"* commented **Anna Mezit**, head of the International Department SibFU, assistant professor of the Department of Russian as a Foreign Language.

*"We value the enthusiasm of the participants. The chats established for each group were active around the clock, as students communicated with each other and with lecturers, asked for and gave advice. It is always a pleasure to work with the audience so keen on the language and culture. The courses are over, but communication with our new foreign friends continues, as some ask in the chats when there will be new classes and masterclasses, some plan to continue studying the language in our university as an undergraduate student, others do not want to lose contact with the Russian speakers and support the chat with conversations about life and culture. We see that we have managed to spark the students' interest and we hope that their desire for learning Russian will only become stronger,"* notes **Ms Tatiana Verenich**, head of the Department of Russian as a Foreign Language SibFU.



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