

New Horizons in Russia and Eastern Europe: A New Vision through Language-Based Area Studies

There is a continuing need for the world to understand developments in post-Soviet Russia, Eastern Europe and Eurasia. This need is urgent, because of the rapid changes (social, political, and economic) that are now taking place across this resource-rich region. While these changes create risks that have global implications they also create opportunities for global benefit. Five years ago, the region's nations began to emerge onto the world stage in their own right, in a manner quite different from the initial, difficult and often introspective post-Soviet transition period. These countries are now moving towards a more outward-looking (though not necessarily easier) relationship with the wider world. However, the increasing interconnectedness of the world's economies and societies means that events and conflicts in the region now have much greater potential for international impact than was previously the case.

The study of post-Soviet Russia, Eastern Europe and Eurasia is now best done not through traditional single nation approaches; but rather through contextualisation and collaboration in the much more comprehensive setting of Language-based Area Studies. The traditional form of regional country-specific studies constitutes a somewhat segmented framework of interconnected but essentially discrete cultural disciplines. It must be admitted that this is an inappropriate lens through which to research such diverse, emerging regions as Russia and Eastern Europe. The Mellon Post-doctoral Fellows at UCL are intended to act as a catalyst to develop a language-based research program, underpinned by an interconnected cross-disciplinary vision, that will provide new ways of thinking about the frameworks of region and area studies.

UCL has unrivalled expertise in research and teaching on Russia and Eastern Europe (and, increasingly, in Eurasia). This work occurs largely within the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, which merged with UCL in 1999. The work of the School has now emerged as a world-class model of cross-disciplinary and trans-national studies. SSEES works not only across languages and cultures, but also draws into its work such diverse social sciences as politics, public policy, law, economics, and sociology. All these are then applied even further afield within UCL, working with – for example - medics and engineers (both as academia and practitioners) who are actively engaged with the post-Soviet region.

The challenges raised by the **strategic urgency** of post-Soviet regional policy formation is matched by the **strategic imperative** for world-class social, historical and cultural research that reflects the new political and geographical realities. This is work that is not currently being fully addressed anywhere, and we believe that UCL's strengths in multi-faculty, interdisciplinary working, centered around our School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies makes it the ideal location for such work.

We aim at nothing less than a fundamental re-conceptualisation of Language-Based Area Studies whereby disciplines are brought together with geographical regions and language in order to facilitate awareness and engagement across the Social Sciences and Humanities and beyond to Engineering, Natural and Biomedical Sciences. The formulation of such a re-conceptualisation is the starting point of the third UCL Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellowship program.

2012 Year 1 - Area Studies Old and New

This strand of the program will examine traditional models of Area Studies, examining how and why the discipline developed and anatomising why it no longer has currency or impact. It will also explore new forms of Language-Based Area Studies which facilitate interdisciplinary work, by creating a new triangulation of disciplines, area and language which highlights the importance of the cultural/linguistic.

-Dr Lora Koycheva

2013 Year 2 – Communities, Globalisation and Cultural Exchange

One of the major features of contemporary life is the constantly increasing patterns of migration, which are, nonetheless inevitably unpredictable. This strand will examine not only this phenomenon, but also that of transnational networks and the development of new boundaries, contact zones and plural identities.

-Dr Joanna Szostek

2014 Year 3 – Reconfiguring Spatial and Temporal Configurations

This strand will examine East-West (and/or North-South) divisions, examining the role played by periodisations and the ways in which continuities interact with changes, e.g. communism and after; the post-colonial/post-imperial phenomenon.

- One Fellow to be appointed for a two-year duration

2015 Year 4 – Internationalisation and the concept of the national

This strand will consider the impact of policies and practices of internationalisation, globalisation and transnationalism on the ways in which the idea of the national is changing, in terms both of individual and collective identities and of the policies of national states.

-One Fellow to be appointed for a two-year duration

2016 Year 5 – Political Changes and Challenges

This strand will focus on reforms of institutions, governance and inequality of democracy. Particular attention will be paid to the influences on political processes of new media and technologies and of the ways in which informal networks increasingly influence decision-making at local, national or regional levels.

- One Fellow to be appointed for a two-year duration

For information on applying to this Mellon Programme contact lee.standen@ucl.ac.uk