



Understanding Russia – the basis of success in German- Russian collaborations

With this very personal News-Story, we would like to introduce you to our expert Maria Lupakhina. Maria created her own personal image of Russia for you. Jump in and get to know Russia in a slightly different way. As a result you will better understand your Russian business partners – and you should be able to decrease the number of misunderstandings!

My Russia:

What do you think about, when you hear the word Russia?

As a Russian woman, living in Germany, I am ever so often shocked, often amused and sometimes saddened by what people think about my country. The power and the proliferation of cultural stereotypes shock me. For some people, Russia is still nothing else than a large and poor country, in which people drink Vodka, fight with bears, play the balalaika afterwards, and then drink again. And we only have one season, which is winter. And guess what we do in the cold, yes, we drink more, dance the [Kozachok](#) and play [Balalaika](#).

But Russia is not only my home country, but first and foremost a country of strong-willed, brave, respectable, hospitable, patient and peaceful people with a large soul and a big heart.

I appreciate being a daughter of this country. „Am I proud of my provenance!?“ Pride in Russia equals „disdainfulness“ and „arrogance“ and is rated as a „sin“. National pride is even worse!

“I belong to a powerful country and am proud of it” – we don’t say something like this. We “love” Russia! The Russian heart overflows with love! Love is the right word. We love our country – but in our way. I am consequently replacing “pride” with “love” and my story is about love.

A positive stereotype, which we will be using as a guideline, describes the Russian women as: „they are not only hard-working but also beautiful. They adjust themselves to all realities in the economy and politics. They are grateful for every little thing they have and carry unperturbed the burden of life, staying optimistic and resistant. My German teacher at the University in Russia was an intelligent, educated, and very strict woman. When you earned a compliment, you were in seventh heaven, since she was very thrifty with praise. Not because we, the students, were lazy or untalented, but because she was always asking more from us since she wanted to educate us on endless opportunities. I owe my life-motto to this teacher: „Everybody – really everybody – gets his chance. One must just be ready to take it.”

My mother is a wise woman, who educated me in a strict manner: No discos, no lies, good results in school, diligence and discipline. Now I am grateful for this education. But in my teenage-years I often asked her: “Why?, Why am I not allowed to do this or that.” Her answer: „Because I want you to see the world, because I want you to have a good education so that you are not dependent on anyone.”

She was always strict but righteous and loving. I always felt the love of my mother and am still feeling it.

During my studies in Germany I worked with two Russian ladies. I was living in a student dormitory and didn't cook often. They knew about this and invited me to dinner to stuff me with goodies. A few hours with a Russian family were like a short trip to Russia to my family. Being Russian means having a big heart, being willing to help, giving guests the feeling of being at home. My mother always said: „Good people are everywhere; you just have to look for them.“

As a student I had good and bad times. And there were moments in which I found myself caught in the stereotype trap thinking to myself „all Germans are vicious and close-lipped. The wisdom of my mother doesn't apply to Germans!“ But then I only had to look around me, and found them: my German colleagues, my neighbours, fellow students or total strangers. My mother was right. And I became a child of both countries, Germany and Russia.

Russian hospitality is another national characteristic. We are happy to receive guests, and would never allow that our guest is sleeping in a hotel or has to travel far at night. All problems are resolved at the table; we complain at the table, we share happiness at the table, at the table we get to know people - with or without Vodka!

Like the English we like to laugh about ourselves. The hero in Russian anecdotes is the one who makes mistakes. For their ability to accept ones weakness and to laugh about them openly, I love my compatriots.

I also love our winters, but also our other four seasons. Russia has all climate zones apart from the tropics. The temperatures lie between -50°C and +40°C. In most parts of Russia there are very cold winters (-25°C/-30°C) and very warm summers (+25°C/+30°C). I have to say, that the winters are easy to bear since the weather is dry and we have the right warm clothes.

As the biggest country in the world Russia has room for the biggest river of Europe (Wolga), the oldest and deepest inland lake of the world (Lake Baikal), the biggest sweet water sources of the world (Ladoga and Lake Baikal) and the longest railroad line of the world (Moskow-Wladiwostok). On one square kilometre live 8.35 people (in comparison to Germany: 231) there are between 200 to 300 kilometres from one big city to the next. To make an excursion means to go to the forest, to visit a lake, in a way you don't see, you don't hear and you don't smell the city. For that, we have enough space.

In a German-Russian anecdote, a Russian is driving on the German Autobahn through Germany and after hours on the road he says excitedly „Ausfahrt“ („Exit“) is a real big city. For a Russian soul it is difficult to understand, that with „Ausfahrt“ means the indication of a new city. In Russia, literally around each city are kilo meters of fields, and nature and no urbanised areas. And our soul is like this: wide, free, and open and for many difficult to understand.

The people with their wide, peaceful souls are the priceless treasure of Russia. And they are what I link to the word „Russia“. What a pity, that I have never seen a bear playing balalaika on the street.

To decrease prejudices and stereotypes about our country you need to get a picture of it yourself. In June 2012 the „Year of Russia“ ([Russlandjahr in Deutschland](#)) and the „year of Germany“ started in Russia. In both countries multiple interesting events are being planned. This is a great opportunity to get closer to the Russian culture and to better understand our history and mentality.

If you want to learn more about our expert Maria Lupakhina and you are searching for a bridge builder in your German-Russian business relationship (either in Russia or in Germany) then send us an [e-mail](#) or give us a +49 (0)6221 – 735 13 71.