

Russian immigrants found to reconstruct identities

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Many Russians who immigrate to New Zealand reconstruct their identity to cope with life in a new country, according to recent Victoria University research.

Elena Maydell, who graduated with a PhD in Psychology from Victoria University in May, conducted research which found that a common response for highly educated Russian [immigrants](#) was to develop what she calls a 'cosmopolitan identity'.

"This is an identity beyond being a Russian or New Zealander—they take resources from both cultures to create something new.

"Typically somebody with a cosmopolitan identity identifies themselves as a 'citizen of the world' which reaches beyond national borders. They are interested in learning about different cultures, working in other countries, and learning other languages."

Dr Maydell says many of the Russian immigrants she spoke to had encountered prejudice and discrimination.

"Many had experienced feeling like second rate citizens, excluded from New Zealand society despite their New Zealand citizenship. However, they managed to get through their feelings of [identity](#) loss and negativity— particularly caused by not being able to work in their profession—by transforming themselves."

Her research included an analysis of media portrayal of Russian-speaking immigrants in New Zealand mainstream newspapers over a 12-year period, an ethnographic case study of a Russian Jewish woman's immigration experiences, and in-depth interviews with 20 Russian-speaking immigrants in Wellington. Of those, 19 held tertiary qualifications from Russia.

Dr Maydell, herself a Russian immigrant who has been in New Zealand eight years after spending seven years in Australia, found that many of her interviewees had been accepted as immigrants to New Zealand under the immigration points system, but had been unable to find work in their profession.

"These people thought because they had been accepted under the point system they would easily find a job in their field as they were led to believe that there were professional shortages in New Zealand.

"They immigrated to New Zealand only to find that their qualifications were not accepted or valued here."

Dr Maydell completed her PhD with the assistance of a BRCSS (Building Research Capability in the Social Sciences) Doctoral Research Award 2008-2009. Her supervisors were Dr Marc Wilson and Professor James Liu.

Provided by Victoria University

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