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The First Waldorf School in Russia: A Postcard from Moscow

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The first Waldorf school in Russia was founded twenty five years ago. That school opened in 1992 in Moscow. It is located a comfortable twenty five minute walk south from such iconic sights of the capital as the Red Square, the Kremlin, Saint Basil's Cathedral and the GUM department store.

Russia's school system is an eleven year system, Years 1 through 11, with students beginning at age seven years. School 1060 (www.1060.ru) was originally launched as an independent Waldorf school with the practical preparation work completed with the aid of prospective parents. There are now more than 650 students in 22 classes and the enrolment is growing.

The school is now wholly funded by the government and so it is free to attend with no fees for students. It is one of three government-funded Waldorf schools. The transition from private to public school was achieved in 1995/1996.

In crossing the threshold into School 1060, a visitor from Australia might first notice the vast forest of coat hooks and coats. It is an unfamiliar sight for those from a moderate climate - but this is Moscow, and the winters are serious. During a Moscow winter the temperature may not creep above zero for weeks or months at a time. Temperatures in the negative teens are common. The record low for Moscow is -42°C. This is a continental climate - in contrast to the maritime climate (moderated by the ocean) that most Australian's enjoy.

A visitor familiar with Waldorf and Steiner schools will feel they are in familiar territory. Walls are painted in bright and cheerful relaxing pastels - each floor featuring a different colour. There is a water feature with swirling vortexes. There are play spaces featuring asymmetric crafted and polished timbers.

On the top level there is a eurythmy room with costumes.



Image 1: Waldorf School 1060, Moscow.

The school is a five storey building dating from the 1930s when it was purpose built as a school. There are 40 classrooms. There are sports areas, a library, and an assembly hall. A recent addition is an outdoor amphitheatre performance space. The school has expanded into a nearby building with a preschool hosting one hundred kindergarten students.

Students have a rich exposure to art and craft activities. “Our primary school pupils do a lot of knitting, needlework, they grow wheat, make bread, build houses, do wood and metal work” (www.1080.ru). Display-cases display student pottery handicrafts. A fine art collage by middle school students recalls a recent school trip to Italy.



Image 2: A classroom with a wall mural.

Music plays a big role in the life of this school. There are class and school orchestras, choirs, and music performances. Students have the opportunity for taking extra music classes after school hours and perhaps half of students take up this option.

The dining room serves nutritious meals with a choice of vegetarian and non-vegetarian, including the Russian favourite, grechka (гречка; buckwheat). Russia is the leading producer of grechka. The triangular seeds are rich in complex carbohydrates. Grechka has a short growing season, it responds unfavourably to synthetic fertiliser, and it is gluten-free.

All school students in Russia learn English. However, there is a lack of exposure to native speakers and that is a challenge which compromises the intent. Russia has not embraced the practices that China and Japan have recently pioneered, in which hundreds and thousands of native English speakers have been imported on temporary work permits to work with classes alongside local teachers.

Vladimir Putin has visited the school to present awards. The school has twice won awards for ‘Teacher of the Year in Russia’ - in music and mathematics.



Image 3: Wood-working class.

The Austrian philosopher, Rudolf Steiner (1861-1924),

made plans to visit Russia in 1912 and 1913, but he was denied permission and he never visited Russia (Carlson, 1993). Nevertheless, from the beginnings of Anthroposophy (in 1912) there were Russians involved with Steiner. The Russian artist Assya Turgeniev (1890-1966) created the remarkable engraved coloured glass windows that we now see in the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland (Paull, 2012; Turgeniev, 2003).



Image 4: Lunch selection at the school cafeteria: grechka (buckwheat), soup, salad, and fruit drink.

Steiner founded the original Waldorf School in Stuttgart in 1919 . He saw the original school as a prototype and exemplar for a new style of schooling. Steiner was keen that his educational ideas were put to the test and that they proliferate internationally. Teachers came to Dornach for seminars with Steiner and in 1922 he presented his ideas at Oxford to an Anglo audience (Paull, 2011; Steiner, 1922). There are now 1,092 Waldorf schools in 64 countries and 1857 kindergartens in more than 70 countries (Hague Circle, 2017).

There are 18 Waldorf schools in Russia and 30 kindergartens (Hague Circle, 2017). As well as five Waldorf schools in Moscow, there are also Waldorf schools in Saint Petersburg, Irkutsk, Jaroslavl, Kaluga, Samara, Schukowskij, Smolensk, Tomsk, Ufa, Vladimir, Voronezh, and Zelenograd. There is an Association of Waldorf Schools of Russia which was founded in 1995 and now has 21 members (waldorf-russia.ru).



Image 5: School vegetable patch.

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