

## REPORT: Uppsala, Stockholm, Lund

First, a couple of words about the peculiarity of Sverker Astrom Foundation scholarship. It is truly peculiar in how the work with scholarship holders is being organized. From the start the attitude is interested and informal – be it a visa issue, your project development or an accommodation matter. Your well-grounded needs are heard and addressed. So I can say that the scholarship is individually-tailored. This makes the scholarship time in Sweden especially rewarding academic and human experience.

Beside the scholarship-related activities proper, the Sverker Astrom Foundation Board invests a lot of effort for the grantees to receive diverse first-hand cultural experience in Sweden. In fact, a newcomer to the country can hardly arrange much of it on her/his own. Here I cannot but mention the retreats to Disa Hastad's summer house on a rocky slope with a fantastic view of the surroundings and the lovely celebrations of Swedish and other holidays which she organized at her place and in the countryside. I am truly grateful to Disa Hastad for all her enthusiastic effort; my special thanks also go to Mikael Sohlman, Orjan Berner and Olga Kuvaldina.



My project was devoted to Russia's non-military foreign policy means in her 'near abroad' in the perception of Polish experts, with a focus on the soft power policies. I started this project earlier, and was especially interested in methodology and informed feedback, and of course wanted to develop it into a readable piece. Another aim was to familiarize myself with the domain of Eastern and Central European Studies in Sweden. This apart, for me, as a university teacher, the organization of curriculum and student life was also of interest.

So I, with the help of the Foundation, took up my six-month scholarship (there was a three-month extension for 2014) in three institutions: at the oldest and, in the opinion of many, the best Swedish universities – Uppsala University and Lund University, and in the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI), a dynamic think-tank of European profile.

## Uppsala

At Uppsala University I was affiliated with the Uppsala Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies (UCRS). The Center was established just a few years ago, but in a couple of years it has become a well-known institution in the area due to its research and the significant scholarly events it organizes.

I cannot but note friendly and open research environment at UCRS, and I am especially grateful for advice to Greg Simons, Prof. Elena Namli and Igor Torbakov who also often shared their papers/drafts with me.

There were numerous interesting research seminars and conferences, while the presenters came from all over Sweden and other countries. My fellow scholarship holder at UCRS was a wonderful person Ania Varfolomeeva who was doing a project on indigenous peoples. We were both happy that there had been many relevant events at the Center on our quite different topics.

In Uppsala I stayed the longest – from late September to mid-December 2013. Also, there I first got to know about the so called nations in which students are being organized in Sweden, at least at most universities. There are thirteen nations, according to the number of the Swedish regions. To my mind, this is a very useful institution to translate some Mediaeval/early-modern university practices into contemporary life thus making the student experience truly special and of course to help students obtain important social and practical skills.

Ania and I were lucky to experience the Christmas eve in Sweden which included, among other things, an amazing boat trip with the UCRS team on the lake Malaren and of course the julbord, traditional Swedish Christmas dinner.



## Stockholm

In Stockholm I was affiliated for two months with the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI). This renowned research institute has expertise on different aspects of international relations of course in the context of their relevance to Sweden, while it also initiates or contributes to the public debates on acute international issues.

Senior research fellow Lena Jonson was my advisor there. She gave a close reading to my paper and provided a substantive feedback. This, together with commentaries from Ingmar Oldberg and other researchers, helped a lot to improve my paper. The piece was published as an UI Paper in December 2014.

So my UI experience was especially rewarding in terms of academic writing, IR methodology and in deepening my knowledge about various problems of international affairs and on how Sweden is seen in Europe and in the world.

Also, in Stockholm there were many opportunities to attend relevant scholarly events in different institutions, as for example at the Stockholm School of Economics.

The city itself with its diverse neighbourhoods and a special care for the nature and arts provides a lot of enriching cultural experience. Easter holidays became a great opportunity not only to get to know the Swedish traditions of their celebration, but also to explore the countryside and enjoy the famous mediaeval wall paintings by Albertus Pictor (to mention just one of the interesting things) – there was an exciting trip organized by the Foundation.

It is worth noting that the scholarship is widening the horizon in terms of what other scholarship holders (whom I mostly met in Stockholm) are doing either. I was happy to meet the interesting people with exciting projects dealing with mediation, the Saami people, Swedish art of the early twentieth century, museums and urban space, to name just a few.



## Lund

For the final month of my scholarship I was affiliated with the Center for European Studies at Lund University. The Center covers a broad range of topics but the most important one is the memory studies in Europe. I am grateful to Prof. Barbara Tornqvist and Nicklas Bernsand for their warm welcome at the Center and an opportunity to present my paper there.

There I found out more about how the curriculum is being organized, in particular how plagiarism and cheating are being prevented, and also how student nations are functioning (as I stayed at a dorm of one of the nations).

Besides, I learnt a lot about the practices of open-access scholarly publishing which are especially advanced at Lund University – it maintains Directory of Open Access Journals, one of the key open-access scholarly resources.

Being in Lund, I was even a bit surprised that such a small and charming city so successfully hosts such a big and dynamic university. Due to Prof. Hjordis Kristenson, who is an art historian, I got an opportunity to get to know better the university (I was also lucky to see the historical interiors usually closed to the public) and the city.

In terms of cultural experience it was interesting to visit a different region of Sweden which lies close to the sea and is in the very south, not far from Denmark. There was a good opportunity to see a neighbouring city of Malmo which is just in a ten-minute travel by train.



In conclusion I can only say that I am happy to have had this exciting and rewarding scholarship experience in Sweden which in many ways exceeded my expectations.