

Institution: London Metropolitan University		
Unit of Assessment: 25 Area Studies		
Title of case study: Changing the discourse and building resilience to gangs in Russian society		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2005-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Svetlana Stephenson	Professor of Sociology	2002 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Prof Stephenson's research on gangs in Russian society posed a fundamental challenge to stereotypes of gangs as purely criminal business organisations or substitutes for state power. Instead she has shown that gangs need to be analysed as context specific organisations that develop cultural forms of solidarity, territoriality and gender. Stephenson's research has influenced the leading Russian NGO, Public Centre for Judicial and Legal Reform, in developing their interregional programme of gang prevention and rehabilitation strategies, which have been rolled out to all 27 territorial justice centres across Russia. Her work has informed public understandings in the West, and challenged conventional wisdoms about criminal organisations, state and society in Russia.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Stephenson's research addressed the rise of criminal gangs in the context of Russia's transition to capitalism, and their transformation into organised crime groups with tight links to the state. Her research, culminating in a major 2015 book [R1] was qualitative in nature, and involved interviews with gang members aged 18-32, community members, business leaders and representatives of law enforcement in Kazan and Moscow. The research took place over 2005-2019 and included collaboration with Russian researchers, Aleksander Salagaev, Aleksander Shashkin and Rustem Safin (Kazan State Technological University), who were involved in the project design and facilitated access to the research participants.

The 2015 book was the first to explore Russian gangs and their transformation as conditioned by the economic, political and cultural changes in Russian society pre- and post- market transition. Stephenson showed that many street gangs have developed from neighbourhood alliances offering protection services into serious organised crime groups. While revealing the complex organisation of much of the gangs' criminal business, Stephenson argued that the gangs, rather than being vehicles for economic operations or substitutes for the absent state authority, develop cultural forms of solidarity, territoriality, gender and leadership. Stephenson's approach highlights the necessity to approach gangs in culturally sensitive ways, overcoming the US-centric focus of gang criminology that creates multiple problems for understanding gangs in the non-Western and global sphere.

Stephenson's research challenges the established view that the gang is a collection of socially excluded and damaged individuals left to survive in the shadow of modern institutions through crime and violence. She demonstrates that a substantial portion of young gang members aspire to mainstream success via the vehicles of employment and education. She argues that by developing

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these opportunities it is possible to effectively limit the attractions of gang membership.

Stephenson's analysis also shows that, while the gangs' economic power has weakened in the early 21st century as the Russian state strengthened, their social and cultural influence has remained substantial. The book and a 2015 paper in Russian [R2] drew parallels between the street gang logic and the behaviour and culture of the Russian economic, cultural and political elites, including President Vladimir Putin's public use of gang language. The study of deep social and cultural integration of the gang into the Russian society allows for novel considerations about the permeable nature of the borders between formal and informal economies and societal formations in Russia and represents important evidence for business communities, working in the Russian markets, and civil servants, both in the West and in Russia.

In her 2016 [R3 and R4], 2017 [R3] and 2019 [R5] papers Stephenson further investigated the gangs' entrepreneurial ethos and their multiple alliances with the representatives of the state. Contrary to the established views, Stephenson argued that instead of a state monopoly on violence or the subjugation of organised crime by a political elite, in Russia there exists reciprocal assimilation between state and private violent agents. She described the intertwined networks of legality and illegality that work in concert in officially sanctioned and non-sanctioned ways, reproducing social order. Her approach further highlights the fact that the Russian experience does not fit the global corruption and organised crime paradigms.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[R1] Stephenson, S. (2015). *Gangs of Russia: from the Streets to the Corridors of Power*, New York: Cornell University Press. ISBN: 978-1501700248 **IN RUSSIAN** *Zhishn' po poniatiiam. Ulichnye gruppировki v Rossii*. Moscow: Strana OZ, 2017. ISBN: 978-5-906139-12-2.

Winner, Alexander Nove Prize, British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES); honorary mention, BASEES Women Forum.

"Landmark study" (F. Varese, Times Literary Supplement, 1 July 2016); "This is an important book about contemporary Russia and about a significant global social formation." (T.Hall, Times Higher Education "Book of the week", 14 January 2016).

[R2] Stephenson, S. (2015), *Zhishn' po poniatiiam*. "Real'nye patsany" i ikh moral'nye pravila [Life on the basis of the "notions". The "real lads" and their moral rules], *Neprikosnovennyi Zapas*, No.5 (1103), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2015/103/9s.htm> **IN RUSSIAN**.

[R3] Stephenson S. (2016), Russian bandit gangs, their moral code and practices of violence, *Mir Rossii*, Vol. 25, No 1, pp. 35–54, <https://mirros.hse.ru/article/view/4910>.

[R4] Stephenson, S. (2016), Russlands echte Kerle. Die Gang als Lebensform und Politikmodell [Russia's real guys. The gang as a life form and policy model], *OSTEUROPA*, Vol. 66, No 5, pp.3-17, <https://www.zeitschrift-osteuroopa.de/hefte/2016/5/russlands-echte-kerle/>.

[R5] Stephenson, S. (2017) It takes two to tango: the state and organized crime in Russia, *Current Sociology*, Vol. 65, No. 3, pp. 411-426. DOI: 10.1177/0011392116681384. Winner, Sociologist of the Month, *Current Sociology*, January 2018 (journal has 5-year impact factor of 1.7).

[R6] Stephenson, S. (2019) Gangs and governance in Russia: the paradox of law and lawlessness, *Global Crime*, pp. 1-19, doi: [10.1080/17440572.2019.1645654](https://doi.org/10.1080/17440572.2019.1645654)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Influencing gang prevention and rehabilitation strategies

Stephenson's research has influenced the policies and practice of civil society groups and state organisations in Russia, working to prevent young people's gang affiliation, rehabilitate offenders and support victims. Stephenson's research on the causes of youth dislocation has informed several projects conducted by the Interregional NGO "Public Centre for Judicial and Legal Reform" (PCJLR, Moscow). This leading Russian civil society organisation has been working in partnership

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with The State Prosecution Service and the Russian Ministry of Education and Ministry of Justice on protecting the rights of the child, preventing juvenile offending and developing restorative justice across Russia.

Stephenson has been a consultant to the project, “Territoria” (2017-2023) supported by a Russian President’s grant. The project aims to promote the reduction in violence, intergenerational conflict, and strengthening of positive ties between young people. The project began with a pilot in Kazan, where it involved a collaboration between the PCJLR and the Kazan City Committee on Children and Youth. Stephenson assisted the PCJLR in preparing the grant application and developing the aims, objectives and key activities of the programme. In February 2017 she participated in the training event for schoolteachers, school psychologists and youth workers, discussing the main conclusions of her research and how these can be used in working with gang-affected young people. The aims of the interventions that the project has developed were based on building young people’s positive links to the community as opposed to the previous predominantly punitive approach to group delinquency.

As the toolkit on “Building resilience towards criminal gangs among teenagers” published by the Kazan City Committee on Children and Youth, explains, Stephenson’s research helped the staff of the City Committee in their work. (S7) In an email to Stephenson, the head of Kazan city youth psychological services, says, “Thank you for your work that helped us in our project to build resilience towards organised criminal groups among teenagers”. (S1). Referring to Stephenson’s support to the Kazan pilot project, the President of the PCJLR says “We introduced school workshops for teenagers in Kazan, where young people learn how to avoid street victimisation. All of this activity drew directly on evidence from Stephenson’s research. The workshops in Kazan involved 427 teenagers. We received overwhelmingly positive feedback from schoolteachers”. (S2)

In 2019, on the basis of the Kazan pilot, the PCJLR set up further gang-resilience programmes in all of the 27 territorial restorative justice centres across Russia, working with the Russian General Prosecution Service, the courts, youth services and schools. In addition to school workshops with teenagers at risk of victimisation, the programme involved the development of mediation between members of different territorial gangs and street-based groups, and mediation between offenders and victims. The PCJLR were involved in the training of 5095 mediators (of whom two thirds were young people). By the end of March 2020 676 restorative justice programmes were conducted with underage offenders, 652 programmes took place with the victims and 758 programmes involved family members. Altogether 7128 members of the public took part in the programmes. The evaluation of the programme showed that 68% of juvenile offenders who participated in the restorative justice programmes (victim-offender mediation and community restitution) agreed that the outcomes of these programmes were fair; and 75% of the victims also agreed with this (S2). The PCJLR distributed copies of the Russian translation of Stephenson’s book “Gangs of Russia” to all territorial restorative justice centres. In August 2020 Stephenson participated in an online workshop with the leaders of regional programmes, which discussed the further development of the project up to 2023. (S3)

In a testimonial, the President of the PCJLR says, “Stephenson’s research helps us understand the real motives of the teenagers, their values, clarify the social factors that lead to their marginalisation. We are grateful to Svetlana Stephenson for her detailed study of juvenile crime and the social factors of juvenile criminalisation. Her work helped us to develop family conferences with gang members, and mediation programmes for victims and perpetrators of street violence.” (S2)

Stephenson’s research also informed the policy of the Russian government on social reintegration of the members of delinquent gangs. Dr Elena Danilova, the Institute of Sociology, Moscow, describes how she used Stephenson’s research in her 2018 report to the Expert Committee of the Russian Ministry of Labour, working on developing the programme of activities within the Russian-wide “Decade of Childhood” (2018-2027). The programme aims to strengthen the state policies of protection of childhood. The report “informed the Committee members about the results” of Stephenson’s studies showing that “a proportion of teenagers experience a ‘drift’ from the values of family and school to alternative [criminal] values, and that the strengthening of social relations in school and family can prevent such drift. These conclusions were positively received, and as a result of our deliberations we managed to include the development of restorative justice, including

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mediation and family conferences with ...members of delinquent groups and gangs into the government programme.”[S6]

Informing the debate in Russia

Stephenson’s work has informed the debate on gangs in Russia, through invited public talks and media interviews. In her lectures and interviews she highlighted the need to develop a more sensitive understanding of gang membership in the Russian context and understand their motives within the context of their marginalisation and the presence of mainstream aspirations among many gang members.

Her work has also contributed to a better understanding of the ways in which the criminal culture that flourished in Russia in the 1990s has influenced the wider political culture. In her article in a popular Russian online media resource “Snob” in 2016, the political analyst Maria Snegovaya noted how Stephenson’s identification of key cultural orientations and the worldview of the gangsters have now been replicated within the political establishment, saying that Stephenson “formulated the principles of behaviour of real bandit gangs that perfectly describe the Kremlin policy” (S8). Snegovaya’s article was read 15,706 times. The Russian book was also reviewed in a range of widely read publications, including the leading magazine “Neprikosnovennyi zapas” and the popular online media resource “Takie dela”.

Stephenson’s research also influenced an art project by the Russian contemporary artist Anton Zimerman in his work on the research exhibition *Moscow – Kazan – Moscow* (Kazan, 2018, Centre for Research Art). The exhibition presented contemporary art projects on the history and current development of Kazan. In his letter, in which he requested documents about the Kazan gangs for his forthcoming exhibition, Zimerman said ‘Your book “Gangs of Russia”, published in Russian, helped me to form a clear view of the subject of my artistic project’ (S4).

Transforming Western understanding of Russian gangs and organised crime

Stephenson’s research has informed a change in Western perceptions of Russian gangs and organised crime, which had previously adhered to Americanised tropes of gang violence. As Tom Porter, International Business Times, discusses Stephenson “penetrated the wall of silence surrounding Russia’s gang culture... for a landmark study on the past, present, and future of the Russian mafia,” noting that while some gang members have “graduated to become mafia bosses, responsible for lucrative drugs and weapons trafficking networks,” others were in key positions in business, “security services or in central or regional government.” [S9] Stephenson’s research has repositioned the perception of Russian gang membership as purely criminal, with members now utilising the connections and support of a gang to join or progress more established career paths. As an audience member at Glasgow’s “Aye Write!” literary festival (2016) also noted, “it is not poverty or lack of opportunity that drives membership,” but a wider set of criteria including a route to status within the community. [S5] The discussion with Laurie Taylor on BBC Radio 4’s *Thinking Allowed*, acknowledged that gangs across the globe had evolved beyond the historical local nexus into social movements, peacekeeping and become institutionalised within corrupt practices of governments and police. [S10]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

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- S1. Email from Elsan Lenkova, the head of Kazan city youth psychological services, 20 February 2020. (in Russian)
 - S2. Testimonial from Rustem Maksudov, the President of the Interregional NGO “Public Centre for Judicial and Legal Reform”, 15 August 2020. (in Russian)
 - S3. The minutes of the online workshop, 6 August 2020.(in Russian)
 - S4. A message from Anton Zimerman on the value of Stephenson’s book for his artistic project and request for materials, 15 December 2017.(in Russian)

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- S5. Email from a member of the audience at the Aye Write Festival, Glasgow, April 2016.
- S6. Email from Elena Danilova, the Russian Institute of Sociology, 22 August 2020. (in Russian)
- S7. The toolkit on “Building resilience towards criminal gangs among teenagers” published by the Kazan City Committee on Children and Youth. (in Russian)
- S8. Snegovaya, M. Kreml', Blatnye Poniatiia, “Buk” i banochki s mochei, *Snob*, 29 June.2016, <https://snob.ru/profile/25786/blog/114305> (the article was read 15,706 times). (in Russian)
- S9. Porter, T., Inside Russia’s street gangs: Author gains unprecedented access to mafia networks, *International Business Times*, 5 February, 2016, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/inside-russias-street-gangs-author-gains-unprecedented-access-mafia-networks-1541557>
- S10. Stephenson is interviewed by Prof Laurie Taylor on the programme “Glasgow Gangs – Russian Gangs”, *Thinking Allowed*, BBC4, 18 May 2016. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07bdd2f> (from 16:00 minutes)