# Field Work Report

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During summer 2018 and January-February of 2019 I fulfilled a data collection in the Russian national archives. I am writing this report as a result of my field work and to help future scholars who plan their work in the archives.

## 1 Start

Archival resources are usually well protected and require certain amount of preparation from the scholar who plans their archival work. First of all, the access can be a bit harder than the access to the libraries, for example. It is especially important if we talk about the historical documents. For both of the Russian archives that I was working in, I was required to provide the letter from the university(it can be substituted by the personal application) with the specification of my aims and the topic of my research. Sometimes the archival workers can be picky about the materials that the scholars are ordering, and can claim that the materials mismatch the topic of the research. So, my advice will be to provide as broad topic as possible, so that one does not get rejected on the ordered cases due to the mismatch.

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## 2  Time

It is necessary to remember that the archival work takes more time than one can expect. If a scholar plans to work with the documents for about a week, they should plan at least a 10-day or even maybe a two-week trip in the city of the archive. I worked in the State Archive of the Russian Federation and in the Russian State Historical Archive. The first one has taken two days to deliver the cases, and the latter - three days. Both of the archives have an electronic version of their cases collection, which makes it easier to plan the trip. The Russian State Historical Archive even allowed to order cases online through the electronic account. Thus in such a situation, the scholar can choose necessary cases in advance.

Although, it is important to remember that there is a limitation on the ordering amount per day. For instance, in my case, I was limited to 20 cases per day. But, for instance, the Russian State Historical Archive has restrictions on the amount of cases per day and per the archival storage. For example, I could have ordered 20 cases per day, but only 5 from a particular archival storage. Eventually, when I needed 20 cases from the same storage, I had to split them in 4 four days, which immediately extended the process of working with these cases.

## 3  Cases Selection Failure

Unfortunately, most of the cases have only the broad name and do not have a proper description of what is included in the folder. A scholar basically should guess by name. That leads to some sort of case selection failure. For example, I ordered a lot of cases that sounded useful for me, but they turned out not to have information that I needed. I was looking for statistical reports, and sometimes those reports were just written in words, or they only consisted of the short description of some statistical findings.

# 4    Handwriting Style and Language

Some of the pre-20th century cases are handwritten which makes them very hard to read and immediately takes much more time than one expects. I was reading documents in my native language, and it still was hard to read some of the words due to the handwriting style. Some of the words I recognized by the context of the sentences and paragraphs. It can be much harder for a non-native speaker, especially considering that most of the time these materials are written in the older version of the language.

# 5    Condition

Archives contain a variety of documents, but usually we talk about historical materials. Some of these documents and folders can be in a bad condition, which may prevent the scholar from properly reading it or extracting information. In the Russian archives such materials are prohibited to photograph. The user can order a professional copy or a scan of these documents. But usually it takes a lot of time (in my case, it was up to a month) and it is not free. Hence, the scholar should be prepared to take a lot of notes right away. I was retyping most of the statistical data that I needed, which automatically impacts the timing.

Sometimes the documents are in such a bad condition, that the archive even refuses to deliver the cases. I had a couple of rejects due to the physical condition of the documents in the Russian State Historical Archive. Unfortunately, there is nothing one can do with that.

Some of the documents are already scanned or microfilmed. In my case, those types of the cases were the easiest to use, because the microfilms and scanned materials can be photographed from the screen. In the Russian State Historical Archive there was not even any limitation on how many scanned documents a scholar can order and look through per day. That is extremely helpful if one needs to work with a lot of materials in a short period of time.

# 6 Sum Up Tips

- Spend some time preparing for the trip

- Prepare all the formal documents to access the archives;

- Ideally, talk to someone who already worked in these archives: it can be your colleges or people from other departments (in my case, it was a history professor);

- Explore the web sources of the archives: go through the collection description, make some notes and select which cases can be helpful or interesting to you, check the rules of the archives, which documents can be ordered online in advance, or which materials can or cannot be copied;

- Give yourself more time than you think you will need.