

## Article

# Hotel Naming in Russian Cities: An Imprint of Foreign Cultures and Languages between Europe and Asia

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**Abstract:** Hotel naming can contribute to cultural exchange, and big countries boasting lengthy peripheries and sharp “cores” are suitable for studying this contribution. Foreign cultural and linguistic imprints in hotel names is studied in four big cities of Russia, namely Rostov-on-Don, Nizhniy Novgorod, Krasnoyarsk, and Vladivostok. It is established that the hotels with names bearing foreign-culture elements constitute up to 20–25% of all hotels in each given city. These elements can be linked to many, chiefly West European countries. The English foreign-language elements are the most common, whereas the French and Italian elements occur in subordinate numbers. The linguistic-cultural types of the hotel names are commonly toponyms and landscape-related symbols. The imprint of foreign cultures and languages in the hotel names diminishes together with the increase in distance from the western state border.

**Keywords:** cultural affinity; foreign influences; hospitality; society openness; urban studies



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## 1. Introduction

The growth of the hospitality industry is triggered by the processes of globalization, and the former also facilitates the latter [1–10]. Hotels are “hotspots” of cultural and linguistic exchange because representatives of different cultures interact there, and a kind of language mix is typical for the hotel environment. If so, the principal attributes of hotels, including their names, contribute to the cultural exchange and, particularly, bring elements of foreign cultures and languages to new places. In many small countries, this effect is thought to be significant because they are very open to the world and the majority of hotel guests are foreigners. The situation may differ in big countries where the amount of domestic travelers is significant and foreigners tend to visit chiefly big, cosmopolitan centers or cities near state borders. If so, the hotel contribution to the cultural exchange may differ spatially in such countries.

Russia is the biggest country in the world with an area of 17.1 mln sq km. According to the World Tourism Organization, it hosted 24.6 mln international tourists in 2018 compared to 22.3 mln tourists in 2010 [11]. This country boasts of significant involvement in the international tourism market [12–17], and domestic tourism rises quickly [18–20]. Tourism growth and active business traveling facilitate the development of the national hospitality industry [21–23]. The related cultural exchange can be described with some models, and Russia, with its unique size, seems to be ideal to develop them. Such models can be applied to other big countries such as Brazil, Canada, China, India, and the USA.

Hotel naming is an important but significantly underexplored topic [24]. Apparently, this topic is related to such issues as hotel and place branding, cultural exchange, and

societal openness. Although naming a given hotel reflects the preferences and intelligence of its owners/managers, these are also framed culturally and may follow some stereotypes. Moreover, the naming procedure is often shaped by the marketing needs, that is, the expected preferences and intelligence of the potential visitors are taken into account. Such cultural peculiarities and transformations as established in Russia [25] should influence many aspects of the development of the national hospitality industry, including hotel naming.

The present study aims at studying hotel names in several Russian cities in order to judge their foreign cultural and linguistic imprint. Different location of the studied cities within a very big country permits examination of the spatial factor of this imprint. The main research question is whether there is any difference between the hotels from the peripheral and central parts of the country in terms of the strength of the imprint of foreign cultures and languages. The central hypothesis to be tested is that the foreign cultural influences increase towards the country's boundaries and are determined by the culture of the neighboring countries. It is also expected that testing this hypothesis sheds light on the degree of openness of Russian society. Indeed, the present study can be only tentative and, thus, organized rather simply. It generally aims at the understanding of whether the issue of the noted imprint exists or not. Such a study seems to be essential for planning a series of more extensive investigations for the future. Nonetheless, putting new questions on the research agenda itself is important, and the reported findings are novel and allow various interpretations.

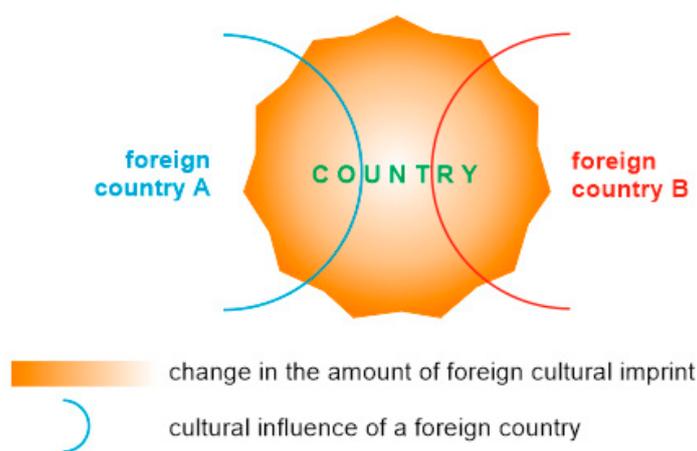
## 2. Conceptual Remarks

Studying hotel branding is important in contemporary hospitality research. Since the pioneering works by Connell [26] and Taylor [27], a significant advance in knowledge has occurred [28–32]. It has been established that the cultural and linguistic components of brands are of utmost importance. The main aspects of this issue include global versus local/national cultural peculiarities of brands [33,34], place brands as cultural phenomena [35], brands as cultural heritage [36], cultural and linguistic peculiarities of branding [37–39], and brand semiotics [40,41]. Additionally, it has been established that cultural characteristics of hospitality customers affect brand perception [42], although the national identity may not matter in the case of global brands [43]. Naming and branding are closely connected, and, particularly, names can be important for how the branding of tourist destinations reflects authenticity [44].

Surprisingly, hotel naming has been rarely discussed in the academic literature, with the main ideas summarized below. Ingram [45] examined the evolution of the hotel chain names in the USA during about a century. This specialist found that two main strategies were to name all units of the same chain similarly and to give individual names to adapt to local conditions. He concluded that the former strategy is more successful, which can be interpreted so that hotels belonging to any international chain should prefer “standard” naming, which means dispersal of foreign cultural and/or linguistic elements. Hashim and Murphy [46] found that domain naming of Malaysian hotels and, particularly, its consistency, are significant approaches to hotel branding. Manthiou et al. [47] investigated name-brand hotels and concluded that customer loyalty depends on name brands. This means cultural and linguistic peculiarities of hotel names are important to their positioning on the market because of the related guest sensitivity. The three above-mentioned studies paid attention to branding issues. Only the work by Nash [24] focused on naming itself. This specialist analyzed the Norfolk Island hotel names, and two of his ideas are of utmost importance. First, hotel names should be treated in the local cultural context. Second, toponymy in hotel names deserves careful investigation. The former idea means that hotels can be classified on the basis of local–external relationships of elements in their names. The latter idea implies that the cultural affinity of hotel names can be revealed by place names. The issue of the presence of foreign cultural and linguistic elements in hotel names remains almost completely missed in research despite its evident importance. The growth

of international tourism and business activities triggers the inevitable penetration of foreign elements into national cultures and languages (e.g., via hotel naming).

The “core”—periphery investigations in the tourism and hospitality research [48–52] also raise interest in the mechanism of the noted penetration. Supposedly, the foreign cultural and linguistic imprint in hotel names in very big countries decreases together with the increase in distances from state borders (Figure 1). This proposition is based on the assumption that peripheries of big countries (in addition to cosmopolitan cities and world-famous tourist destinations) are more open to cultural exchange than the geographical “cores”. Such an assumption echoes the previous notions by Gormsen [53] and Hu and Konrad [54] on the near-border cultural phenomena. It is also reasonable to hypothesize that the foreign cultural and linguistic imprint in hotel names in very big countries is related essentially to the countries located most closely to hotel locations (Figure 1). For instance, if hotel names are studied in a city near the border with any European country, it is possible to expect that the cultural and linguistic elements in these names are chiefly European.



**Figure 1.** A schematic representation of the propositions.

### 3. Materials and Methods

Hotels of four Russian cities have been considered for the purposes of this study. The selection criteria are as follows. First, these cities represent different parts of Russia, including the Russian South, Central Russia, Siberia, and the Far East. Second, the cities are located near the borders of the country (periphery) and in the central part of the country (“core”). Third, the cities are big enough to boast of a well-developed hospitality industry with numerous hotels of different categories. Fourth, cosmopolitan cities attracting crowds of guests like Moscow and Sankt-Petersburg should be avoided because their extraordinary attractiveness and cosmopolitanism mask the influence of the factor of the distance from the state border. Fifth, the cities are located in the regions with moderate-to-low cultural differences from the other parts of the country (for instance, Kazan is an appropriate city by the other criteria, but it is located in the Republic of Tatarstan with its own cultural peculiarities). Rostov-on-Don, Nizhniy Novgorod, Krasnoyarsk, and Vladivostok are selected for the purposes of the present study (Table 1). Rostov-on-Don and Vladivostok represent the Russian geographical periphery, and Nizhniy Novgorod and Krasnoyarsk represent the “core” of the country (Figure 2).

**Table 1.** Basic characteristics of the Russian cities considered in the present analysis.

City	Macroregion	Location	City Population, mln.	Number of Persons Accommodated (2017), mln. *	Number of CAFs in the Region (2017) *	Number of Hotels in the City (2019) **
Rostov-on-Don	Russian South	Periphery (Europe)	1.13	1.09	568	153
Nizhniy Novgorod	Russian Centre	“Core” (Europe)	1.25	1.07	486	109
Krasnoyarsk	Siberia	“Core” (Central Asia)	1.10	0.70	369	52
Vladivostok	Far East	Periphery (East Asia)	0.60	1.06	465	81

Abbreviation: CAF—collective accommodation facility (hotels, hostels, etc.). Notes: \* the data by the Federal Survey of State Statistics of the Russian Federation (gks.ru) for the regions where the cities are located; \*\* the information on hotels extracted from [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com) (accessed on 31 August 2019).

**Figure 2.** Geographical location of the selected cities.

For each selected city, the information is collected as follows. All hotels from this city are considered (the online booking system with its extensive coverage of hotels and other collective accommodation facilities facilitates the solution of this task). The hotel names available either in Cyrillic or Latin are compiled. Then, these names are checked in order to find those bearing foreign elements (a hotel name can include one or more elements, and sometimes foreign and Russian elements are mixed in the same name). These elements can be attributed to two major categories. Foreign-culture elements are foreign toponyms, persons, literature personages, national culinary items, etc. Each of these elements can be brought in correspondence to a given country of origin. Foreign-language elements are foreign words that are not used in the standard Russian language. Each of these elements can be brought in correspondence to a given language of origin (but its attribution to a particular country is often impossible because the languages like English, Spanish, and German are used in many countries).

Hotel names with elements belonging to these two categories are then transliterated (if these are given initially in Cyrillic), and spelling of some foreign words is corrected according to the norms of the relevant language (spelling is incorrect chiefly because of transliteration, but some names were given to hotels with linguistic errors). After these procedures, the lists of hotel names bearing the imprint of foreign cultures and languages

are compiled for the selected cities, and the names are classified, with identification of the linguistic-cultural types (Supplementary Materials).

The number of hotels with names bearing foreign-culture and foreign-language elements relative to the total number of hotels is measured for each city (R). This permits the establishment of the relative impact of foreign imprint in hotel names for the cities. Then, the ratio of foreign-culture and foreign-language elements (E) is calculated for each city. Third, all foreign-culture elements are attributed to countries. Fourth, all foreign-language elements are attributed to languages. Fifth, the presence of linguistic-cultural types of hotel names is registered for the cities. Subsequently, the above-mentioned patterns are considered in regard to the “core”–periphery position of the cities, which allows testing the validity of the propositions made above (Figure 1).

#### 4. Results

In the three analyzed Russian cities, up to a quarter of the hotels bear names with foreign cultural and linguistic elements (Table 2). Only in Krasnoyarsk, their number is less than 20%. This indicates the recognizable foreign imprint. Importantly, the number of the names with foreign-language elements exceeds that of the names with foreign-culture elements (Table 2). This means that foreign words are preoccupied more actively than cultural ideas when the names are given to hotels. Only in Rostov-on-Don, the number of hotel names with foreign-culture elements is relatively high (Table 2). In contrast, such elements are not registered at all in the hotels of Krasnoyarsk.

**Table 2.** Basic indicators of the presence of foreign elements in the hotel names.

City	Number of Names with Foreign-Culture Elements	Number of Names with Foreign-Language Elements	R, %%	E
Rostov-on-Don	14	22	23.5	0.64
Nizhniy Novgorod	5	19	22.0	0.26
Krasnoyarsk	0	7	13.5	0.00
Vladivostok	4	16	25.0	0.25

The spectrum of foreign-culture elements differs significantly between the cities (Table 3). It is the widest in Rostov-on-Don where the correspondence to 12 countries is established. The hotels of Nizhniy Novgorod and Vladivostok can be related to only four and three countries, respectively. Interestingly, these are the same countries as in the case of Rostov-on-Don, except for the only hotel in Nizhniy Novgorod bearing the name of a character from the Mexican series that was popular in Russia a few decades ago. Notably, only Italian culture has an imprint in three cities (Table 3). The diversity of foreign-language elements is moderate-to-low in all cities (Table 4). It is also the biggest in Rostov-on-Don where the hotel names include the words from five foreign languages (all are European languages). The minimal diversity is established in Krasnoyarsk (two languages). The most common foreign-language elements are English (Table 4), which is a very expected finding due to the importance of this language in international affairs and culture. French words are included in hotel names more rarely, but these are also found in all four cities. The Italian foreign-language elements are more restricted (Table 4) than the Italian foreign-culture elements (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Foreign-culture elements in the hotel names.

Country	Rostov-on-Don	Nizhniy Novgorod	Krasnoyarsk	Vladivostok
Armenia	1			
Austria	1			
Bermuda *	1			
Cuba	1			
France	2			2
Georgia	1			
Italy	1	1		1
Mexico		1		
Norway	1			
Spain	2			1
Turkey	1			
UK	1	1		
USA	1	2		

Note: \* a British Overseas Territory.

**Table 4.** Foreign-language elements in the hotel names.

Language	Rostov-on-Don	Nizhniy Novgorod	Krasnoyarsk	Vladivostok
German	2			
English	10	16	6	13
French	6	2	1	2
Italian	3	2		1
Spanish	1			

The diversity of the linguistic-cultural types of the hotel names is significant in Rostov-on-Don (8 types) and Nizhniy Novgorod (7 types), and it is lesser in Vladivostok (5 types) and Krasnoyarsk (4 types) (Table 5). In Rostov-on-Don and Vladivostok, toponyms play an important role. In Nizhniy Novgorod, the hotel names often are non-motivated, that is, these are “just words”. In Krasnoyarsk and Vladivostok, landscape symbolic names are relatively common. This diversity reflects the breadth of cultural and linguistic options for hotel naming linked to the cultural and linguistic experience and awareness of hotel owners/managers (in ideal cases, the latter also take into account the cultural and linguistic preferences of their guests).

**Table 5.** Linguistic-cultural types of the hotel names.

Linguistic-Cultural Types *	Rostov-on-Don	Nizhniy Novgorod	Krasnoyarsk	Vladivostok
Non-motivated	9	7	0	6
Direct nomination (indication on organization type)	3	1	1	0
Indirect nomination: reference to hotel services and functions	4	6	2	0
Indirect nomination: reference to construction type	6	5	2	2
Indirect nomination: toponyms and famous places	10	2	0	7
Symbolic nomination: landscape	3	0	3	7
Precedent nomination: real persons	4	1	0	0
Precedent nomination: fictional (literature and movie) persons	2	2	0	1

Note: \* several types can be found in some hotel names.

## 5. Discussion

Two principal findings of the undertaken analysis are the significant imprint of foreign cultures and languages in hotel names of the considered Russian cities and the geographical differences of this imprint within the country. These findings need further interpretation, which is provided below.

A servile attitude to foreign things should be excluded as a possible explanation of the significant imprint of foreign cultures and names in the hotel names because hotel naming requires significant responsibility. Moreover, Russians have been active learners of the world [25], which means in-depth cultural interactions with the latter. The ideas of cosmopolitanism constitute an important sociological theory [55]. In fact, cosmopolitanism is something more than an effect of globalization because it requires some internal processes in the societies, including cosmopolitan imagination [56]. It also faces some challenges like mediation between the particular and the universal [57]. Generally, this theory traces the roots of societies' openness, as well as the open world shaping and feeling (in this case, an open world is not equal to the contemporary understanding of the globalized world). However, cosmopolitanism does not seem to be an acceptable explanation of the findings of this study because of the well-shaped identity of the Russian society and the strong feeling of patriotism [58–62]. The registered imprint of foreign cultures and names can be explained partly by the global nature of the entire hospitality industry and the naming practices preferred by some international hotel chains existing on the Russian market. However, many analyzed hotels are independent, small ventures, and, thus, this factor cannot dominate. Finally, the presence of foreign elements in the hotel names cannot be explained by the desire of their owners/managers to satisfy the foreign guests because Russian guests prevail in the majority (if not all) hotels.

The rather high degree of the registered imprint of foreign cultures and languages in the hotel names of the four Russian cities indicates the involvement of the Russian hospitality industry in globalization processes and reveals a kind of openness of the Russian society, which seems to be prone to linguistic-cultural exchange. Indeed, the

finding of the present study is only one of many possible indicators of societal openness, and, thus the latter should be treated as rather hypothetic, although probable, characteristic. The latter contrasts the common stereotype of the Russian society as “closed”, somewhat traditionalist, and oriented on the Soviet values. In contrast, it implies that the openness can be bigger than sociologists report [63], as well as it is not restricted to only such cosmopolitan centers as Moscow [64]. At least, these interpretations are reasonable in the light of the present study with its narrow focus. This openness may be a historically developed characteristic of this society enhanced in the post-Soviet times [65], and it is closely related to the famous Russian creativity [66] and hospitality [67]. Indeed, this is a significant competitive advantage of the society, and its detailed investigation seems to be a perspective for further research (more indicators of this openness should be considered, which is out of the scope of the present work).

Several findings of this study are linked to the geographical differences of the examined imprint of foreign cultures and languages. The hotel names in Rostov-on-Don and Vladivostok representing the Russian periphery bear a relatively bigger number of foreign cultural and linguistic elements than Krasnoyarsk representing the “core” (Table 2). However, Nizhniy Novgorod is also situated in the “core”, but it does not differ by the presence of these elements from the peripheral cities. As for the geographical affinity of the cultural and linguistic imprint, three peculiarities should be noted. First, there is significant coherence of this affinity between the four selected cities (Tables 3 and 4). Second, the strongest affinity is to the West European countries and languages (Tables 3 and 4), irrespective of where the city is located in Russia (Figure 3). Third, the imprint of cultures and languages of the neighboring countries is zero in the peripheral cities. For instance, there are no East European elements in the hotel names of Rostov-on-Don, as well as there are no Chinese, Japanese, or Korean elements in the hotel names of Vladivostok. Several hotel names with affinities to Armenia and Georgia in Rostov-on-Don (Table 3) can be explained by the significant number of Armenians and Georgians living permanently in this city, but not by the close position of the city to Armenia and Georgia. Interestingly, the names of shops and various small enterprises in Vladivostok often include East Asian components, but this is not the case for hotels. Generally, it appears that the “core”–periphery explanation of the imprint of foreign cultures and languages in the hotel names does not work, and, thus, the central hypothesis of this study (see Introduction) is not validated.



**Figure 3.** Geographical affinity of the cultural and linguistic imprint in the hotel names of the selected cities (see Table 3 for information and Figure 2 for city abbreviations).

Evidently, the cultural and linguistic elements of the hotel names demonstrate strong affinity to West Europe; this is registered for all cities, including Krasnoyarsk and Vladivostok, which are located in Siberia and the Far East, respectively (Figure 3). This idea can be defined as the West-Eurocentric linguistic-cultural preference (WELCP). The results of the present study allow verification of the WELCP idea. First, the R values decrease eastwards, that is, from Rostov-on-Don to Krasnoyarsk (Table 2). Its high value in Vladivostok can be explained by the local openness that facilitates contacts with the entire world, including West Europe; from the analyzed cities, only Vladivostok is a sea port, and this factor tends to affect the local socio-economic and cultural situations in Russia [68]. Second, the spectrum of the cultural affinity decreases in the eastern direction (Table 3). Third, the spectrum of the linguistic affinity also shrinks eastwards (Table 4). Fourth, in regard to all indicators of the analyzed imprint, their values are the highest for the hotels of Rostov-on-Don (Tables 2–5), which is the westernmost of the selected cities (Figures 2 and 3).

The considered cultural orientation can result from the historical cultural influences, which were much stronger from the European side [25] than from the Asian side. It appears that the hypothesized openness of the society may facilitate acquiring foreign cultural attributes. It is notable that the popularity of the Latin American series in the first half of the 1990s left a legacy in the Russian mind, which resulted, particularly, in hotel naming (see above). If so, the WELCP reflects nothing more than strong historical interactions with Europe. WELCP contradicts somewhat the Eurasian self-positioning of Russia [69,70]. However, one would expect enrichment in the Asian elements if the channels of the cultural exchange between Russia and Asian countries strengthen and widen. Hypothetically, the discussed imprint has not challenged the national identity and patriotism, which seem to be strong.

This research raises the question of the dynamics of the imprint of foreign cultures and languages in hotel names. Indeed, the degree of this imprint can change through time, either increasing or decreasing. However, the hotel businesses in the analyzed cities are often too young (<10 years old), and, thus, many hotels possess the names they received from the beginning. Although there are several “old” hotels, which were named yet in the Soviet times and then changed their names in the 1990s or the 2000s, such hotels are chiefly outside the scope of the present study because their new names do not demonstrate the imprint (how it is understood in this study). Nonetheless, it seems to be probable that the intensification of domestic tourism and the increase in the names of visitors from Asian countries will affect the principles of hotel naming in the future, and the situation may change significantly in 20–25 years.

## 6. Conclusions

The undertaken investigation of the hotel names in four Russian cities permits making three general conclusions.

- (1) The number of the hotel names representing foreign cultures and languages is significant in the selected cities, which indicates the involvement of the cultural exchange with the outside.
- (2) The position of the cities on the geographical periphery of Russia or in its “core” does not determine the foreign imprint in the hotel names (thus, the central hypothesis is not confirmed).
- (3) The majority of the hotel names with foreign elements demonstrate affinity to the West European cultures and languages, and, apparently, only the distance from the western border of Russia may affect the studied imprint.

More generally, the undertaken analysis highlights an important direction for modern hospitality research, that is, understanding the geographical determinants of organization naming. The main findings also have some practical implications for hospitality management (organization-level) and governance (city-, region-, and country-level). First, the significant foreign imprint in the hotel names can be employed for the purposes of effective branding of the cities and their hospitality industries, which is important for

the growth of inbound tourism in Russia. Second, WELCP is a kind of challenge for the hospitality industry in Siberia and especially the Far East where many visitors arrive from Asian countries. Presumably, programs and initiatives of tourism growth developed by the regional governments should address this challenge and support hotel naming that is more attractive to potential Asian guests (of course, sustaining the Russian identity should not be forgotten). Third, although the reported imprint is limited to no more than a quarter of the hotels, the practice of naming should be controlled to avoid any damage to the identity of the cities, which are essentially Russian. Moreover, it is questionable whether active use of foreign cultural and linguistic elements in hotel names is really attractive to foreign tourists who usually appreciate the authenticity of destinations [71–75] rather than their excessive internationalization. Managers of the hospitality industry should be aware of the noted issues, and their decisions, including name proposals, should be both reasonable (taking into account the cultural exchange as a factor of their business performance) and responsible (conservation and promotion of national, regional, and local authenticity).

The present investigation is only tentative, and it reveals the importance of hotel naming in countries as a promising research topic. This means further investigations should deepen the related knowledge about Russia and other big countries. For instance, it is necessary to realize how hotels are named, in fact, by whom, on which basis, and with which cultural focus. The other question is measuring the attractiveness of different hotel names to both Russians and foreigners. Evidently, cultural, linguistic, and sociological approaches would help with the solution of these and other possible tasks. It should be noted that these approaches would require modification to work irrespective of the cultural frame, the direct application of the tools tested for only Western societies should be done with serious cautions or even avoided. Nonetheless, discussing the outcomes of these investigations in the light of the available sociological theories and, probably, the extension of the latter seems to be a promising direction for further research.

**Supplementary Materials:** The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/soc12020058/s1>. Hotel Names Considered for the Purpose of the Present Analysis.

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