

2

The Novgorod Model: Creating a European Past in Russia

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The arrow of our geopolitical compass is turning. Time is moving forward so fast that the past has become increasingly relevant.

—Vladimir Kagansky¹

Novgorod in Russia's Memory

Once regarded as the cradle of Russian democracy, commerce, and learning —“our own Russian Florence,” as Prince Eugene Trubetskoi once dubbed it—Novgorod has for centuries served as a beacon for Russian reformers. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the region's leaders have used the historically based myth of the medieval Novgorod Republic to promote local reforms. Before describing how they have done so, we must briefly explain the political significance of the Novgorod myth by delving back into the city's unusual civic history.

From its inception, the two most distinctive features of Novgorod were its ethnic diversity and confederated system of administration. The city's earliest records describe it as a mixed community of Slavic and Finno-Ugric peoples. The names of two of the city's five boroughs, as well as several elected officials, are clearly of Finnish origin.² Perhaps the need to keep such a diverse constituency together first led settlers to adopt the intricate network of formal and informal institutions that preserve popular sovereignty and the republic's independence for more than four centuries. These included the popular selection of princes, the election of magistrates (*posadniki*) as well as their counterweights, the people's tribunes known as *tysiatskiye*, and neighborhood assemblies that sent delegates to the citywide popular assembly known as the *veche*. The Novgorod Republic's political ideal was one of local self-sufficiency, which modern-day Europeans would recognize as subsidiarity.³

The ultimate seat of civic authority was the citywide town meeting known as *veche*, a body similar in origin to a parliament. It ratified treaties, invited princes, declared war and peace, set taxes, conducted foreign relations, and served as the supreme court for public disputes. Much of its time, however, was consumed by the election (and removal) of the city's two executive officers—the city magistrate and the people's tribune, who were elected simultaneously each year. An additional constraint on abuses of power was provided by the custom of requiring that all state documents (except trade agreements) carry the archbishop's blessing, given in the presence of both the magistrate and people's tribune, and witnessed by the official representatives of all five boroughs.⁴

The Cathedral of Saint Sophia served as the de facto State House of the republic, intertwining church and civil administration in accordance with the Byzantine view that good government required the consent of both the people and the Church. The archbishop of Novgorod had his own military regiment, and he was also occasionally asked to administer particularly difficult border territories. The Church in Novgorod also took an unusually active role in commerce, with Novgorod's priests and deacons being active entrepreneurs and traders.⁵ As one historian put it, the Church in Novgorod blessed the accumulation of wealth, participated in it, and helped to administer it for the republic.⁶

That wealth was legendary. At the height of the Hanseatic League, Novgorod was its fourth-largest trading port, with commercial ties comparable to those of Venice and Genoa (archeological excavations in the city have revealed coinage from England, Persia, and even African cowry shells).⁷

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there were two or three permanent foreign trade settlements in Novgorod, hosting as many as 150 to 200 foreign merchants annually (not including up to two assistants for each merchant).⁸ With a main market that, in the sixteenth century, reportedly hosted 1,500 shops for a population of only 35,000 to 40,000, trade had a perceptible impact on the city's quality of life and created a prosperous class of burghers, traders, and artisans (figure 2.1).⁹

Having come into contact with Western Europe quite a bit earlier than Moscow thanks to this trade, Novgorod played a central role in the spread of Latin learning in Russia. The first translation of the Bible into modern Russian and the first Russian encyclopedia both appeared in Novgorod. Russia's first Greco-Slavonic Academy was opened in Novgorod in 1706 by two graduates of the University of Padua. They subsequently prepared



Figure 2.1. Residents of Novgorod still commonly speak of living on either the “Sophia side” or the “trade side” of the river. Both are seen here, on the cover of a collection of postcards from “Lord Novgorod the Great.” Saint Sophia’s Cathedral is in the foreground, and the white colonnades across the river show Prince Yaroslav’s Court, the site of a large public marketplace during the Middle Ages. Photograph by A. Kochevnik; used by permission of the city administration of Novgorod the Great.

teachers for the country's first fourteen grammar schools.¹⁰ All these developments have led some historians to surmise that, had Novgorod avoided annexation by Moscow, Russia would have opened up to the West two or three centuries earlier.¹¹

Even so, by the end of the fifteenth century, a fortunate location on the trade route from Northern Europe to Constantinople, and a political culture that rewarded economic entrepreneurship and gave the lower classes a modest influence on government, had allowed Novgorod to amass a territory nearly half the size of European Russia—the largest state to emerge in Europe since the Holy Roman Empire. Just as important, despite repeated attacks from Mongols, Swedes, Teutonic, and Livonian crusaders, it managed to preserve a republican form of government for more than four hundred years, until it fell to Ivan III, grand prince of Muscovy, in 1471.

That, however, is not the end of Novgorod's remarkable story. The deeply ingrained notion of local self-government survived. In the seventeenth-century street elections, the election of the city magistrate, and even town meetings, slowly reasserted themselves over the Muscovite administrative system.¹² Novgorod even retained its own exchequer and monetary system.¹³ Thanks to these, the city's political system survived well into the seventeenth century, as evidenced by the fact that at its first opportunity to leave Muscovy—the Swedish invasion of 1611—Novgorod opted for separation and welcomed the Swedes.

Dim echoes of popular resistance to Muscovite rule lingered on even into the nineteenth century (figure 2.2). When Tsar Alexander II instituted the "Great Reforms" of 1864, calling for the creation of institutions of local self-government in cities and villages, Novgorod was one of the first regions to petition that the principle of self-rule be extended to the national level as well.¹⁴

As the centuries passed and Novgorod's political and cultural distinctiveness dissipated, the symbols and values of the Novgorod myth retained a surprising potency in Russian literature. They even emerged as a dominant theme in the Decembrists' uprising against Tsar Alexander I.¹⁵ Since then, they have become a fixture of political reform efforts, even into the twentieth century.

It is therefore not surprising to find that in post-Soviet times the Novgorod myth has been picked up by scholars, writers, and political activists. Russia's foremost medieval archeologist, Valentin Yanin, has suggested that Novgorod has a stronger claim to being the forerunner of today's Russia than Kyiv because, while Muscovy inherited its centralized form of gov-



Figure 2.2. The monument to one thousand years of Russian history, erected in 1862, stands in the center of Kremlin Park and remains the most widely recognized symbol of Novgorod. It commemorates Russia's leading statesmen, writers, religious, and military leaders but, in deference to local sensibilities, omits Ivan the Terrible. Photograph by Nicolai Petro.

ernment from Kievan Rus', Novgorod preserved its political pluralism and strong commercial ties with the West.¹⁶ Lest his point be lost on the current political elite, Yanin adds: "Our current rulers could learn quite a bit from the history of ancient Novgorod."¹⁷ Many popular writers and essayists have highlighted Novgorod's political significance for the present, suggesting that the true "Slavic path of development" was not Muscovy but Novgorod, with its extensive regional pluralism in politics and commerce.¹⁸ In May 1999, Vladimir Ryzhkov, then a young, aspiring politician, and now a leader of the political opposition in the federal parliament, actually proposed moving Russia's capital to Novgorod because it was "the birthplace of Russian republicanism."¹⁹

Today's writers and historians appeal to Novgorod's distant past for the same reasons that their ancestors did—because it brings present-day political debates into sharper focus. The impact of the Novgorod myth has been most pronounced, however, in the city where the visible architectural symbols of the past survived to make it, in the academician Dmitry S. Likhachev words, a living lecture hall.²⁰ It is to this past, or rather to its popular image, that local leaders turned when the ideals of the Soviet era shattered.

The Medieval City as Modern Political Symbol

The regional elite's usage of the Novgorod myth has gone through three distinct phases. First, the Novgorod City Soviet vigorously publicized the Novgorod Republic as a model, thereby helping to delegitimize the Soviet era. Second, civic leaders linked symbols from Novgorod's medieval past to a new, long-term vision for the region. Finally, having become conscious of the political utility of Novgorod's symbols, the local government openly embraced them to build public support for new policies.

Creating a Better Past

Because the Cathedral of Saint Sophia was synonymous with the independent spirit of the Novgorod Republic, it is not surprising that in Soviet times it became a prime target of the atheist regime and was eventually closed in 1929. Perestroika, however, allowed local religious activists to challenge the status of Russia's oldest cathedral and, when the Diocese of Novgorod and Staraya Russa was reconstituted in July 1990, these became outright demands that Saint Sophia be reopened as an active church (figure 2.3).

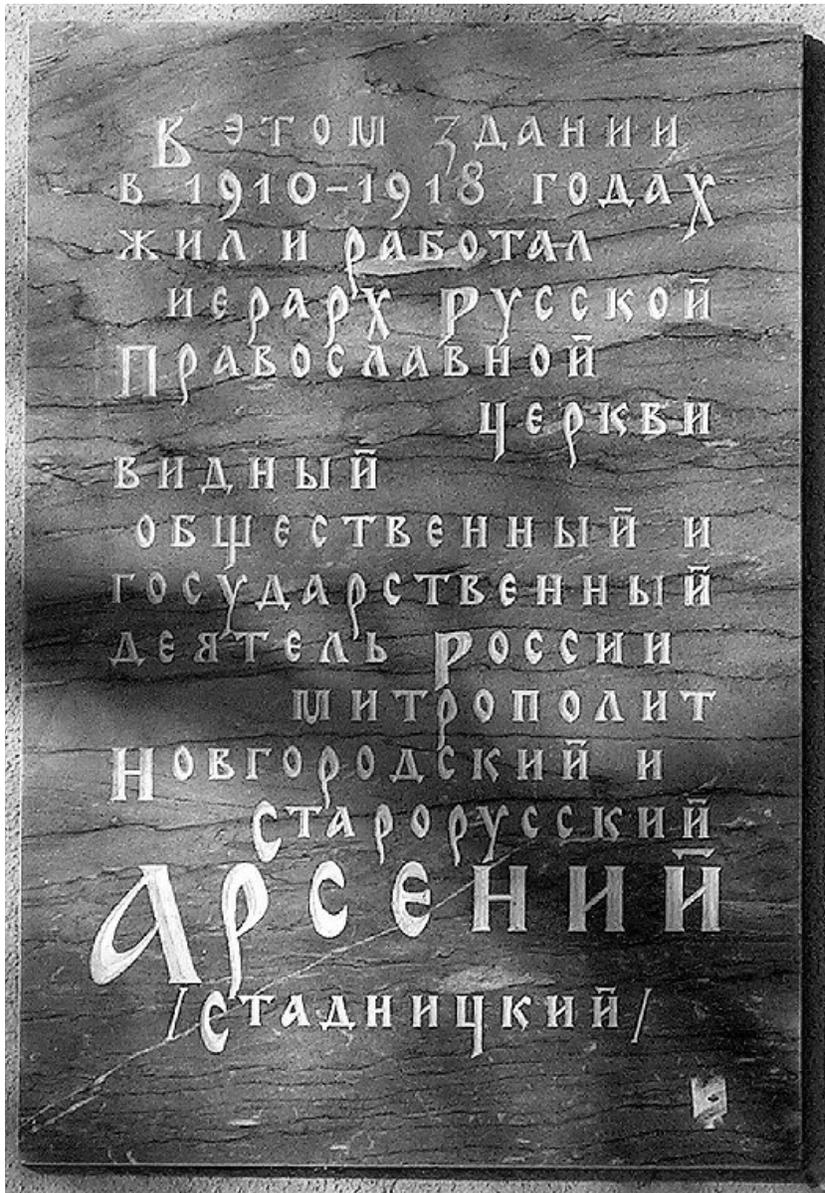


Figure 2.3. A plaque in Kremlin Park, put up shortly after the fall of Communism, commemorates the metropolitan of Novgorod, Arseny Stadnitsky, who led the diocese from 1910 to 1918. He was arrested in 1919 and subsequently exiled; the plaque refers to him as a “prominent social and political personality of Russia.” Photograph by Nicolai Petro.

The issue was embraced by many different segments of Novgorod society. Russian nationalists saw it as a means of reasserting Russia's cultural sovereignty, local democrats supported it as a way of undermining the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and reform-minded Communists pointed to it as proof of the party's ability to change with the times.

Saint Sophia began to receive an inordinate amount of local press coverage that stressed its role as the symbolic unifier and protector of Novgorod. In 1989 the Novgorod Writers' Union founded a new weekly newspaper, called *Veche*, that served as a forum where diverse segments of the local intelligentsia could popularize key components of the Novgorod myth and appeal for public action. Thanks largely to the efforts of this broad local constituency, on August 16, 1991, the Cathedral of Saint Sophia was restored to the Russian Orthodox Church. The significance for the political life of the region of this early successful collaboration among civic groups is hard to overestimate. It has come to be regarded in the region as a model for church-state relations, and it is commemorated annually in the local media, not just as a church holiday but as a turning point in the region's history.

The role of the Orthodox Church at this very critical juncture serves to underscore an aspect of Russia's contemporary cultural (and political) landscape that is often overlooked: its "clericalization." One critic of this phenomenon, Vladimir Kagansky, complains that things have gotten so out of hand in today's Russia that a cityscape is now widely regarded as "truly cultural" only to the degree that it has been clericalized. He has aptly referred to the reconstruction of old churches and monasteries as "the most important visual sign of the new era," particularly when seen against the backdrop of a decaying city infrastructure. The result is not only a stunning new visual symbolism but also new patterns of social behavior, with routines that transform the entire city.²¹

One certainly sees evidence of this within the city limits of Novgorod the Great, as the city was known in its earlier glory and is now again known. The mayor and City Council have cosponsored the construction of a magnificent new cathedral in the city's most populous district, promoted supported religious programs on local television, and subsidized an "experimental" religious school out of the municipal education budget. The city's many public festivals and commemorations still begin, as usual, in the center of the city in Kremlin Park, but now they are typically preceded by a brief liturgy at Saint Sophia, which is advertised right alongside the public event. All in all, more than one hundred and ten Orthodox churches have

been reopened in the Novgorod region over in the past decade, more per capita than in any other region in Russia.

Looking back, we can say that the success of these early reformers in wresting control of the city's main historical and cultural icon from "Moscow" was a turning point. It galvanized local reformers into run for public office, and in September of 1989 the reformist electoral association Veche captured nearly one-third of the seats in the regional legislative assembly, and nearly half the Novgorod City Soviet. The leadership of the new Novgorod City Soviet of People's Deputies openly identified itself with the Novgorod myth and, for nearly four years, conducted an intense media campaign to educate the populace about the virtues of republican Novgorod.

The main instrument of this campaign was the city newspaper *Novgorod*, which is distributed free of charge to every family. In its premier issue, the editors promised to devote special attention to local history, and they appealed to the intelligentsia to "help us become aware of our historical past and, by connecting it with the present, more clearly see the road ahead."²² The chair of the City Soviet, Oleg Ochin, expressed deep regret at how much of Novgorod's ancient heritage had been lost, and then launched into a panegyric that leaves the reader with no doubt about where the new city leaders intended to look for guidance:

What a sense of pride those Novgorodians must have had in their contacts, not only with their own countrymen, but with the foreigners who came here in large numbers . . . curious about the people who had placed such a rich city among the marshes and decorated it with magnificent cathedrals, who ruled over an expanse larger than most in Europe, and were nearly all literate, . . . a people who knew the value of free speech and who, unlike the Church obscurantism and court intrigues that held sway in Europe, created a unique democratic construct—the Novgorod state, a republic in the Middle Ages. In my opinion, we have yet to fully appreciate the historical importance of this phenomenon, which can and must serve as an inspiration for the tasks before us.²³

The City Soviet's most striking initiative was purging the city of all its Soviet-era street names. A local history professor turned City Council member, Vasily Andreyev, cultivated the idea in the public's mind for more than a year, writing dozens of articles and appearing on local radio and television shows, calling Soviet-era street names a "blasphemy, a violent offense against

our native history.”²⁴ Andreyev urged his fellow citizens to get rid of these “faceless” names and restore the “true” names of historical Novgorod.

Andreyev’s efforts bore fruit on January 4, 1991, when, by a two-thirds majority, the City Soviet restored the pre-1917 names of all the streets in the historical Novgorod (figure 2.4). In one fell swoop, the names Lenin, Bolshevik, Komsomol, Proletariat, Soviet, and Worker’s were stricken from



Figure 2.4. The street signs bearing the new, post-Soviet names restored by the City Council in 1991 explain the origins of the street name—in this case, the former Church of Saint John the Baptist. Photograph by Nicolai Petro.

the city map in what remains to this day the most comprehensive cultural de-Sovietization of any city in Russia.²⁵

What made the Novgorod City Soviet unusual even during the anticommunist euphoria of 1989–91 was that it did far more than just decry the Soviet past. It linked reforms to a particular period from Novgorod's past. Though the City Soviet did not achieve everything it set out to do, it brought to a decisive end the communist claim to be the sole legitimate interpreters of Russia's past, thereby encouraging people to consider options outside their immediate Soviet-era experience.

Linking Old Symbols to New Policies

The young governor of the Novgorod region, Mikhail Prusak, turned to the local university for guidance on how to link the symbols of Novgorod's past to his current policy agenda. As he remarked candidly at the time, "Our people do not as yet recognize the importance of our past; that is why we created the university to help us."²⁶

"The Novgorod Project: A Leap into Postindustrial Society" was one such initiative, specifically designed to mobilize the public in support of making Novgorod's medieval history the centerpiece of regional development. The project notes that the world is moving into a "postindustrial" phase that emphasizes cultural and intellectual products. This emphasis on cultural paradigms could be quite advantageous for Russia if, rather than imitating the development path taken by the West, it relies on traditional Russian communitarianism, collective action, and cooperation to "leap" directly into postindustrial development.²⁷

The key to empowering postindustrial values is greater regional autonomy, which will spawn civic initiative in support of local historical preservation. Modernization efforts should therefore be targeted at increasing sociocultural diversity and cultural pluralism, and in Novgorod should focus on creating a technology infrastructure that would "incorporate the historical-cultural heritage of the Novgorod region."²⁸

Novgorod State University and local Novgorod television are to be the main actors in a strategy designed to "incorporate the historical-cultural heritage of the Novgorod lands in intensive cultural, educational, and practical methodological usage, and to broaden the access of diverse groups of actual and potential users to cultural-historical materials."²⁹ The final report was widely distributed among local officials, but after the bankruptcy

of the project's major investor, it was shelved and apparently forgotten by all but senior university officials.³⁰

Apparently, however, the report's recommendations continue to provide a broad direction for policy. Tourism, touted as central to postindustrial society, has been officially designated one of the region's key cultural and investment initiatives. Telecommunications became a top priority, so much so that in 1997 Prusak boasted that Novgorod had the nation's third most highly developed telecommunications infrastructure.³¹

In 1995, the building housing the former Institute of Marxism-Leninism was converted into a training center for local civil servants, with special emphasis on the history and traditions of the Novgorod region. Each year nearly twelve hundred public and private managers take short training courses at the center, now known as Dialog. Ultimately, its director hopes to establish a regional school of public administration that applies Novgorodian traditions, history, and culture to the solution of civic problems.³²

Meanwhile, the local television station, Slaviya, has made local culture and history a mainstay of its programming. In addition to regular programs like *Historical Monologues*, it has produced several feature films that focus on Novgorod's cultural and political heritage, including *Lord Novgorod the Great* (2001) and *The First Republic* (2002–3), a five-part series devoted to the lessons that the “Novgorod model” holds for Russia today.

The station's managing director, Victor Smirnov, a widely published historical novelist, is quite unabashed about his personal sympathies for republican Novgorod. Asked, during a recent television interview, which side he would have supported during the fifteenth-century *veche* debate between the supporters of union with Moscow and the pro-Lithuanian party headed by Martha the Magistrate. Smirnov replied that “as a patriot of Novgorod” he would certainly have sided with Martha. Though history favored another path, he concluded that Novgorod now has a chance for a bit of “historical revenge,” by showing that its reliance on local traditions is a better model for Russia today.³³

Despite scarce funding, the university has set up its own Center for the Study of Culture to explore the impact that Novgorod's history and traditions are having on contemporary political and spiritual life, a project that in 2001 evolved into the Novgorod Interregional Institute for the Social Sciences.³⁴ The institute plans to organize conferences, seminars, and symposia that focus particular attention on the cultural legacy of Novgorod as it applies to politics, economics, and public administration. According to its mission statement, “Russian statehood originated in a specific region: the

Russian Northwest. Elements of social and political democracy first appeared here, in the territory of Novgorod, and they remained alive here despite our checkered historical development. This is reflected in the heritage of the democratic ‘Veche Republic’ and in the European political identity of the local population.”³⁵

The Political Utility of Symbols

The very effort to conceive a “Novgorod Project” helped key segments of the local elite formulate a long-term development strategy rooted in the Novgorod myth. It described in elaborate detail how Novgorod’s symbolic resources could be used, so that when opportunity arose, the blueprint was already at hand. By the end of the 1990s, Governor Prusak and his closest advisers openly referred to that blueprint as the “Novgorod model”—a direct, modern extension of the principles of the Novgorod Republic:

The Novgorod model demonstrated its viability, giving the world a unique culture that created enormous spiritual and material wealth. History, however, decreed that the country should take another path. The eastern tradition, represented by the principality of Vladimir-Suzdal’, and later Moscow, gained the upper hand. The Novgorod Republic was forcibly destroyed and yet, over the course of centuries, it has continued to exist in people’s memory. Today this model has a new historical opportunity. Our generation can return to the principals of our ancestors, but on a new basis. Self-government, elections, public accountability of authority, private property, individual liberty—the very cornerstones of the Novgorod Republic—are regaining their former significance.

On January 27, 1998, a joint session of the city and regional Dumas took a truly symbolic step. The deputies unanimously resolved to restore Novgorod’s previous historical name—Novgorod the Great. In making this decision, the deputies not only rectified an historical injustice but reaffirmed their commitment to the principles our ancient city once lived by. Without foisting our views on anyone, it seems to us that it is precisely in these principles that we must seek the roots of that national idea that the new Russia so desperately needs.³⁶

The fact that, as Governor Prusak likes to put it, “in Novgorod tradition lives” has also had policy implications.³⁷ Before reviewing the administration’s programs in support of small business, for instance, Prusak reviewed

sixteenth-century records indicating that there had once been more weavers in Novgorod than in Kazan, Tula, Ustyug, and Mozhaisk combined. Because of this tradition, he felt it would make sense to fund a regional program to revive local linen weaving.³⁸ When the research center Dialog was given the task of developing the region's housing reform program, it first conducted a study of communal living arrangements in the city from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries, with appendices and charts comparing those eras to the present.³⁹ At a conference on local self-government co-sponsored by the regional administration, the mayor of Novgorod the Great underscored the importance of territorial self-administration for his city by pointing out that it is fully "in keeping with centuries of Novgorod traditions and customs."⁴⁰

Governor Prusak's very public conversion to the Novgorod myth has, naturally, also encouraged other government officials to embrace the imagery of Novgorod's past. Historical analogies that would seem farfetched in other regions are quite common in Novgorod. Thus, in describing how the Novgorod Regional Duma differs from those of other regions, chairman Anatoly Boitsev draws attention to fact that the final budget hearings are open to the public and broadcast live on television and radio. "If there is a modern *veche* in Novgorod today," he concludes "this is it."⁴¹ For the late mayor of Novgorod the Great, Alexander Korsunov, the city's efforts to promote trade and close ties with the West shows that "the spirit of our ancestors has been preserved."⁴² In the last interview he gave before his untimely death in 2002, he eloquently summarized his personal vision of Novgorod's historical significance:

While people in the capitals spar with each other in search of "high political ideals" that will satisfy their ambitions, we can wait. With more than eleven centuries of experience, we have no need to rush. Here in Novgorod the Great is the one, true, centuries-old pillar of tradition, of culture, of principles and government experience that we can all count on. Sooner or later they will come here for the right decisions.

Our task lies not in adopting fleeting goals. Ours is a special trust. We are not closed to contemporary trends, but rather follow our ancient Novgorod traditions in being active and entrepreneurial, some might even say excessively so. I recommend to all who feel "lost," and particularly to those whose decisions affect the lives of millions—come here, feel the real roots and voices of those who came before us. That will be enough.⁴³

Reintegrating Novgorod into Europe

A very significant role in the public's acceptance of this Novgorod model was played by the new, locally oriented school curriculum introduced in 1996. From the seventh through the eleventh grade, students in the region study Novgorod's history for one hour a week. The curriculum is designed to promote "patriotic qualities" among schoolchildren but, as distinct from Soviet times, these now include "a Novgorodian and Russian self-awareness . . . [and] an ability to compare our own national, European, and regional histories, and discuss different versions of historical events."⁴⁴

The ultimate purpose is to "Novgorodify" the entire school curriculum. As the principal of School No. 22, Svetlana Matveeva, points out, "not only the study of history, but also literature, geography and biology here is tied to local materials."⁴⁵ The deputy director of the Novgorod City Educational Committee, Svetlana Shubina, argues that "children must be given every opportunity to understand the region they live in, what the value orientations of our region are, and how these can help in life."⁴⁶

Many extracurricular programs are organized around the city's archeological excavations, which are prominently featured in the local press. Programs like "City under the City," "I Am a Novgorodian" and "Be a Magistrate [*Posadnik*]" link contemporary civic education to the city's past by taking students to the digs and asking them to imagine what their role might have been in the cultural and political life of medieval Novgorod.⁴⁷ Recently the Novgorod region's Committee on Education has even introduced a preschool component aimed at "resurrecting the national-cultural traditions of the Russian people through a focus on the historical and ethnographic past of the Novgorodian land."⁴⁸

This educational curriculum is supplemented by a vast array of local cultural and volunteer organizations. During the school year, more than three thousand students each month visit the region's history museums and participate in a wide variety of educational programs designed to promote local civic identity, many with names like "Voyage to the Past," and "My City."⁴⁹

More recently, the city has built on the recovery of its lost heritage with a number of initiatives designed to anchor it more firmly in Europe. One such initiative is the pairing of city administrators from Novgorod the Great and Strasbourg under the Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) City Twinning Program, an initiative of the European Commission that promotes democratic structures and effective ad-

ministration at the local level. After an initial round of meetings and visits in 1997 and 1998, the Novgorod city administration endorsed two cooperative projects. The first, known as Strategic Action in Tourism and Urban Reforms in Novgorod's Economy (SATURNE), was completed in 2001. It has led to the establishment of Russia's first-ever central tourist information office and to the cooperative publishing of information (figures 2.5 and 2.6).

A second cooperative project, called Dialog, is designed to adapt French municipal-level innovations to the needs of Novgorod the Great. Over the course of the past decade, the once tightly centralized municipality of Strasbourg has been experimenting with shifting certain functions from the mayor's office to local boroughs. The Novgorod city administration found this idea very much to its liking and, with the assistance of experts from Strasbourg, has set up two similar subdivisions, referred to as "mini-mayoralties." They deal with whatever issues that local residents find most



Figure 2.5. The Novgorod region has invested heavily in resurrecting its tourist infrastructure, and it was one the first Russian cities to open a single, central information center for tourists visiting the region; known as the Red Hut (Krasnaya izba), it is located in the heart of Kremlin Park. Photograph by Nicolai Petro.

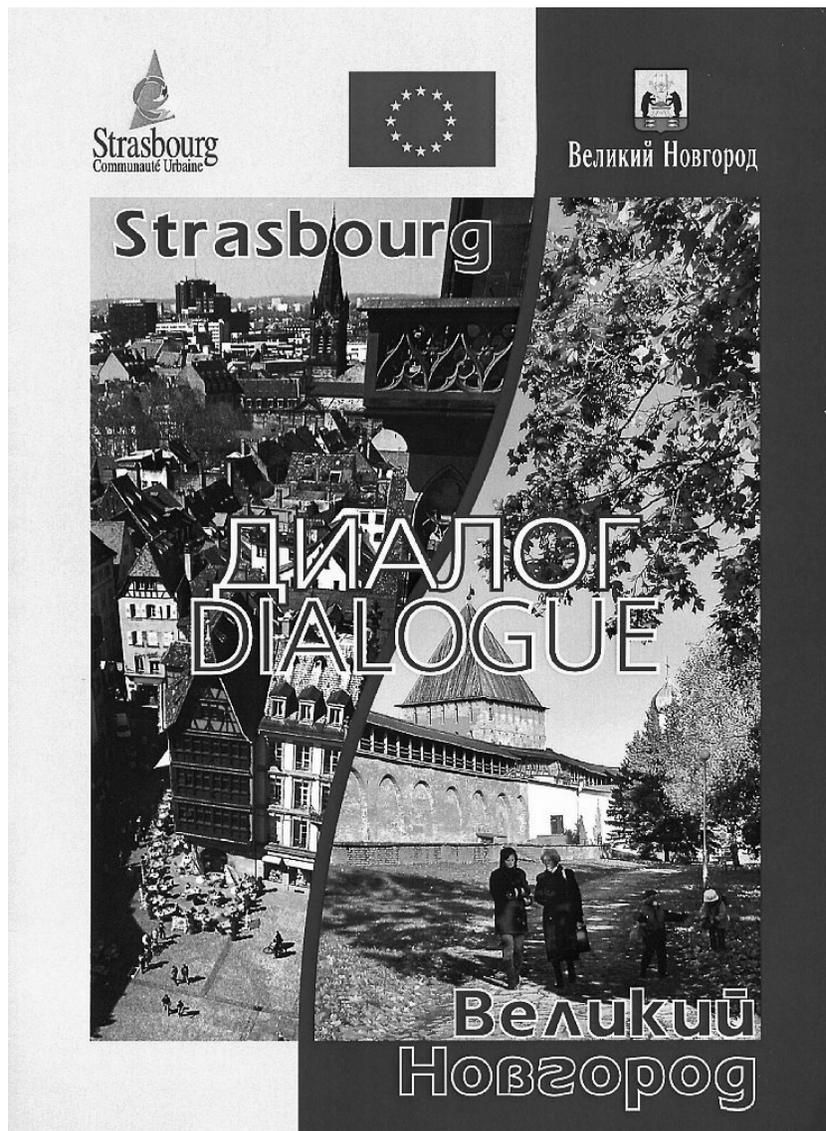


Figure 2.6. In 2001, the city of Novgorod the Great partnered with the French city of Strasbourg. The municipalities shared their experiences in civic administration and tourism. Their cooperation on tourism resulted in a joint brochure, whose cover is shown. Reproduced by permission of the city administration of Novgorod the Great.

pressing. In addition, they serve as a convenient forum for discussion of the city budget, following up on citizens' complaints, improving coordination with local law enforcement, and providing citizens with advice and information on their legal rights. In sum, they act as advocates on behalf of residents to the municipal, and sometimes even the regional, bureaucracy. The local councils of mini-mayoralities include a variety of representatives of social, municipal, commercial, and noncommercial organizations. As of March 2004, two mini-mayoralities have become operational, one in the historic Trade Side of the city, where 7,000 people live, and the other in the newer Western region, where some 30,000 people live. Several more are planned over the coming years.

Finally, there is a project that has been in the works for nearly a decade, known as "The Route from the Varangians to the Greeks." The phrase, originally mentioned in the Russian Primary Chronicle, refers to the river route that once connected Constantinople with the Baltic Sea. Trade along this vital network of rivers helped establish Novgorod as a major port during the Middle Ages.

The idea of revitalizing this route originated in 1997, and it has received new impetus since Novgorod joined the New Hanseatic League, an association of over two hundred cities from sixteen countries that promote trade and tourism among its members.⁵⁰ Reestablished in 1981, and chaired by the mayor of Lübeck, former towns and Hansa offices are invited to participate in the league's annual "Hanseatic Days." Novgorod the Great was the first Russian city to join the reconstituted league, and it has been designated the host of the league's gathering for 2009.

In preparation for this grand event, the city is seeking funding for an ambitious proposal to create a pedestrian mall and international trade complex that would serve as a permanent exhibit of its Hanseatic ties. The idea, in essence, is to create small versions of the permanent trade representations that medieval Novgorod once hosted, this time in the very heart of its downtown. Locations would be leased to the various Hanseatic partners to promote themselves and their commercial wares, while at the same time providing a convenient and attractive location where Russian tourists could get a "taste of Europe." Tellingly, the proposal is subtitled "Forming a Model of European Integration with the Participation of the Russian Federation."

Although each of these projects is still in its very early stages, together they show a strong desire by local elites to build up Novgorod's European identity and to have the city and the region viewed as Russia's gateway to Europe.

Between 1994 and 2004, the Novgorod region obtained more foreign direct investment per capita than any region of Russia but Moscow. Fully a quarter of the region's factory workers are now employed by foreign companies. The Novgorod elite's confidence in its ability to compete in a global marketplace is reflected in the late Mayor Korsunov's comment that, as far as Novgorod was concerned, Russian membership in the European Union and the World Trade Organization could not happen quickly enough.⁵¹ Underlying this remarkable success in redefining the region's future in European terms lies an astute usage of local historical symbols and myths to ease the way.

Vladimir Kagansky, an astute observer of Russia's modern cultural landscape, has written about how the once totally familiar and ahistorical Soviet landscape has quite unexpectedly, for many locals, come alive with pre-Soviet cultural symbols. Politically and culturally, this sudden flood of local history has often led to very messy attempts to return all the past all at once. As Kagansky expresses it: "History once stood before us as a closed corridor; suddenly it became possible, inevitable, necessary, and even tempting to enter any door and decorate those rooms anew."

In many regions, this has led to serious social conflict. In Novgorod it has not, and the reason seems to be the early emergence of an elite consensus on which version of the past to prefer. This provided a socially receptive environment for the emergence of a view of Novgorod in the twenty-first century as a place that was more "Scandoslavia" than it was "Eurasia."⁵²

Despite this striking success, however, it is hard to imagine the Novgorod myth ever becoming a source of serious political opposition to Moscow. Despite occasional attempts in the Russian media to portray Novgorod's policies as the antithesis of the policies of Vladimir Putin, Putin's agenda in fact astutely incorporates key elements of the Novgorod myth, most notably a clear embrace of a European identity for Russia. It would thus be more accurate to say that the Novgorod myth offers a conceptual framework through which the rest of the country could identify itself with Europe, while preserving a distinctly Russian cultural identity.

Notes

1. Vladimir Kagansky, "Teoretiko-geograficheskie miniatyury," *Russkii zhurnal*, May 8, 1998, http://www.russ.ru/journal/odna_8/98-08-05/kagan1.htm.
2. Dmitry S. Likhachev, *Razdumya o Rossii* (Saint Petersburg: Logos, 2001), 197,

198; Henrik Birnbaum, *Novgorod in Focus: Selected Essays* (Columbus: Slavica Publishers, 1996), 21.

3. Theodor Schilling, *Subsidiarity as a Rule and a Principle, or: Taking Subsidiarity Seriously*, Jean Monnet Working Paper 10, 1995; <http://www.jeanmonnetprogram.org/papers/95/9510ind.html>.

4. O. V. Martyshin, *Volnyi Novgorod: Obshchestvenno-politicheskiitroi i pravo feodalnoi respubliki* (Moscow: Rossiiskoe pravo, 1992), 175–76, 189.

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21. Vladimir Kagansky, “Klerikalizatsiya,” *Russkii zhurnal*, April 13, 2005, <http://www.russ.ru/culture/20050411.html>.

22. “Zdravstvuyte!” *Novgorod*, October 30, 1990.

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24. Vasily Andreyev, "Chto v imeni tebe moem . . . ?" *Novgorod*, January 4, 1991.
25. Some Soviet-era names remain in the regions of the city that were built in Soviet times.
26. Mikhail Prusak, opening remarks to the eightieth anniversary of the founding of the Communist Youth League, Novgorod, Novgorod Political Archives Fund, October 29, 1998; from the author's personal notes.
27. Petr Shchedrovitsky and Valentin Tolstykh, *Novgorodskii Proekt: Proryv v postindustrialnoe obschestvo* (Moscow: Gorbachev Foundation, 1995), 11–14.
28. *Ibid.*, 39.
29. *Ibid.*, 45–46.
30. President Vladimir Soroka committed the university to helping to "formulate and realize" this program as part of its efforts to help improve local self-government. Vladimir V. Soroka, "Mesto i rol sistemy obrazovaniya v mestnom samoupravlenii Novgorodchiny," in *Mestnoe samoupravlenie v Rossii: Istoriya i sovremennost*, ed. B. N. Kovalyov (Novgorod: Novgorodskii gosudarstvennyi universitet im. Yaroslava Mudrogo i Administratsiya Goroda Novgoroda, 1997), 17.
31. *Novosti*, November 28–December 3, 1997, citing a speech by Mikhail Prusak of November 14, 1997; available at <http://www.novgorod.ru>.
32. Interview with Alexander I. Zhukovsky, director of the Dialog regional municipal research center, Novgorod the Great, April 9, 2002.
33. Viktor Smirnov, interviewed for the program *Sophia* on Novgorod television, re-broadcast July 27, 2003. Smirnov was also the ghostwriter for Prusak's 1999 political autobiography *Reform in the Provinces*.
34. Svetlana Kovarskaya, director of the Center for the Study of Culture at Novgorod State University, personal correspondence, May 17, 2002.
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