

PSKOV: URBAN PLANNING SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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Abstract and Introduction

Soviet cities benefited from what was, at least on paper, some of the best urban planning in the world, yet the implementation of that planning was among the least successful, especially in the new suburban areas of existing cities. In theory, citizens' needs for housing, transportation, landscaping, shopping, education, and employment were planned logically and efficiently. Yet, the residents of these communities almost always found the realities of the plans less attractive than the theory. With the collapse of communism in Russia and the economic turmoil of the last decade, these deficiencies became even clearer and more difficult to correct.

This paper uses the northwestern city of Pskov as a case study to examine the lived experience of Soviet, then post-Soviet citizens in an urban center that has existed for more than a thousand years, but which was transformed into a model socialist city in the years following the almost total destruction of the city during the Second World War. It examines the large-scale housing, industrial, and commercial expansion of new regions of Pskov during the later decades of communist rule, evaluates the success of urban renewal and restoration in the historic center, and considers the city's efforts to maintain positive improvements in the lives of its citizens during the last decade of economic and political disruption.

The paper's focus is on how this built environment has operated on the lives of its residents during the last twenty years. It considers what has worked well from the original plans and what has failed, how residents have modified the city to make it livable, what projects are underway now, and what changes can be expected in the future.

Pskov Before 1945

The city of Pskov is located at the intersection of two rivers, the Pskova and the Velikaia, in the far northwestern part of Russia, near the border with Latvia, and 270 kilometers southwest of St. Petersburg. It is five hours by train to St. Petersburg or Riga, and about thirteen hours to Moscow. Its average temperature in January is minus seven degrees Celsius, and in June seventeen degrees Celsius.

There were Slavic settlements in the area of the city by the sixth century, and Pskov itself was first mentioned in the Russian Chronicles in 903 AD. Originally an outpost of Novgorod, by the eleventh century Pskov had gained importance as a Russo-German trading center. By 1137 it essentially operated independently of Novgorod (though this was not officially the case until 1348), had the good fortune not to be invaded by the Mongols, and enjoyed existence for some decades as an independent merchant republic. Its elected prince oversaw defense and justice, while the city's administrative and economic activities were administered by two commissioners presiding over a council of nobles elected by a people's forum. From the thirteenth century on, Pskov had to struggle against the increasingly aggressive Teutonic Knights, who captured the city in 1240 before being driven out by Novgorod's Prince Aleksandr Nevsky. By 1478 the city was brought under Muscovite rule, and in 1510 Vasilii III arrested the leaders of the city's nobility, and exiled three hundred families from the area, replacing them with Moscow families loyal to the Tsar. In 1581-1582, the Poles under Stephan Batory besieged Pskov, but failed to capture it, and in 1615 the city withstood a similar siege from the Swedes under King Gustavus Adolphus.

By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Pskov had become nothing more than a provincial center. Many of the city's older buildings were destroyed during the Great Northern War as part of Peter the Great's attempts to fortify the city against the Swedes. With the growth of St. Petersburg and Riga as important Russian foreign trade centers, Pskov entered a long period of economic recession and general decline, extending to the end of the nineteenth century.

Nicholas II abdicated nearby in 1917, and during the years of the Civil War, the city was occupied by the Germans, then by the anti-Bolshevik Whites, and finally in 1919 by the Communists. Little was done to change the city physically during the 1920s, but in the 1930s new factories were constructed in the city as part of the nation's overall economic expansion during the Five Year Plans. Still, by 1939, when Pskov had a population of sixty thousand residents, it had no paved roads, no streetcars, and only two buses. Only 334,000 square meters of living space existed for its residents, providing each inhabitant with only five and a half square meters.

The years of the Great Patriotic War were devastating for Pskov. The city was captured by the Nazis on 9 July 1941, and remained under occupation for three years. Many of the city's best buildings and some of its greatest architectural treasures were destroyed. Thousands of partisans were fighting in the forests surrounding the city, three-quarters of the towns and villages in the region were destroyed, and almost four hundred thousand people met their deaths in concentration camps in the area. When it was liberated on 23 July 1944, the city was in ruins, and only 143 people remained in the eighteen buildings still standing amidst mountains of rubble and piles of concrete. Ninety three per cent of the living space in the city had been burned; the railroad station, central power station, and the bridges across the Velikaia River had been blown up by the Nazis; there was total destruction of the industrial enterprises in the city; the water system was inoperable. In essence, the city would have to start from scratch in its post-war reconstruction.

Pskov Rebuilds: 1945-1964

By early 1945, ten thousand people had returned to the city, living primarily in dugouts, basements, underground passages, and bomb shelters. The city was now the center of the Pskov administrative region, and the Communist Party issued a declaration declaring that Pskov would be one of fifteen cities of the USSR given priority for reconstruction. The principles guiding the city's rebuilding were to be those of the Moscow General Plan of the 1930s: the city was to be limited in size, residential areas would be developed in a carefully planned way, there was to be

a limited journey from home to work for citizens, traffic flow was to be rationalized, there would be extensive green space in the city, and the central historic core was to be developed in a way that would emphasize its symbolic role (French, *Plans, Pragmatism, and People*, 46-47). Indeed, the patriotism of the war led to a rediscovery of the medieval past in Pskov, and the next four decades would see a substantial reconstruction of the architectural legacy of the city (French, *Plans, Pragmatism, and People*, 182ff). The USSR Academy of Architecture stressed the preservation of certain parts of the city with significant historical relics through the imposition of substantial restrictions on development in areas including the Krom (or Kremlin), Dovmont Town, the Pogankin House neighborhood, the churches in the city's central sections, and the seventeenth-century domestic architecture in the "Solodezhnaia" area.

The principal goals of postwar construction were to restore historical treasures, to correct the inadequacies of the old city plan, and to provide better housing for workers. By the Khrushchev era, four- to five-story brick apartment buildings were being constructed, with prefabrication becoming common, and by the late 1960s, nine-story apartment structures were not unusual. The city's main highways, leading to Leningrad, Riga, and Novgorod, were reoriented to protect the historic city center, and a new bridge across the Velikaia River was constructed adjacent to the historic Mirozhsky Monastery. Parks, gardens, and squares were restored and expanded (one central park included the historic churches of St. Vasilii on the Hillock and Nikolai on the Dry Spot), and new parks along the old city walls and the Velikaia River were laid out. A new City Soviet and House of Culture were constructed in the town center, a new hotel and movie theater were built, and the square outside the railroad station was redesigned. Factories were moved from the central city to outlying areas for environmental reasons, and new industrial enterprises produced electrical motors, radio components, telephone and telegraph equipment, machines, chemical fibers, construction materials, ceramics, clothing, and food. The city grew substantially in all ways during these years, with its population expanding from 81,000 in 1959 to 115,000 in 1965.

The Brezhnev Era, 1964-1982

By the beginning of the Brezhnev years, Pskov had thirty-eight industrial enterprises, the work week had been reduced from six to five days, 29% of the population lived in one- or two-unit houses, 67% in apartment houses, 21% had household plots adjacent to their residences, 40% had had electricity, water, and gas readily available in their residences, and 2% had their own automobiles.

The main streets had been clearly laid out by this time. Oktiabrskii Prospekt, a wide avenue with trees and commodious sidewalks, stretched from the railroad station area to October Square, not far from the historic Krom. Jan Fabricius Street (named after the Latvian revolutionary and famous Civil War commander) ran roughly parallel to Oktiabrskii Prospekt and connected Railway Square to Victory Square, a green area with a World War II memorial and eternal flame adjacent to the old city wall, which was also substantially rebuilt. Sovetskaia Street stretched from Victory Square parallel to the Velikaia River and eventually to October Square and Lenin Square, immediately adjacent to the Krom. Finally, Sverdlov Street reached north and south along the old city wall and down to the Velikaia River.

By 1973 the city's General Plan called for expanding the city northwesterly along the right (eastern) bank of the Velikaia River, and more significantly, to the west into the Zavelichie District, along the Riga Highway, with a number of new residential neighborhoods. By the mid-1970s Pskov was a major industrial center, with its heavy electrical welding equipment factory being one of the largest in the USSR, for example, and with a substantial number of export products being manufactured. Pskov also became a significant educational center, with a teacher training institute, a branch of the Northwest Polytechnic Institute, and several specialized technical secondary schools and post-secondary institutions being established. By this point, there were also several hotels, restaurants, cafes, and cafeterias (*stolovye*) in the city, as well as a regional drama theater, a puppet theater, a planetarium, several museums, three stadiums, two swimming pools, two rowing clubs, and five movie theaters. Finally, by the mid-1980s citizens were able to receive four television stations, two national, one local, and one from Leningrad.

Pskov's basic urban shape had been established, its infrastructure laid out, and the framework for its future development determined. What most of its residents did not expect was the extraordinary dislocations of the next two decades, which would make it very difficult to realize the hopes of the Soviet urban planners of the immediate post-war period.

The Era of Late Communism, 1982-1991

By the early 1980s, there were almost 1.5 million square meters of living space in Pskov, and a considerable percentage of the city had been rehoused by this time. Typical of parts of Pskov and the country as a whole was the *mikroraion* of eight to twelve thousand residents. Each *mikroraion* was planned to have an appropriate number of parks, daycare facilities, schools, and health clinics, supplemented by good public transportation, so that residents' day-to-day requirements could be met on foot or after a short journey by bus. New apartments were provided free to the population, with very small monthly payments for space, heating, electricity, water, and gas. By the mid-1980s, fourteen square meters of living space were provided for each inhabitant. In 1986, almost three-quarters of Pskov's adults were married; 93% had at least a seventh-grade education; 84% lived in apartment buildings; a third lived within one kilometer of the city center, a third between one and two kilometers of the center, and a third between two and five kilometers of the center; the vast majority had running water, gas, sewage, central heating, electricity, baths and showers, kitchen stoves, refrigerators, washing machines, televisions, and radios (though only a surprising 23% had their own telephones). 90% of the men and 80% of the women in the city were employed outside the home, with the men working primarily in manufacturing, construction, and transportation, and the women in retail trade, food and consumer industries, health, and education. The typical work week was five days, with single day shifts being most common. Most workers lived close enough to their jobs that they could walk to work (Robinson, *The Rhythm of Everyday Life*, 24, 42-49).

Many residents remember Pskov in the 1980s as a city that was growing and improving. The central area was the location of the best stores, the principal educational institutions, and

most of the city's historic buildings and squares. These provided backdrops for and legitimacy to the political ceremonies of the late Soviet era, and conveyed a sense of the present's continuity with a past so predominant in Pskov's partially restored central district. Residents remember the major, and still uncompleted, projects of the last decade of communist rule as well: a new hotel just across the river from and slightly south of the Krom, a new Pioneer Palace on a peninsula near the Mirozhsky Monastery, an extensive commercial center in a new *mikroraion* along Kommunalnaia Street, and a new House of Soviets directly opposite the Krom in the city's Zavelichie region. They also remember the many problems of life in late-Soviet times, not so much resulting from poor urban plans, but from inefficient and incompetent implementation of those plans (see French, *Plans, Pragmatism, and People*, Chapter 5, 97-129). They remember the consumer problems that were endemic during the 1980s, the shortages of everything, and the interminable shop queues, the great distances everyone was required to walk to do the daily shopping because the stores were so spread out, and the absolute paucity of shops in some of the newer districts, where stores opened only several years after the housing was completed, if at all. Public transportation was inexpensive, but never quite adequate in times of bad weather, and slow to serve the new residential districts growing so rapidly during this period.

The maintenance of public space was particularly dispiriting for many citizens. While parks and squares were fairly well maintained in central parts of the city, this was not true in the new housing developments, and playgrounds and greenspaces were filled with vandalized play equipment and litter-strewn landscaping. The apartment buildings of the early Khrushchev years, no matter where they were located in the city, were in dire need of refurbishing by the 1980s, but little work was done on them. Some older structures in the very center of the city, though along back streets, were given no attention at all, and were in danger of collapsing around their residents. Other buildings, completed no earlier than the 1970s, had notices placed on them cautioning passers-by to beware of bricks and masonry falling from their poorly finished exteriors. The system always emphasized new construction and rarely included adequate measures for the care or preservation of older buildings lacking historic designations. Clearly

there were unaddressed problems, and the city's lived experience for its residents was one of a curious combination of ambitious new projects combined with poor maintenance of what had been built during Soviet times, and great attention to (though little real investment in) the architectural treasures of the past. Still, there were some bright spots about the city.

Environmental problems were relatively minor. The city's air was clean, as was the water in its rivers, though even Leningraders preferred not to drink the water coming out of Pskov's kitchen taps. The city's natural surroundings were always a great escape for residents weary of urban life, and most families had some sort of *dacha* or at least garden plot in the countryside to retreat to in summer. Pleasures were simple on the whole in Pskov, but the city was quite livable by Soviet standards.

Post-Soviet Pskov, 1991 to the Present

With the collapse of the communist system, and the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, Pskov found itself to be a border city, located near an international frontier that saw far less activity than it had as a republican boundary in Soviet times, however. In the late 1980s, the city's population had reached two hundred thousand, but in the last decade, the city has ceased growing, and begun a slow decline as younger people move to other regions of the country, older people die off, and families have fewer children than they did previously. The newest construction projects of the 1990s have been private banks (in new or remodeled buildings in the central city), extravagant new country houses put up by wealthy "New Russians," and a few other minor projects that almost always have some sort of rumors connecting them to the country's seemingly omnipresent Mafia. Few public projects have been initiated with the exception of park and infrastructure improvements made possible by foreign loans and grants. A large regional hospital has been under construction for a number of years, and is still not completed. When it is finished, the hospital will still face the problem of being outfitted adequately with modern equipment whose cost will be substantially beyond the budget of the city authorities. Still, the city's frontier status has been beneficial, since large numbers of soldiers

are stationed near the city, and while they earn little themselves, the government does spend money on them, and those funds do benefit the non-military residents of the city somewhat.

But what was the experience of urban life in Pskov during the post-Soviet years of the 1990s, and what is it today? Housing for most people in the city is decent by Russian standards, and certainly far better than that which might be expected when national income per capita is compared with other countries. Many apartment buildings have been refurbished, and residents take a certain amount of pride in their own apartments themselves, though public spaces, whether the hallways immediately outside their own doors, the elevators, entrance halls, garbage chutes, and children's play areas in building courtyards, have not changed since Soviet times, except to become worse. In the newest suburbs, citizens live with the legacy of the economic collapse of the 1990s. Unfinished buildings and abandoned construction sites are blots on the landscape in outlying districts, and while housing was usually completed, commercial spaces were not. What were supposed to be commercial areas are now surrounded by small temporary or semi-permanent kiosks run by local entrepreneurs selling any number of products at prices most in the city find challenging to their budgets.

Transportation is better in some ways than it was in the past because of the city's purchase of new buses from abroad through complicated political arrangements. Yet many people walk as much as possible because the price of bus tickets now constitutes a substantial part of many citizens' disposable income. Pskov is still primarily a city dependent on public transportation, and while some wealthy entrepreneurs own automobiles, most people do not. Streets are often pleasantly devoid of traffic as a result, but drivers are convinced that roads were meant for driving as fast as the car's horsepower allows, so that being a pedestrian in Pskov is as dangerous as it is anywhere in the world. Potholes and poor paving do slow cars down, however, and the city is still one that conveys almost a sense of nineteenth-century calm in some of its older quarters.

Consumption and leisure activities have changed during the last decade, but not in most cases for the better. More products are now available than during Soviet times, and there are

almost never queues to buy goods or food, primarily because most people have very little disposable income. A few newer shops have opened in the former locations of state-run commercial enterprises, but they are not thriving. Nowhere in Pskov can the kind of capitalist frenzy that has overtaken much of Moscow be seen, and some foreign shops that had opened before 1998 have now closed or been completely transformed. One resident said about one of these new grocery stores that it was a sort of museum for her, a place to examine items advertised on television or seen in soap operas, but not a place to purchase every-day essentials (or for that matter, even luxuries). Although almost everything is now available, shopping is still a tiresome undertaking for most citizens, particularly because at the current exchange rate, the average monthly wage in the city is about \$20 per person. Yet if shopping continues to be tiresome, it is also more interesting, because of the rows of kiosks located in certain parts of the city offering a large array of goods, though at high prices. These shopping precincts have also energized the city's street life, so that shopping is far more entertaining than it was in the past, and somewhat reminiscent of life in the city in pre-Soviet times.

Indeed, leisure in general has changed as well. In the Soviet era, people attended the cinema regularly, for example, but now most movie theaters have closed because people find video tape players cheaper and more convenient. Some restaurants have closed, and others opened, but it is not uncommon to meet residents who never go to restaurants because they are beyond their budgets. Some elegant cafes along the Velikaia River, and in the shadow of the Krom have opened, but have had only limited success for a number of complicated reasons, some having to do with the city administration (one not always in favor of entrepreneurial activities), and related to the shady world of organized crime, and some related to sheer business incompetence. This is unfortunate because Pskov has a number of lovely vistas, historic structures, and charming locations that would provide attractive locations for cafes, restaurants, and nightclubs. Much of the leisure residents of Pskov do enjoy is related to nature. Strolling through city parks, swimming in the river at a community beach, watching the sun set on the historic cathedral or the moon rise over the old city walls are activities Pskov's residents enjoyed

in Soviet times, and activities they enjoy today. Ironically, while some people have more leisure time, others have less. Because so many citizens are now underemployed at their regular jobs, they have more opportunities for leisure, but their economic straits force them into moonlighting, so that it is not uncommon for people to be out in the evening pursuing other more remunerative activities than are provided by their day jobs.

One other feature of leisure in Pskov today relates to children. During Soviet times, the lives of Pskov's children were fairly tightly structured, even during the summer. Today, however, with the Pioneer organization having become defunct and with most summer camps available only to those who can pay substantial fees, many children simply "hang out" in parks and public places, with no real adult supervision or oversight. Pskov does not have a major problem with gangs, and most people still feel perfectly safe on public streets any time of day or night, but there is real concern about the future of the city's children.

Finally, one substantial change in the urban experience in Pskov during post-Soviet times has been the reappearance of active churches. Most particularly, citizens are aware of this because of religious processions, the refurbishing of previously secularized religious structures (including some of the city's most historic and remarkable historic sites), and most particularly, ceremonies held inside and outside the Holy Trinity Cathedral in the Krom. The reappearance of religion has had a striking impact on the urban experience of Pskov, and like so many changes in the city, it is a hybrid experience, combining the past with the present, and hinting about the future.

What makes Pskov remarkable in terms of its "lived experience," however, is the reality of the penetration of the city's present by its past. Living in Pskov means living in one of Russia's oldest urban centers, and the memory of the past is present throughout the city. Even those residents who reside in the farthest outlying suburbs often travel regularly through the city's historic center. Their leisure activities often take them to the parks in the city center that incorporate churches or fortifications hundreds of years old or to the banks of the river that carried the foreign customers of their Russian merchant ancestors a thousand years ago. The past

is still alive in Pskov, even the past of the Bolshevik Revolution (Lenin Square and its statue of the Bolshevik leader), the Stalin years (the monument to Sergei Kirov outside the regional administration building), and the more recent struggles for democracy (shops sell bottles of Zhirinovskiy vodka, named after the Russian nationalist leader of the mid-1990s). One nineteenth-century Russian historian described Pskov as a kind of quiet backwater, and that description still fits the city. It may not be a vibrant metropolis, but it does provide the fundamentals of a decent life for its people. Unfortunately, it, like much of Russia, is still living through a difficult time of troubles that may take a generation to overcome. What it does have is potential, a potential made possible to a great extent by an urban plan that was humanistic and rational in design, and that will continue to provide a framework for the city's development once the current period is over.

Conclusions

In terms of defining Pskov's lived environment, what must be said is that it is a city of three eras now living through a period of transition to a fourth. Much of the central city is dominated by ancient and medieval structures -- fortifications, churches, and private residences scattered about in such a way that walking through the city is a series of constant discoveries, where the past and the present carry on a dialogue. The Soviet era constitutes the second period, and since most Soviet-era buildings were constructed or reconstructed in the years after the Second World War, they convey a sense of Stalinism or early post-Stalinism, and much of the city's planning during the years before the 1970s is influenced directly by Stalinist ideals. The third era is associated with Brezhnev and the late communism of the Gorbachev years. Entirely new suburban developments appeared, and new regions of the city grew, though not at a pace that overwhelmed the city's historic structure. Being in the Zavelichie district of the city, and particularly along Rizhskii Prospekt and Kommunalnaia Street, is like being in any other Soviet city. From an urban planning point of view, there is nothing to distinguish these districts from formerly Soviet urban centers in Siberia, Ukraine, or any number of other regions. Fortunately

for those who live in these *mikroraiony*, in their relatively comfortable and more or less well-built apartment blocks, they are able to combine in their daily lives the lived experience of their ancestors, even if unconsciously. Pskov has had a remarkable past, and has lived through a number of recent decades that have altered it substantially, yet improved it as well. Its history and experience are those of many other cities in European Russia, but it is also unique, and building on that uniqueness will ensure its success in the future.

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