

Victoria Donovan

'Going Backwards, We Stride Forwards': *Kraevedenie* Museums and the Making of Local Memory in North West Russia, 1956–1981¹

This article focuses on the post-war revival of the disciplinary tradition of local studies or *kraevedenie*, a field of enquiry that is defined by the *The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* as the 'holistic study of a particular part of a country, town, village, or other settlement by the local inhabitants who consider this territory to be their homeland'.² Scholars have tended to interpret the rehabilitation of this field of 'self-study' as a reflection of the patriotic turn in Soviet culture in the post-Stalin era, linking the burgeoning interest in local history and heritage with popular hostility to Soviet modernisation and the rise of cultural conservatism in Russian society [Johnson 2006: 176; Hosking 2006: 338–372; Dunlop 1983: 130]. This line of reasoning, however, exaggerates the spontaneous, grassroots nature of the *kraevedenie* revival, ignoring the state-sponsored dimension of the initiative. In many Russian regions, the revival of interest in the local past was a corollary

Victoria Donovan

St Andrew's University
vsd2@st-andrews.ac.uk

¹ The quotation in the title is taken from A. I. Herzen, *Sobranie sochinenii*: V 30 t. M.: Izd-vo AN SSSR, 1954–1965. Vol. 3. P. 24. The quotation was reproduced in a pamphlet published in 1974 on the role of local studies [*kraevedenie*] and tourism in Soviet society [Yun'ev 1974: 11].

² See 'Kraevedenie', *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya* <<http://bse.sci-lib.com/article065588.html>> (last accessed: 10 January 2011). While it is occasionally claimed that *kraevedenie* has no equivalent in Western European and American culture, an analogy can certainly be drawn with some dilettante historical pursuits of the nineteenth century, such as 'homeland studies' [*Heimatkunde*] in Imperial Germany and antiquarianism in Victorian England, in which individual and local initiative played a comparably important role in promoting knowledge of the local past [Cf. Confino 1997: 182–184; Levine 1986: 1–7].

of the ‘massification’ of *kraevedenie*, the official regeneration of local memory for the purpose of strengthening Soviet patriotism. In this article, I examine one facet of this process: the creation of regional *kraevedenie* museums, where visions of local history and culture were formulated and presented to local communities. I suggest that these visions inscribed the political priorities of the Soviet regime into portrayals of events in the local past, revealing a tension between the retrospective, conservative nature of the *kraevedenie* tradition and the transformative logic of the modernising socialist state.

The article begins with an overview of the evolution and repression of the *kraevedenie* tradition in the early-Soviet era, before considering the political impulses behind the rehabilitation of the discipline in the post-Stalin period. It examines the problems local museums faced as a consequence of the *kraevedenie* revival, the strategies adopted to negotiate the logical contradictions and practical obstacles that this shift in orientation posed. Finally, it appraises the social impact of the revival, focusing in particular on the emergence of a patriotic discourse among visitors to *kraevedenie* museums. I suggest that the regeneration of interest in the local past gave rise to public challenges to established historical narratives and expressions of patriotism that departed significantly from the conservative and presentist understanding of local identity in official discourse.

***Kraevedenie*: The historical background**

In the early-Soviet period, the discipline of *kraevedenie* cohered around the Central Bureau of Kraevedenie (TsBK), a body under the control of the Commissariat of Enlightenment that had been established in response to the vulnerability of cultural institutions in the Russian provinces during the Civil War.¹ The Bureau was an institution of a missionary character that perceived its role to be the organisation and coordination of *kraevedenie* work in the Russian regions. It stood at the centre of a process of capital-driven cultural transformation, the source of instructions about the preservation of heritage and the exploitation of local resources that were implemented by regional administrations. Such a top-down approach to regional cultural development was typical of Soviet cultural politics at this time. The Soviet ‘Film Train’, for example, transported cine-propaganda to the Russian regions in the 1920s and 1930s, with the intention of stimulating a greater sense of national consciousness at the periphery (in this case through the projection of films about the regions to the regions) [Widdis 2003: 44]. *Kraevedenie* was thus part

¹ The historical outline that follows draws significantly on the work of Emily D. Johnson, who has tracked the evolution of the *kraevedenie* discipline in Russia, and in particular in St Petersburg, from the late-nineteenth century until the Khrushchev period [Johnson 2006: 157–176].

of a strategy of engaging regional communities in the process of socialist construction by making them aware of their role as an integral cog within the larger mechanism of the communist regime.

The rapid growth of the *kraevedenie* movement in the immediate post-revolutionary period was an indication of the level of official interest in acquiring knowledge about the Russian regions, in particular ethnographic and geographical information about the territory of the Soviet Union. Between 1918 and 1923, 270 new museums were established in the Soviet Union, of which 193 were *kraevedenie* museums [Widdis 2003: 100]. By 1927, this number had grown to 576, while the list of *kraevedenie* societies and clubs had increased from 231 in 1923 to 1112 in 1927 [Melnikova 2010]. The movement incorporated leading party members such as Nadezhda Krupskaya, Anatoly Lunacharsky, and Mikhail Kalinin and its remit of activities extended into the fields of ethnology, geography, art history, and geology. It was perhaps the rapid expansion of the semi-independent movement, many of the members of which endorsed a limited form of regional independence, that roused the suspicion of the central authorities at a period of political centralisation. As Emily Johnson has remarked: 'Drawn out of their relative isolation, transformed into a real community, local *kraevedy* became more effective cultural workers, but they also might have started to resemble an independent power base' [Johnson 2006: 175].

From the end of the 1920s, the activities of the movement were gradually brought under the control of the central government. In 1927, the regional branches of the movement were subordinated to the central Ministry of Enlightenment by Resolution of Council of People's Commissars of RSFSR and the administrative centre was relocated from Leningrad to Moscow. In line with the first Five Year plan, which put cultural policy at the service of state industry, *kraevedenie* was redefined as a sphere of activity that should contribute directly to the improvement of the economy. Those who were perceived to deviate from this mandate and to continue to practice what was by this time understood to be 'bourgeois' retrospectivism were identified as enemies of the people and arrested.¹ As *kraevedenie* metamorphosed into an extension of the state apparatus geared for the fulfillment of plans and the promotion ideological messages to the people, so its attraction for the general public waned. By 1934, 94–95 % of the *kraevedenie* work consisted of research into valuable minerals, and by the mid-1930s the discipline had lost its relevance to Soviet society completely [Johnson 2006: 176].

¹ D.O. Sviatsky and Ivan Grevs were among those members of the Leningrad bureau branch who were arrested in the purges of 1930–1931 [Johnson 2006: 176].

The politics of the *kraevedenie* revival

The rehabilitation of *kraevedenie* in the post-Stalin era was partly a consequence of the retrospective turn in Soviet culture at this time. In the late-1950s and 1960s, the views of a group of culturally conservative intellectuals, whose articles on the preservation of national traditions appeared in popular literary journals such as *Molodaya Gvardiya* [Young Guard] and *Nash Sovremennik* [Our Contemporary], began to find purchase in Soviet society [Brudny 1998: 57–94; Hosking 2006: 338–372]. Among the most vociferous critics of the Brave New World of socialist modernity was the poet and writer Vladimir Soloukhin. In his epistolary *Pisma iz Russkogo Muzeya* [Letters from the Russian Museum], first published in *Molodaya Gvardiya* in 1966, Soloukhin attacked the tackiness [*poshlost*] of contemporary tastes — modern art, contemporary furniture, and technologically enhanced music among them — which he contrasted with the simplicity of authentic Russian culture and art [Soloukhin 1972: 155–159]. By striding forward too quickly and fervently, Soloukhin and other patriotic writers argued, Soviet culture had lost touch with its national roots, compromising the moral wellbeing of the Russian people.

Kraevedenie was identified by the patriotic elite as a means of addressing the cultural deficit in Soviet society, stimulating pride in national traditions and an awareness of the cultural origins of the Russian people. In an article about the preservation of cultural heritage published in 1961, for example, the medieval historian and cultural critic Dmitry Likhachev extolled the activities of a group of schoolchildren in Tikhvin, who had collected artifacts for display at a local *kraevedenie* museum, replacing the institution that had been repressed in the 1930s [Likhachev 1961: 10]. Likhachev made explicit the link between pride in one's locality and love for the Soviet Motherland: 'Love for one's homeland is far from an abstract concept; it is the love for one's town, for one's region, for its cultural monuments, it is pride in its history' [Likhachev 1961: 10]. In order to guarantee the patriotic caliber of the next generation of Soviet citizens, he argued, it was necessary to involve them in the construction and consumption of local memory.

As in the past, the problem with this line of reasoning lay in the specialist nature of *kraevedenie* as a discipline. If a number of inveterate *kraevedy* — for the most part historians, restorers, architects, and artists — were actively engaged in the conservation of heritage in regional towns, many local inhabitants were unaware of the arguments and practices of historical preservation. Following the Twenty-Second Congress in 1961, the Communist Party took a more active role in defining the goals of *kraevedenie* and the means by which these goals would be achieved. The impact of the state-sponsored

regeneration of local memory was felt in particular in smaller Russian towns, where cultural institutions dedicated to the promotion of *kraevedenie* activities — clubs, societies, and museums, for example — provided important new spaces of socialisation and instruction for local communities.¹

Knowledge of local history and culture was nevertheless understood as a means to an end in the construction of socialism. At the Sixth Congress of the Methodological Council for the Work of Soviet Museums in 1965, the 'core themes' in the work of *kraevedenie* museums were identified as the leading role of the KPSS in Soviet society, the fraternal friendship of the Soviet peoples, and the evolution of Soviet democracy [GAVO, f. 4795, op. 6, d. 108, l. 73]. The same political priorities were to inform the study of local history and culture in Soviet schools. As one letter from the Deputy Minister of Enlightenment, M. Kashin, and the Deputy Minister of Culture, V. Striganov to the heads of local cultural institutions in Novgorod explained, *kraevedenie* activities should reinforce the ideological work already being carried out in schools and institutes of higher education around the country [NGOM, op. 1, d. 410, l. 24]. Rather than stimulating a sense of regional particularism, the promotion of local knowledge was intended to underline the fundamental shifts in *national* politics — from personal dictatorship to collective leadership, from Great Russian chauvinism to Leninist internationalism — to have taken place in the post-Stalin period [NGOM, op. 1, d. 410, l. 25].

How, then, did the abstract political objectives of the post-Stalinist era translate into strategies for displaying local history? How were exhibitions of the regional past and its material culture expected to affirm contemporary values of collective leadership, democracy, and the construction of socialism? The most striking development in exhibitive strategies in the post-Stalin period was the so-called 'democratisation' of the content and presentation of museum displays.² According to this logic, esoteric references and abstract theorising had to be replaced by accessible and appealing visions of local and national culture. This shift in emphasis manifested itself most obviously in the official sponsorship of regional ethnography in the late-Soviet period. Rather than a generic image of the Soviet nation, museums were required to focus on the ethnographic reality of the locality, to present local communities with idealised visions of

¹ In the Novgorod region, for example, local history museums opened in Valdai in 1961, Staraya Russa in 1967, and Borovichi in 1971, while in the Pskov region, inter-regional *kraevedenie* museums were established in Velikie Luki, Sebezh, Porkhov, and Pechory in 1965 [NGOM, istoricheskaya spravka, op. 1; GAPO, f. R-1855, op. 1, d. 247, l. 143].

² For a more general discussion of the rehabilitation of the notion of 'demokratizatsiya' in Soviet society and the political campaigns for its implementation in the post-Stalin era see [Lovell 2010: 44–45].



Fig. 1. A pensioner demonstrating examples of work on a weaver's loom to a group of pioneers at the *kraevedenie* museum of the 'Iskra' kolkhoz in the Novgorod region in 1977



Fig. 2. A girl talking about the pre-revolutionary life of the peasants of Poozer'e at the *kraevedenie* museum of the 'Iskra' kolkhoz, 1977

their own history and culture [NGOM, op. 1, d. 380, l. 27]. If local communities could recognise themselves and their surroundings in museum displays, politicians reasoned, they would feel greater affinity with the ideological message and political priorities articulated by Soviet state [NGOM, op. 1, d. 410, s. 24].

'Democratisation' was also a guiding principle in the reorganisation of museums of architectural monuments, or *zapovedniki*, at this time.¹ In the post-Stalin period, the churches of Kievan Rus', with their austere forms and laconic ornamentation, were held up as the architectural embodiment of the anti-elitist principles of the governing regime. In a guide to the architectural monuments of Vologda, for example, local historians insisted that there was nothing ostentatious or snobbish about the local style, that its 'simple and, at times, primitive forms are so concrete, so democratic, that they would appear to be the products of a living folk tale' [Bocharov, Vygolov 1969: 6]. In an analogous fashion to the displays of local ethnography, people were encouraged to perceive these buildings as an intimate expression of their own culture and history rather than distant and remote objects of awe and reverence.

¹ The *muzei-zapovednik*, an open-air architectural museum comprising a number of prominent architectural buildings or ensembles preserved in their historic surrounds, functioned as the vehicle for a new form of historical tourism in the post-Stalin period. The towns of Kostroma, Novgorod, Nizhny-Novgorod, and Yaroslavl-Rostov were the first to acquire the status of *zapovedniki* by order of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR in 1958–59 [Smith 2010].

The transformation of architectural monuments, and, in particular, Old Russian churches, into museum exhibits that reinforced the values of the post-Stalinist regime required some innovative re-contextualisation. A report on the work of the Novgorod Museum in 1962 thus detailed the plans to present the Sophia Cathedral, the architectural centrepiece of the city, not only as an exceptional piece of medieval architecture but also as a unique work of Russian art and a monument to the social and political history of the town [NGOM, op. 1, d. 429, l. 5]. By drawing attention to the role that the building had played as a center of democratic life in medieval Novgorod, the museum collective hoped to emphasise its relevance to contemporary political developments in the country as a whole. As one member of the museum collective put it: 'This will greatly enrich the ideological content of the monument, making it more comprehensible and accessible to ordinary visitors' [NGOM, op. 1, d. 429, l. 5].

Another important emphasis of the work of *kraevedenie* museums was the notion of continuity between the Russian past and the Soviet present. The socialist regime was presented not only as having built on, but also having assimilated and perpetuated the traditions of the past. This idea informed the organisation of exhibitions of traditional crafts and arts in particular. In a report on an exhibition of Vologda lacework, for example, the way in which lace-making practices had been preserved in the Soviet context and enriched by a 'contemporary artistic language' was emphasised in particular [VOKM, op. 1, d. 849, l. 5]. It may be conjectured that this insistence on cultural continuity and national traditions derived from the need to affirm the legitimacy and cultural relevance of the political regime following the social and ideological upheavals of the early-1950s. By drawing an unbroken line between the distant past and the Soviet present, the political authorities could stress the spontaneous nature of the processes of societal evolution and political transformation that had taken place in the second half of the twentieth century.

The practicalities of the *kraevedenie* revival: problems of formulation

Reflecting the ideological priorities of the contemporary regime in displays of local history and culture raised a number of specific problems. The most obvious of these was a deficit of objects in museum collections that effectively communicated such abstract ideas as democratisation, social solidarity, and the irreversible process of socialist construction. Compounding this problem was the fact that a large number of new *kraevedenie* museums had opened throughout the 1960s, not only in regional capitals, but also in provincial towns comprising no more than a few thousand inhabitants. Museum collectives were thus obliged to scour the surrounding regions in search of 'communicative' objects that might be included

in new exhibitions of local culture, to enrich the vocabulary of an emerging language of local things.¹

In the Vologda region, for example, museum workers visited workplaces and cultural institutions in the Vitegorsk region in 1961. Items were collected that were seen to reflect the industrial and social advancement of the region in the preceding years: a severed ribbon and scissors from the opening of the Vitegorsk hydro-electric complex, a fitter's uniform from the workshop floor and a list of socialist pledges from the Vologda linen factory [VOKM, op. 1, d. 403, l. 2]. At the same time, museum workers visited villages and agrarian settlements where they acquired objects of folk art and crafts such as decorative distaffs, looms, chests, and carved salt-cellars [NGOM, op. 1, d. 429, l. 17]. While selecting objects on the basis of their capacity to convey political messages, museum workers also used the mandate of building museum displays to acquire items of particular ethnographic and artistic significance to the region.² Some continuity with the work of the *kraevedy* of the 1920s, who attempted to confiscate and preserve objects of national heritage during the upheavals of civil war, was thus in evidence.

It was not only museum exhibits that were in short supply. Many of the newly established museums faced problems finding qualified staff to occupy posts as exhibition organisers and excursion guides. At a meeting of researchers from museums across the RSFSR in Novgorod in 1960, the need to create a new 'cadre' of young museum workers was underlined. As one participant in the discussion pointed out, the new generation of excursion guides had to be professional, informed individuals, rather than 'talking machines' [NGOM, op. 1, d. 380, l. 47]. To this end, training courses were established where new workers could study Marxist-Leninist theory, the methodology of museum work, the history of their region and its historical monuments [NGOM, op. 1, d. 407, l. 6]. The inculcation of newcomers to the profession with knowledge about the locality produced effective results. In museum response books, excursion guides were frequently complimented on their 'profound love' for the region and the 'patriotism' with which they presented their subject [GANO, f. R-4063, op. 2–10, d. 140a, ll. 2, 3, and 9].

Another problem facing local museums collectives was how to strike

¹ Employees at the Pskov State Museum visited Pushkinogorsk, Pechory, Porokhov, Gdov, and Ostrov in 1962 in search of museum exhibits, while workers at the local museum in Novgorod carried out expeditions to Okulov, Gory, Kuznets, and Borovichi with the same objective in the 1960s [GAPO, f. R-1855, op. 1, d. 164, l. 50; NGOM, op. 2, d. 318; NGOM, op. 2, d. 814; NGOM, op. 2, d. 954].

² Museum workers were particularly keen to acquire icons from local villages, many of which were being bought by private collectors or taken away by museum workers from Leningrad and Moscow at this time. See the reports on ethnographic expeditions in the Novgorod region in 1968 [NGOM, d. 814 n.a., ll. 10–11].

a balance between the endorsement of the ideas of progress and modernity, on the one hand, and the celebration of folk culture, the existence of which depended on traditional modes of production and ways of life, on the other. Some museums circumvented this problem by separating folk culture from its traditional context, praising the former while criticising the latter. The painting techniques, weaving, and toy-making practices of the Russian peasant were thus the object of lavish praise in museum exhibitions in the North West, while the rural conditions in which traditional arts and crafts had originated were condemned as inhumane and backward. The explanatory notes from an exhibition at the Vologda State Museum in 1963, *Vologda Province XII–XX Centuries*, reveal the underlying tension in the treatment of local folk culture. While traditions such as lace making and the preparation of a bride's dowry-trunk were spared heavy ideological criticism (the only negative remark in the notes to the exhibition concerned the 'stuffy workshops' [*dushnye masterskie*] in which the lace-makers had worked [VOKM, op. 1, d. 491, l. 50]), the explanatory text accompanying a reconstructed interior of a peasant *izba* poured forth with ideological indignation:

The dirty, dilapidated courtyard makes everything around it dirty and eventually ends up as a stinking, impassable bog, as harmful for people as it is for animals. In the *izba* everything is filthy, there are holes in the floor, the old hovel is on the brink of falling to pieces. It is pitiful *izba*, which has neither wooden carvings, nor decoration; the owner is in no fit state to put up the cornices. Such are the conditions the poor peasants of Vologda district were forced to endure. [VOKM, op. 1, d. 491, l. 21].

In the note, the contradiction between the treatment of peasant life and folk traditions was resolved through the implication that popular arts and crafts were threatened by the organisation of labour in capitalist societies. The lack of decorative carvings or folk details on the *izba* in question was explained by the fact that the owner was 'in no fit state' [*ne v sostoyanii*] to carry them out, in other words, that his creative spirit had been crushed by the exploitative conditions of capitalism. Following this line of reasoning to its logical conclusion, it was implied that folk traditions were only able to thrive in conditions of economic and social equality, that is, in egalitarian societies such as the Soviet Union.

In the Brezhnev period, the contradiction between the praise for peasant traditions and the celebration of modern urban life became less important. In accordance with the growth in interest in Soviet ethnography, museums turned their attention to describing the traditional ways of life in the rural sphere. Expeditions to Russian villages developed from missions for the collection of locally specific exhibits to become ethnographic research trips for the study of

peasant life. The reports compiled by museum workers during these expeditions meticulously detailed the architectural specificities and layout of village houses, the occupations of the residents, forms of social organisation, and dialectical specificities of the region. Rather than condemning wooden *izbas* as unhygienic and pitiful, museum workers from Novgorod described the village houses of Gorneshno and Perevoz in the Vologda region in intricate detail as objects of considerable cultural value [NGOM, op. 1, d. 814 n.a, l. 5–6].

Nevertheless, and as Tatyana Shchepanskaya has noted, ethnographical research continued to be shaped by ideological factors at this time. Soviet ethnographers were obliged to work within exacting ideological conditions, inventively reinterpreting their research to correspond with official objectives [Shchepanskaya 2009: 163]. The tendency to self-censor ethnographic work was just as remarkable at the local level as it was at the national one. In the late-1960s, museum workers collected considerable material pertaining to the ethnic minorities in the Russian regions, such as the Karelian community in the Okulovskii region of Novgorod and the Estonian settlement around the village of Dyachino that had moved to the Novgorod region in search of free land before the Stolypin reforms [NGOM, op. 1, d. 318 n.a, l. 16–20]. But while the minorities in the Pskov and Novgorod regions were considered appropriate research topics for the museums of the Soviet republics in which they were the titular nations, they were clearly regarded as unsuitable subject matter for exhibitions at local history museums [NGOM, op. 1, d. 318 n.a, l. 16]. The materials and objects collected during the expeditions to the regions were never incorporated into displays at the Novgorod State Museum despite the contemporary relevance of the theme.

Throughout the Brezhnev era, *kraevedenie* museums in the North West placed increasing emphasis in exhibitions of folk culture on Russian heritage. Typical exhibitions at this time thus included *Northern Spinning Wheels* in Vologda (1970) where painted distaffs, wood carvings, folk sculptures and other objects of applied art were displayed [VOKM, op. 1, d. 678, l. 70]; *Folk Art* (1967) in Novgorod which included exhibits of clothing, textiles, and domestic and agricultural equipment of ethnic Russians [NGOM, op. 2, d. 789]; *Vologda Lace* (1977) an exhibition of Vologda lace-making from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries [VOKM, op. 1, d. 863]; and *Vologda National Costume* (1979), an exhibition of ethnic Russian clothing in Vologda [VOKM, op. 1, d. 998]. At local folk festivals, a similarly exclusive approach was taken to the presentation of ethnic arts and crafts. At the folklore festival at the ‘Vitoslavlitsy’ Museum in Novgorod in 1977, for example, demonstrations by specialists in Russian arts and crafts were followed by performances by Russian folk ensembles from the various regions of the *oblast’*, while no space

was allowed for displays of the material culture of the minority ethnicities of the region [NGOM, op. 2, d. 952, l. 1].

An important means of accommodating the notion of tradition in a discourse saturated with references to progress and modernity was the periodisation of the present or the creation of Soviet traditions and rituals. Throughout the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, the socialist state attempted to establish a corpus of festivals, ceremonies, and practices that were seen to typify the Soviet cultural tradition.¹ The vintage of these festivals did not appear to be as important as their capacity to mobilise local communities in performances of Soviet identity. In 1965, the cultural authorities in Pskov thus reported that a number of local festivals, including the 'Spring and Work' celebrations and the 'Days of the Livestock Breeder', which had been introduced in the preceding years and had now 'become established traditions' [*traditsionnymi stali*] [GAPO, f. R-1855, op. 1, d. 247, l. 110]. These Soviet rituals frequently included important elements of the folkloric traditions that they were intended to replace. For example, the Soviet wedding rituals performed at the Molodeisk collective farm in the Strugokrasnenk region of Pskov, included female choirs singing Russian wedding songs, the exchanging of rings, and the presentation of the young couple with bread and salt by the farm elders [GAPO, f. R-1855, op. 1, d. 247, l. 118]. By emphasising the 'inventedness' of tradition, the malleability of popular ritual and the importance of its contextualisation, the authorities were able to smooth over the contradiction between the regeneration of traditions and the discourse of transformative modernisation at the centre of Soviet ideology.

The practicalities of the *kraevedenie* revival: problems of interpretation

It is difficult to gauge the extent to which the efforts of museum workers and schoolteachers succeeded in achieving the goals of national and local affirmation. The repetition of the key dates and figures from local history by a disinterested excursion guide may have succeeded in substituting curiosity for indifference in some cases, while the obligation to attend 'educative' school trips in the middle of the summer holidays must have been resented by more than a few pupils. Yet, if the affirmation of regional culture fell short of producing an army of local patriots, the salience of local memory was recognised by many inhabitants of small Russian towns. From the year that the town was founded, to the dates of local battles, to the lives and times of figures from local history, a shared corpus of

¹ 'Soviet traditions' comprised both secular rituals, such as the Komsomol wedding, which were intended to replace what were perceived to be anachronistic pre-revolutionary practices and the establishment of entirely new customs and norms of socialization, such as the festive consumption of Soviet champagne [Abashin 2011; Bogdanov 2011].

knowledge was established that served to reinforce the boundaries of communities through a collective understanding of the past and its role in contemporary life.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the number of visitors to local museums increased exponentially. At the Novgorod State Regional Museum, where attendance figures had grown by just 58,000 between 1940 and 1961 (from 82,000 to 140,000 a year), the number of visitors rose by a further 100,000 between 1961 and 1966 (to 240,000 in 1966), and increased by, on average, 70,000 visitors a year over the next twenty years (to reach 1,628,271 in 1986) [NGOM, *istoricheskaya spravka*; NGOM, op. 1, d. 407, l. 19; NGOM, op. 2, d. 602, l. 15; NGOM, op. 3, d. 1404, p. 1]. If Novgorod was something of an exception in this regard, given its privileged status of *muzei-zapovednik*, similar developments were in evidence in less prominent locations such as Pskov and Vologda. Visitors to the Pskov State Museum of History, Art, and Architecture increased fivefold between 1962 and 1970 (from 57,508 to 307,000), while attendees at the Vologda Regional *Kraevedenie* Museum grew at a slower, but nevertheless constant pace from 144,627 a year in 1961 to 401,885 in 1975 [GAPO, f. R-1855, op. 1, d. 164, l. 57; GAPO, f. R-1855, op. 1, d. 517, l. 1; VOKM, op. 1, d. 403, l. 14; ; VOKM, op. 1, d. 768, l. 37]. Many of these visitors took part in excursions, the number of which increased at a significantly quicker pace than the overall number of visitors to the museum over the same period, indicating a growing emphasis on organised rather than independent tourism



Fig. 3. Pioneers on an excursion around the Pskov *kraevedenie* museum, late-1950s

[see, for example, VOKM, op. 1, d. 403, l. 14; VOKM, op. 1, d. 599, l. 38; VOKM, op. 1, d. 679, l. 1–2].

Another consequence of the intensification of activity in local museums was the creation of a standardised vocabulary with which people could articulate their appreciation of local culture and traditions. Thus, while some comments from schoolchildren in the Vologda museum response book for 1961 appeared relatively unaffected ('We enjoyed the museum very much, but it was a shame that there were no guns') [VOKM, op. 1, d. 406, l. 10b.], others typified the overblown style and convoluted language of contemporary textbooks celebrating the national past. One comment from the students of school No. 32 in Vologda, which may have been dictated by a teacher, reflects the overly technical vocabulary and artificial euphoria of many entries of this kind: 'The museum is a cultural reserve! Walking through the rooms of the museum, we learned much about the history of Vologda, its record-breaking levels of production, and agricultural workers. We wish the museum the best of luck for the future!' [VOKM, op. 1, d. 406, l. 4]. The standardised nature of this genre of comment, while providing evidence of the capacity to engage with Soviet officialese, also offers an insight into writers' understanding of their discursive contexts. The association of local history with the goals of socialist construction — industrial productivity and agricultural toil — was clearly considered a prerequisite of public commentaries of this kind and one which was delivered with a degree of expertise.¹

The revival of *kraevedenie* work in the post-Stalin period stimulated greater historical consciousness among local communities. In the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, every town, village, settlement, school, club, and family became a prospective focus of scholarly research, every local object a potential museum exhibit, and every piece of information a possible historical fact. In letters to the Novgorod State Museum in 1960 and 1961, amateur historians from the region enquired into the historical origins of their particular settlements, the lives of local war heroes, the details of Novgorod's liberation from the German occupiers, and the history of local burial grounds [NGOM, op. 1, d. 398, l. 28–30b; NGOM, op. 1, d. 422, l. 7–8, 13, 14–15, and 33]. The museum provided detailed answers to each enquiry from its own archives, encouraging the efforts of the local population even when these were perceived to range into the realm of non-historical fantasy.

In response to a question from the schoolchildren at Yablonovsky school No. 8 in Novgorod in 1961 about the significance of a stone

¹ For a discussion of public commentary in Soviet Russia and its usefulness as a historical source see [Dobson 2008: 57–73].

with strange markings which was said to mark the spot of buried treasure, the museum offered the following response:

As far as the stories about buried treasure and pirates are concerned, this is a common phenomenon — there are similar legends attached to all mysterious places and things that are difficult to understand. That said, it is worth noting them down because they might be the source of some real historical information. [NGOM, op. 1, d. 422, l. 38–39].

This note explaining the difference between *real* historical study and mere fantasy highlights an important consequence of the state-sponsored emphasis on historical enquiry at a local level. As individuals became increasingly aware of their historical contexts, they also became more inclined to question established historical narratives and subtly to challenge the authority of the state to evaluate the past. From buried treasure to historic monuments, the relics of bygone times became a focus of political negotiation as local communities, empowered with knowledge of the local history, asserted their opinion about how the past ought to be represented in cultural institutions.¹ This tension could also be identified in relations between local and national cultural authorities, where the rhetorical commitment to the idea of national unity through cultural diversity was put to the test.²

In some cases, the ideological message of museum exhibitions was lost or ignored as visitors, particularly those from industrial towns of Russian East and neighboring socialist republics, interpreted the objects on display as evidence of the nation's genius rather than a manifestation of socialist ideals. A resident of the built-up city of Chelyabinsk in the Urals thus poured forth with patriotic enthusiasm for the exhibition of lace work held in Vologda in 1977: 'Thank you for the cordial welcome into the kingdom of lace. Your lace is simply beautiful. It is Russian! Many thanks to the organisers of the exhibition for bringing us such enjoyment!' [VOKM, op. 1, d. 863, l. 19ob.]. Russians from Baku, the capital of the Caucasian Republic of Azerbaijan, also expressed their appreciation for the preservation of Russian culture at the *Russian Samovar* exhibition in Vologda in 1975: 'We residents of the town of Baku were very interested to visit your 'Russian Samovar' exhibition. Many thanks for organising this

¹ For example, in a letter published in the *Novgorodskaya pravda* in 1967 one reader questioned the wisdom of the official logic directing the preservation of historic buildings in the Novgorod [Melomedov 1967: 4]. For a related discussion of the way that the 'historical turn' in late-Soviet culture challenged social cohesion see [Kozlov 2001: 577–600].

² A frequent source of conflict between cultural authorities at the center and in the North West region was the ownership of local icons, a number of which — to the chagrin of the local cultural authorities — were taken to Leningrad and Moscow for restoration and never returned [GAPO, f. R-1855, op. 1, d. 157, l. 23].

display of Russian heritage. Thank you for not forgetting about Russian history, about the everyday life of the Russian people. For us Russians living in the Caucasus, it's a particular pleasure'. [VOKM, op. 1, d. 826, l. 29]. The resonance of these exhibitions appeared to be particularly rich for Russians who considered themselves estranged from an imagined national homeland, culturally stranded in industrial megalopolises or foreign lands.



Fig. 4. A samovar from the *Russian Samovar* exhibition in Vologda in 1975

At the same time, exhibitions of local traditions were celebrated for their contribution to national culture in the comments of Russian visitors from the historic heartland of the country. One engineer from the medieval city of Perm' thus praised the tradition of Vologda lace making as a craft inspired by the beauty of the Russian landscape: 'To create such beauty, you have to know all the beauty of nature [...] this is the great talent of the Russian women of Vologda' [VOKM, op. 1, d. 826, l. 19ob]. Another tourist from the historic town of Vladivostok in the Russian Far East waxed eulogistic about the monuments of the Novgorod State Museum: 'Thank you Mighty Rus' for bestowing such an inheritance upon us. And thank you, Russian people of Novgorod, for preserving it. I experienced complete peace of mind as I contemplated all of this, it is truly Russian — Ours' [NGOM, op. 2, d. 611, l. 29ob]. Comments such as these revealed the all-Soviet impact of the idea that the towns of the North West captured the essence of Russian culture, even if this idea was rendered in more explicitly nationalistic tones than the conservative discourse of Soviet patriotism would normally permit.

One might speculate that the distinction between 'insider' and 'outsider' interpretations of museum exhibitions is indicative of a more profound difference in the way that local identity was conceptualised at a grass-roots and national level. Local communities

were involved not only in the consumption of Soviet patriotic culture, but also in its performance to each other and to outsiders in various spheres and formats. School children, students, and factory workers, not to mention those working directly in the fields of culture and tourism were required to engage with and reproduce the ideological substance of local cultural work and, as a consequence, were better able to negotiate its logical contradictions and discursive ambiguities than the relatively unpractised visitors to the towns from other Russian regions. While saying little about whether local communities actually endorsed the priorities of socialist construction, this situation nevertheless reflected the greater degree of discursive proficiency, that is, the ability to reproduce the 'official script' in the necessary public forums, at the regional level.

Patriotic Culture at the Centre and Periphery

How do the developments detailed above contribute to our understanding of the 'Russian revival' in the post-Stalin period? To what extent was the strengthening of local identity at this time a reflection of the growth in national consciousness in the country as a whole? A number of scholars have pointed to an upsurge in national consciousness in the post-1953 period, arguing, in particular, for the existence of a culturally conservative national intelligentsia that cohered around a number of prominent Soviet literary journals and spheres of semi-political activity [Cf. Brudny 1998; Dunlop 1983; Duncan 2000: 62–82; Hosking 2006; Kozlov 2001: 577–600; Mitrokhin 2003]. The role of the Party in this 'Russian revival' has been interpreted variously, as both an 'enabler' of limited cultural nationalism in the name of political stability [Brudny, 1998], and as a the hub for a cogent and committed nationalist 'Russian party' set on asserting the primacy of Russian culture in the Soviet context [Mitrokhin 2003].

The ways in which these developments translated at the regional level, however, has been more difficult to determine. On the one hand, a process of 'localisation' has been identified, particularly in the historic centre of the country, where the experience of war and the challenges of post-war reconstruction provided a focus for local patriotic memory [Kelly 2009; Maddox 2008]. The All-Russian Society for the Preservation of Historical and Cultural Monuments, founded by Decision of the RSFSR Council of Ministers in 1965, played an important role in this regard, popularising the notion of cultural heritage and institutionalising the language of cultural preservation at a local level [Brudny 1998: 68–69]. On the other hand, the enhanced role of regional governors, whose authority was bolstered by the reorganisation of the political structure during the Khrushchev era, has been underlined as an important factor in the

rise of the Soviet regions [Lovell 2010: 191–2; Khlevniuk 2007]. As one historian points out, a regional first secretary was to a certain extent 'a viceroy in his own domain', although his longevity in office still depended on his adeptness at securing the approval of the central authorities in Moscow [Lovell 2010: 191–2].

Nevertheless, it would be misleading to suggest that the patriotic turn in regional culture was a reflection of the rise of nationalist sentiment in the country as a whole. A number of patrons of local culture existed in the regions, but these individuals did not enjoy the prominence or the political influence of the intellectuals at the forefront of the national revival in Leningrad and Moscow. While Novgorod, which benefitted from the patronage of the eminent cultural historian Dmitry Likhachev and the prominent academician Vladimir Yanin among others, should perhaps be considered apart in this regard, regional authorities were generally less tolerant of the criticisms of modernity voiced by members of the local elites.¹ Moreover, the existence of patrons of local culture and history within local administrations was less in evidence in the regions than at the political centers of the country. Khrushchev's efforts to culture a loyal regional elite whose political priorities were aligned with his own resulted rather in the proliferation of regional governors who were more concerned with urban modernisation and the the achievement of social parity than the preservation of local cultural heritage [Lovell 2010].

As I have argued in the preceding discussion, the 'massification' of *kraevedenie* in the post-Stalin period was a state-sponsored strategy to strengthen the legitimacy of the Soviet regime during a period of ideological restructuring. Local communities were exposed to visions of regional life, history, and traditions in an attempt to reinforce collective identity and to make communities aware of their own role as a cog in the larger machinery of the Soviet state. The objects displayed in exhibitions of local life — from traditional lacework to factory machinery — were worked into a teleological narrative of history, and their relevance to the ideals and values of socialism, even where this was at best tenuous, was underlined. Yet, museum workers were not always in control of the signifying functions of the objects in their displays, which for some visitors served to pique feelings of local particularism and Russian nationalism rather than encourage affinity with the goals of socialist construction.

One of the central contradictions of the *kraevedenie* revival was between its endorsement of conservative retrospectivism and its

¹ The case of the Pskov-born restorer and architectural historian Yury Spegalsky provides a vivid illustration of this situation. An impassioned local patriot and outspoken critic of the shortcomings of Soviet planning in the town, Spegalsky was excluded from his position at the Inspectorate for the Preservation of Monuments in 1937 and only permitted to return to Pskov to work as the town's principal architect thirty years later in 1968.

intolerance of Russian nationalism, in other words, between political populism and ideological rigor. The discursive overlap between these two, which increased and diminished at different times in the post-Stalin period, created a space of ambiguous intentionality, where the boundaries of permissible commentary were oblique and unstable. The dexterity with which individuals were able to negotiate this space depended on their knowledge of the rules that governed it, their mastery of the language of official patriotism and capacity to self-censor. While few were completely fluent in the rhetoric of Soviet patriotism, many local inhabitants exhibited a rudimentary understanding of the expressive and linguistic exigencies of the genre.

Looking at the Russian revival 'from the ground' provides an important dimension to our understanding of political changes in the late-Soviet era. The popularisation of local memory in the post-1953 period, while being driven by the political centre and intended to underpin the authority of the Soviet regime, nevertheless resulted in the strengthening of local identity and a sense of cultural distinctness in regions. The official efforts to stimulate patriotism through the commemoration of local history and culture in state institutions became part of the lived experience of Soviet rule, reinforcing community boundaries through acts of collective performance and cultural consumption. During the *perestroika* years and in the post-Soviet period, when the centralising structures of power were partially rolled back, the consequences of this process became more obvious. Drawing on the symbolic vocabulary of local patriotism established during the late-Soviet period, regional elites were able to capitalise on feelings of local specificity, leading to a process of political and cultural regionalisation that departed significantly from visions of a 'United Russia'.

References

- Abashin S. 'Paradoksy sovetskoi traditsii: komsomolskaya svadba v Srednei Azii' [The Paradoxes of Soviet Traditions: The *komsomol* Wedding in Central Asia], unpublished conference paper presented at the conference *Sovetskie traditsii: Stanovlenie i transformatsii* [Soviet Traditions: Formation and Transformation], European University at St Petersburg, 18–19 February 2011.
- Bocharov G., Vygodov V. *Vologda, Kirillov, Feropontovo, Belozersk*. M.: Iskusstvo, 1969.
- Bogdanov K. 'Sovetskoe shampanskoe: prazdnichnaya istoriya' [Soviet Champagne: A Festival Narrative] // *Antropologicheskii forum*. 2012. No. 16. Pp. 367–78.
- Brudny Y. M., *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953–1991*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Confino A. *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871–1918*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

- Dobson M. 'Letters' // *Reading Primary Sources of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History* / Ed. by Dobson M., Ziemann B. London: Routledge, 2008. Pp. 57–73.
- Dunlop J. B., *The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Goluzov A. 'V muzei prishli rabochie...' ['Workers Visit the Museum...'] // *Pskovskaya pravda*. 6 February 1961. P. 4.
- Hosking G. *Rulers and Victims: The Russians in the Soviet Union*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of University of Harvard Press, 2006.
- Johnson E. D. *How St Petersburg Learned to Study Itself: The Russian Idea of Kraevedenie*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2006.
- Kelly C. "'Ispravlyat' li istoriyu?" Spory ob okhrane pamyatnikov v Leningrade 1962–1990' ['Are We to "Correct" History?' Debates on the Preservation of Monuments in Leningrad, 1962–1990] // *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*. 2009. No. 64/2 <<http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2009/2/kk7.html>>. [Last accessed: 27 December 2010].
- Khlevniuk O. V. 'Regionalnaya vlast v SSSR v 1953-kontse 1950-kh godov: Ustoichivost i konflikty' [Regional Authority in the USSR from 1953 to the End of the 1950s: Stability and Conflict] // *Otechestvennaya istoriya*. 2007. No. 3. Pp. 31–50.
- Kozlov D. 'The Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture: Retrospectivism, Factography, Doubt, 1953–91' // *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2000. Vol. 2. No. 3. Pp. 577–600.
- 'Kraevedenie' // *Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya* <<http://bse.sci-lib.com/article065588.html>>. [Last accessed: 10 January 2011].
- Levine P. *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archeologists in Victorian England, 1836–1886*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Likhachev D. S. 'Pamyatniki kultury — vsenarodnoe dostoyanie' [Cultural Monuments — the Property of the Entire Nation'] // *Istoriya SSSR*. 1961. No. 3. Pp. 3–12.
- _____, *Russkaya kultura* [Russian Culture]. M.: Iskusstvo, 2000.
- Lovell S. *The Shadow of War: Russia and the USSR, 1941-present*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- Maddox S. 'Healing the Wounds: Commemorations, Myths, and the Restoration of Leningrad's Imperial Heritage, 1941–1950'. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 2008.
- Melnikova E. 'Malenkii gorod i ego litso: institucionalizatsiya kraevedeniya v SSSR vo vtoroi polovine XX v.' [The Small Town and its Character: the Institutionalisation of *kraevedenie* in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century]. Unpublished seminar paper presented at the European University, St Petersburg, 8 June 2011.
- Melomedov G. 'O gorode moem rodnom' [My Home Town] // *Novgorodskaya pravda*. 6 January 1967. P. 4.
- Mitrokhin N. *Russkaya Partiya: Dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR 1953–1985 gody* [The Russian Party: The Russian Nationalist

Movement in the USSR, 1953–1985]. M.: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003.

Shchepanskaya T. Contribution to ‘Forum o forume (ili o sostoyanii diskussionnogo polya nauki)’ [‘Forum on forums (or on the state of the discursive field of scholarship)’] // *Antropologicheskii forum*. 2009. No. 10. Pp. 161–8.

Smith S. ‘The Creation of the Vladimir-Suzdal Museum-Reserve: Preservation for a National Audience’, unpublished conference paper presented at the Annual Convention for the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies Annual Conference, Los Angeles, California, 18–21 November 2010.

Soloukhin V. ‘Chernye doski’ [‘Black Boards’] // *Slavyanskaya tetrad*. M.: Sovetskaya Rossiya, 1972. Pp. 155–9.

Widdis E. *Visions of a New Land: Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second World War*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

Yunyev I. S. *Kraevedenie i turizm [Kraevedenie and Tourism]*. M.: Znanie, 1974.

Archival Sources:

Archival materials from the Novgorodskii gosudarstvennyi obyedinennyi muzei-zapovednik [United Novgorod State Museum Reserve] (NGOM), Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Novgorodskoi oblasti [Novgorod Regional State Archive] (GANO), Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii Pskova [State Archive of Contemporary History of Pskov] (GANIP), Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Pskovskoi oblasti [Pskov Regional State Archive] (GAPO), Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Vologodskoi oblasti [Vologda Regional State Archive] (GAVO), Vologodskii oblast’noi kraevedcheskii muzei [Vologda Regional Museum of *Kraevedenie*] (VOKM) are referred to by their abbreviated titles throughout.