

Flexible Socialism of the Brezhnev era: People, institutions, and emotions in the closed city of Severodvinsk

The story of the closed city of Severodvinsk, the Soviet centre of nuclear submarine construction, makes an insightful case for deepening our understanding of late Soviet society.

A product of Stalinist industrialization, the city was founded in 1936 as a construction site of a big shipbuilding enterprise on the White Sea coast and built by GULag prisoners. During World War II it was one of the main seaports to receive the lend-lease deliveries, and, given that fact, experienced a strong impact of Western leisure culture. After the war, the presence of foreigners was radically eliminated. For since the mid-1950s, Severodvinsk's main shipbuilding plant "Sevmash" began to produce nuclear submarines and the following closure of the city for both foreign and Soviet visitors in 1972 led to a higher degree of isolation than in other cities. With other urban population. Simultaneously, the closure of the city allowed to allocate and to channel immense resources. While in other areas of the Soviet Union a gradual slowdown of economic development became visible, this was not the case in Severodvinsk. Especially during the 1970s and the early 1980s the city boomed, assuring its residents of a higher standard of living than enjoyed by surrounding areas.

The development of Severodvinsk epitomized the technocratic and social utopia of late Socialism as the last stage of Soviet industrial modernity.

The study will unfold the specific social texture of the tight city community of Severodvinsk bound by privilege and state control with the analysis of everyday interaction within city institutions such as the submarine construction plant "Sevmash", the local newspaper "The Worker of the North", the local history museum, the Severodvinsk drama theatre, the higher education school, the Palace of Culture, and the restaurant "The Wave".

By focusing on everyday situations within these structures such as a party meetings, company outings or the organization of a state holiday I will showcase such general processes as urbanisation, technisation of everyday or privatisation and localisation of Soviet symbols and rituals. With the special focus on articulation of emotions, the

aim is to show how Soviet citizens did interact with institutions while generating new meanings to Soviet values and structures and simultaneously eroding them.

The study of Severodvinsk will show how complex and diverse citizens' responses to social change during the last Soviet decades were as to be pressed into a firm concept of a submissive "Homo Sovieticus". Further it will enhance our understanding of Soviet structures and institutions, challenging the traditional narrative of its "stagnation" and "immutability". Finally, the study will address the general issue of dynamics that led to the transformation and dissolution of the Soviet society and contextualise this process within Eastern and Western understandings of modernity.