

СОВРЕМЕННЫЙ СИБИРСКИЙ ГОРОД

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Branding Local Towns in Post-Soviet Russia through Reinventing Local Symbols

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Abstract. Authorities of post-Soviet cities have redefined local identities by replacing symbols of industrialisation achievement with those of the pre-revolutionary times. One can understand such initiatives as a denial of the negative legacy of a national project driven by the central government. After the demise of the centralised system in the 1990s, local authorities began to define their identities in their own way, using their historical experiences and traditions. The local city authorities' restoration of pre-revolutionary symbols in coats-of-arms was a post-Soviet “invention of tradition” and a formation of new local identities reflecting post-Soviet values.

Keywords: coats-of-arms, local identities, local symbols, Soviet industrialisation, post-Soviet deindustrialisation.

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INTRODUCTION

During the last 25 years since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, local Russian cities and towns have made great efforts in redefining their local identities. They have “created” — in fact, “rediscovered” in many cases — new local symbols because post-Soviet changes in political, economic, and social conditions have compelled local authorities to redefine their local symbols, and furthermore, even their local identities. During the Soviet period, the central and local governments and the Communist party made great efforts to instil Soviet ideology and values throughout the country in a unifying way. As a result, many local towns and cities came to have similarities in terms of their local symbols and identities. For example, each town had streets named after Lenin, Karl Marx, or Engels, and each town had the same central square with a Lenin statue in the centre.

However, such universality and similarities — based on Soviet socialist ideology — among local towns and cities came to be undermined significantly after the Soviet system collapsed in 1991.

During the 1990s, the symbols of the Soviet era disappeared from official emblems of towns as many local authorities replaced municipal symbols with pre-revolutionary symbols. Some post-Soviet changes compelled local elites and authorities to change municipal symbols as they redefined their local identities. Above all, both state and society during the post-Soviet era came to consider many aspects of Soviet practices and legacies in a very negative way. One of the most prominent branding strategies of local towns and cities in the post-Soviet era is to remove Soviet symbols of industrialisation while restoring pre-revolutionary symbols, specifically in the coats-of-arms of their towns and cities.

Changing the social and political atmosphere toward the legacy of the Soviet industrialisation is what encouraged local authorities to change municipal emblems. During the years of *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the local intellectuals and elites indeed began to re-evaluate the Soviet achievement, especially that of the Soviet industrialisation. Paying more attention to the quality of life and living conditions, regional mass media exposed the idiocy of the Soviet industrial policy and its ill effects, such as air and water pollution and other environmental destruction, as well as a poor welfare system [14]. The regional mass media and public opinion often criticised Soviet policy that put top priority on industrial development at the expense of quality of human life [16]. Recognising the seriousness of environmental problems, the post-Soviet central government initiated legal regulations starting in the early 1990s in order to address these problems [22]. Such action implies that immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, both central and local authorities considered the legacy of the Soviet industrialisation from a negative perspective rather than a positive one.

Furthermore, during the 1990s, regional authorities came to have more autonomous power in selecting, developing, and “branding” local symbols, as central authorities significantly lessened their control over building local identity. During the Soviet period, the central authorities did not allow local city authorities to use monarchical and religious images and symbols, such as a crown and a cross, in city emblems [12]. Moreover, the Soviet authorities criticised the “emblems of capitalist countries” that contained symbols such as a cannon, roaring lion, leopard, panther, axe, spear, sword, or rifle, by regarding those items as representations of *violence, inclemency, and deceit* [19]. Today, despite the fact that the local authorities should still obtain authorisation from an organisation of the central authorities — such as the Russian Heraldic Committee under the Presidential Office — in order to use their emblems [4], the central government has not imposed unifying regulations on local towns and cities as they did during the Soviet period. In these post-Soviet circumstances, local authorities have begun to redesign their Soviet style coats-of-arms.

Several works, which examine local initiatives in the branding process of regional cities, help us to understand the emergence of both new post-Soviet local symbols and identities [3, 18, 26]. Few scholars, however, have tried to explicate the development of changes in post-Soviet cities coats-of-arms and emblems. Employing local cities’ coats-of-arms and emblems as analytic lenses to better observe the post-Soviet local identities, I will thus examine changes in local symbols and cities’ coats-of-arms during the 1990s and early 2000s. In doing so, this study will explore the way that post-Soviet local authorities have reinvented local symbols and identities.

SOVIET CITIES’ COATS-OF-ARMS: SYMBOLS OF INDUSTRIALISATION AS KEY ELEMENTS

During the Soviet period, more than 100 cities had their own coats-of-arms, while many more cities had only had unofficial emblems and city symbols. One can categorise those coats-of-arms and emblems into three groups: 1) those using pre-revolutionary compositions 2) those with both pre-revolutionary and Soviet symbols 3) those only with Soviet symbols [19]. Many Soviet emblems indeed fall into the second and third categories as they contain industrial enterprises, industrial products, and natural resources as symbols that represented the towns and cities.

Local Soviet authorities frequently portrayed their region by emphasising the region’s industrial potential because industrialisation was one of the key values and goals that the Soviet leadership had pursued since the early years of the Soviet state, especially from the 1930s. Thus, one can frequently find emblems of local and regional towns that include symbols of industrialisation, such as cogwheels, machinery, or an industrial complex. For example, the coat-of-arms of Chelyabinsk during the Soviet period includes a tractor and factories, as well as an electricity tower. The other Soviet coat-of-arms of the city also shows a huge cogwheel and bucket used at metal works (Fig. 1). These images indicate that during the Soviet period, the city authorities of Chelyabinsk selected industrial facilities such as the Chelyabinsk Tractor Factory (*Chelabinskiy traktorny zavod, ChTZ*) and the Che-

lyabinsk Metallurgical Plant (*Chelyabinskiy metal-lurgicheskiy kombinat*, ChMK) as symbols to represent their city. Likewise, the Soviet coat-of-arms of Sverdlovsk (today's Yekaterinburg), the administrative centre of the Sverdlovsk Region, includes a cogwheel in its centre. The cogwheel certainly represented the Uralmash, a heavy machine production factory (Fig. 2) [27, p. 149, 151]. In addition, the coat-of-arms of Neryungry, a mining town in the Republic of Sakha, also has symbols of similar industry: it shows a huge dump truck carrying a full load of coal on the left side of the emblem, while a freight-cart loaded with coal is on the right. Moreover, the emblem of Neryungry, created in 1984, like other city emblems of the Soviet period has a huge cogwheel in the centre behind the traditional image of three tethering posts (Fig. 3) [10]. Many emblems of other less industrialised cities, such as Lipetsk, were the same. They all included cogwheels in their cities' coats-of-arms.

It indeed makes sense that the authorities of Chelyabinsk and Sverdlovsk used industrial facilities as symbols to represent their cities because these cities were well-known industrial centres that produced metal products, machinery production, or coal. During the Soviet period, however, not only smaller towns but also those less regarded as industrialised centres designated industrial artifacts or facilities as their emblems. This pattern indicates that at that time, industrialisation was indeed a "national ideology" and

value that even authorities of small rural towns had to internalise and pursue. For example, in 1983 the authorities of Shadrinsk, a rural town of the Kurgan Region with a total population of 84,000, embraced an emblem adorned with a cogwheel (Fig. 4), despite the fact that the town manufactured farming tools. Likewise, in 1967 the authorities of Troitsk, a small town in the Chelyabinsk Region with a total population of 86,000 that had a newly built power station after World War II, adopted a coat-of-arms that brandished a part of a cogwheel and a symbol of electricity (Fig. 5) [28]. In addition, regional cities that were not known as Soviet industrial hubs but best known as historical centre, such as Novgorod, also created their coats-of-arms to include cogwheels in the late 1960s (Fig. 6).

Although the industrial facilities in these small towns and cities were less impressive in terms of the size and reputation (when compared to those at the national level) the facilities often were nonetheless major industrial assets for those small towns and cities. Their emblems, therefore, imply that during the Soviet period, even those local authorities of less industrialised towns and cities wanted to prove their industrial potential by including symbols of industrialisation in their coats-of-arms. For them, it was a way of creating a local identity for residents, on the one hand, and a strategy that showed that the local authorities were faithfully following the national goal, on the other hand.

Fig. 1. Chelyabinsk

Рис. 1. Челябинск



Soviet period

Source: [9]

Источник: [9]

Fig. 2. Sverdlovsk

Рис. 2. Свердловск



1973

Source: [13]

Источник: [13]

**POST-SOVIET CITIES' COAT OF ARMS:
DE-INDUSTRIALISATION
AND RESTORATION
OF PRE-REVOLUTIONARY SYMBOLS**

This strategy that local authorities used to promote the industrial potential of their towns and cities through emblems eventually changed after the Soviet Union collapsed. As the mass media and local elites de-mystified the Soviet achievement of industrialisation, the local authorities began to remove the Soviet

legacy in the official rhetoric, discourse, and symbols, too. Consequently, from the mid-1990s, local governments of even major industrial centres of the former Soviet Union began to create new emblems for their towns and cities either by removing cogwheels and other symbols of industrialisation or by replacing Soviet emblems with pre-revolutionary symbols. Authorities of some cities that did not have pre-revolutionary coats-of-arms — due to the city being founded during the Soviet period — replaced indus-

Fig. 3. Neryungri
Рис. 3. Нерюнгри



1984

Source: [10]
Источник: [10]

Fig. 4. Shadrinsk
Рис. 4. Шадринск



1983

Source: [5]
Источник: [5]

Fig. 5. Troitsk
Рис. 5. Троицк



1967

Source: [8]
Источник: [8]

Fig. 6. Veliky Novgorod
Рис. 6. Великий Новгород



1969

Source: [6]
Источник: [6]

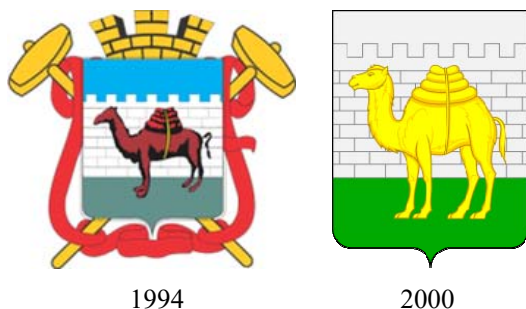
trial symbols with natural resources such as animals and fish, which are symbols that instead value the preservation of nature.

For example, in 1994, the Chelyabinsk city authorities introduced a new official emblem that placed a large camel loaded with freight on its back. All images of tractors, power stations, and buckets of steelworks were removed. Six years later, the authorities presented an updated version of its emblem. This version does not have even two hammers, the pre-revolutionary signs of industrial centres, but it has maintained the camel loaded with freight (Fig. 7). The camel symbolises the rehabilitation of the pre-revolutionary role of the city as a centre of trade and commerce in the Southern Ural. The new coat-of-arm indicates that the local authorities “invented” new

post-Soviet symbols by adopting historical and traditional elements of the local city. Likewise, in 1998, the city of Yekaterinburg introduced its new coat-of-arms, which draws on pre-revolutionary images of the coat-of-arms created in 1783, and which had the “Soviet” cogwheel removed (Fig. 8). The city authorities of Neryungy, founded in the 1950s, also introduced a new coat-of-arms, in which a truck and a freight train fully loaded with coal were erased, while a large cogwheel in the background was replaced with five fish, representing the “universal renovation of nature” [7] (Fig. 9).

In this post-Soviet atmosphere of “de-industrialisation”, cities known as historical centres, such as (Veliky) Novgorod and relatively less-industrialised cities like Shadrinsk, Troitsk, Lipetsk, and Kirov,

Fig. 7. Chelyabinsk
Рис. 7. Челябинск



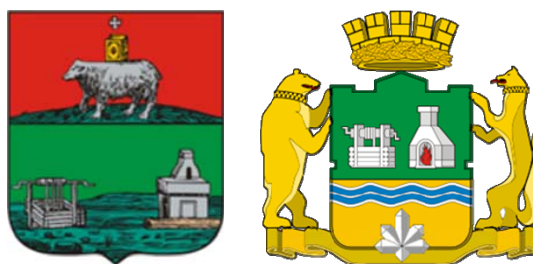
1994

2000

Source: [1]

Источник: [1]

Fig. 8. Yekaterinburg
Рис. 8. Екатеринбург



1783

1998

Source: [20]

Источник: [20]

Fig. 9. Neryungri
Рис. 9. Нерюнгри

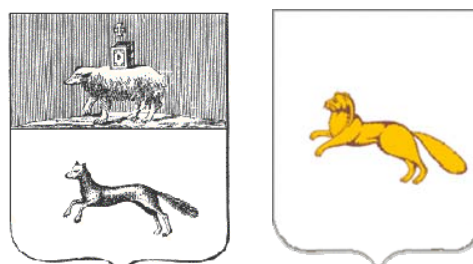


2003

Source: [10]

Источник: [10]

Fig. 10. Shadrinsk
Рис. 10. Шадринск



1783

1999

Source: [11]

Источник: [11]

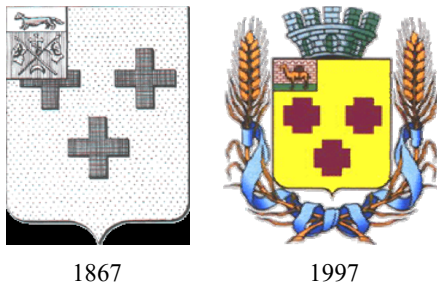
changed their coats-of-arms. In 1999, the city дума of Shadrinsk presented a new coat-of-arms, showing a running marten that was a part of the images of the original coat-of-arms introduced in 1783 (Fig. 10). In 1997, the city дума of Troitsk also introduced a new coat-of-arms partly restored from the 19th century original (Fig. 11), while those of Lipetsk, Kirov, and Veliky Novgorod rehabilitated symbols used in original coats-of-arms presented in 1781 during the reign of Yekaterina II (Figs. 12-14).

The restoration of the pre-revolutionary symbols in the coats-of-arms of these cities during the first decade of the post-Soviet era implies that the Soviet legacy and the failed Soviet policy — which heavily prioritised industrialisation — have been both denied and abandoned by city authorities and residents. During the post-Soviet transitional period to a market econo-

my, many factories and industrial companies indeed suffered from the reorganisation of the economic and industrial structure. For example, the Chelyabinsk Tractor Factory, which was a major enterprise sustaining the city’s economy during the Soviet period, went bankrupt in 1997 and faced a crisis when it was dismantled in parts and sold [21; 27, p. 149-150]. In this situation, many local authorities and elites began to look back to their pre-revolutionary traditions and histories to redefine their local identities.

In addition to rehabilitation of pre-revolutionary coats-of-arms, some industrial cities even restored their pre-revolutionary symbols in public spheres. In 2000, the city administration of Chelyabinsk decided to build a statue of a camel, a symbol of trade during the pre-revolutionary era [2]. In 2004, the local authorities eventually built the camel statue on Kirov Street, which

Fig. 11. Troitsk
Рис. 11. Троицк



1867

1997

Source: [8]
Источник: [8]

Fig. 12. Lipetsk
Рис. 12. Липецк



1781

1968

1996

Source: [17]
Источник: [17]

Fig. 13. Kirov
Рис. 13. Киров



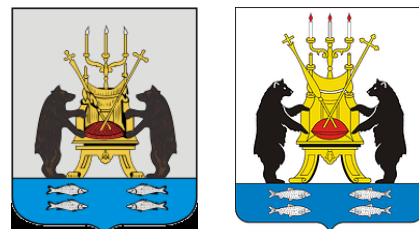
1781

1969

1995

Source: [23]
Источник: [23]

Fig. 14. Veliky Novgorod
Рис. 14. Великий Новгород



1781

1991

Source: [6]
Источник: [6]

was a trade and commerce centre that was crowded with merchants during the pre-revolutionary era [15]. In terms of its size, the statue of the camel is not like either the statue of a Soviet tank, representing the city's main commodity during the Soviet period, or the statue of Lenin, built on the city's major squares. While the statues of the tank and Lenin are huge and put on tall pedestals, the city authorities decided to place a life-sized statue of a camel with no pedestal, so that the local residents and children could freely approach, touch, and take pictures with it. The statue of the camel is indeed a "third space" where a real and imagined space coexisted [24, p. 6]. In other words, the statue of a camel as a "real space" provides an "imagined space" where city residents can internalise the camel as a symbol of their hometown while taking a rest or taking pictures around the statue. Certainly, in this sense, one can consider the city authorities' decisions to rehabilitate pre-revolutionary symbols as a new post-Soviet strategy of "branding" their cities. Through this procedure of branding their city, local residents can have a chance to develop their own local identity.

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CONCLUSION

The post-Soviet regional cities' authorities redefined local identities by replacing symbols representing achievement of industrialisation with the symbols from pre-revolutionary times. One can understand the local initiative as a denial of the negative legacy of a national project driven by the central government. After the demise of the centralised system in the 1990s, the local authorities began to define their local identities in their own way using their own historical experiences and traditions. The local city authorities' restoration of pre-revolutionary symbols in coats-of-arms was a post-Soviet "invention of tradition" and formation of new local identities reflecting post-Soviet values.

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Создание новой символики городов постсоветской России путем пересмотра существующих местных символов

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Аннотация. Власти постсоветских городов переопределили местную идентичность, заменив символы достижений индустриализации дореволюционными. Можно понять такие инициативы как отказ от негативного наследия национального проекта под управлением централизованного правительства. После распада старой системы в 1990-х гг. местные власти начали определять свою идентичность по-своему, используя местный исторический опыт и традиции. Реконструкция дореволюционной символики местных органов власти в гербах представляет собой постсоветское «изобретение традиции» и формирование новых местных идентичностей, отражающих постсоветские ценности.

Ключевые слова: герб, местные идентичности, местные символы, советская индустриализация, постсоветская деиндустриализация.

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