National Monumentalization and the Politics of Scale: The Resurrections of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow

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This paper analyzes the link between the changing geographical scale of dominant ideologies in Russian society and the architectural scales of different versions of the preeminent national monument, the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. The history of this process of national monumentalization in Russia is profiled by focusing on mutual influences between processes at these two scales, and the interplay between the state, society, and the Russian Orthodox Church. Within the context of the new Cathedral, ongoing but nevertheless underestimated pre-Soviet and post-Soviet antireligious practices are revealed through an analysis of the politics of scale that shaped the monument's meanings at different historical periods. Thus, the paper also attempts to contribute to the understanding of the importance of scale in politicogeographical studies. Key Words: Russia, Soviet Union, post-Soviet politics, Moscow, the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, Russian Orthodox Church, geographical scale, national monuments.

I am sure that no church was closed without God's will. ... Certainly, we feel pity for the Cathedral of Christ the Savior which was demolished. Yet we understand that there was something in our Christian life that allowed it to be ruined (f. Alexandr Mert, prominent Russian Orthodox priest, in Krotov 1995: 21–22).

An visible phenomenon has altered the cityscape of Moscow. In the very heart of the city, two blocks southwest of the Kremlin (Figure 1), on a high curved bank of the Moscow River, a 103-m-high church has been reconstructed in only a year (Figure 2). Officially opened in September 1997, the Cathedral of Christ the Savior (hereafter the Cathedral) two years later remained only partially accessible to the public due to continuing interior work, yet the Cathedral’s immense scale already had established its presence in the cityscape.

As with many preeminent national monuments, scale has always been an essential element of the Cathedral’s story (Table 1). The initial plan, later abandoned, was to create the world’s largest church to commemorate victory in the 1812 war with Napoleon. As eventually constructed over several decades (1831–1881), the first Cathedral on this site was Russia’s largest church. This building was demolished by the Bolsheviks in 1931 to clear space for a new monument, the 415-m Palace of the Soviets, but this structure was never completed, and the foundation pit later became one of the world’s largest outdoor swimming pools (1960–1993). In recent years, this pit has become, arguably, Russia’s most famous geographical symbol for the failed Communist endeavor. The new Cathedral has replaced the pit.

This architectural reversion corresponds to the intended symbolism of the project. The new Cathedral is publicized as a reversal of the Communist practice of eradicating religion (and traditional national consciousness in general) through such place-specific actions as the nationalization, closure, demolition, and juridical transfers of churches (Sidorov 2000). Thus, the reemergent Cathedral is a powerful symbol of the presumed break with the Soviet past and the beginning of yet another epoch for Russian society.

One way to explain the remarkably changing forms of national monumentalization in this place is to look at the corresponding spatial and social changes of the nation. It is an irony of history (and geography) that, coincident with the Cathedral’s reconstruction, the territorial scale of the country it used to represent has shrunk...
Figure 1. Locations in contemporary Moscow of the areas discussed. Vitberg’s construction site, near modern Moscow State University: 2; the original Cathedral: 1, and its other proposed sites: 3, 4; The convent of Alexius the Man of God: 1, 5, 6; open-air swimming pool Moskva: 1; major contemporary cathedral construction projects: 1, 8.
dramatically. The Russian Empire as a cultural realm finally ceased to exist in 1991, with the dismantling of its territorial successor, the Soviet Union, and the formation of the independent Russian Federation and other republics. As will be shown, the Cathedral’s design, especially its architectural scale, reflects shifts in the scale of Russian national identity.

The social changes in the nation also affected the project that was to represent it. This paper treats nation as a three-fold, politico-socio-religious construct. In addition to considerations of the state and society, Russian national identity has been shaped by the Russian Orthodox Church (hereafter the Church) or, paradoxically, the rejection of it. For example, it was a common belief in the prerevolutionary Russian Empire that the key elements of the country’s identity were its Orthodox religion, its autocratic state system, and its distinctively unselfish compliant society. Russia was said to be “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality.” The absence of “and” between the last two words was not accidental: this formula reflected not so much a set of “ingredients” as their extreme interconnectedness. The key ingredients of Russian national identity were the tsarist state, the Russian Orthodox Church, and society. To convert to Orthodoxy meant to become Russian. As the history of the Cathedral attests, the relative importance of these three entities as well as their spatialities, were fluctuating. The interplay between the politically and spatially changing state, society, and Church can explain the often peculiar forms and ways of Russian national identification.

This paper has a threefold agenda. First, it examines the evolving process of national monumentalization as a result of conflicting political interaction and spatial noncorrespondence between the state, society, and Church. Their interplay in each historical period produced the different forms that the national monument took. The second goal is to demonstrate, within the context of the new Cathedral, that the underestimated pre-Soviet and post-Soviet practices of place manipulation are continuing. Third, by examining the politics of scale that shaped the monument’s meanings at different historical periods, including the current phase, the paper contributes to an understanding of the importance of scale in politico-geographical studies.

Following a conceptual introduction, the body of the paper is organized chronologically. The first chronological section describes five predecessors of the restored Cathedral: the first unrealized project, the convent of St. Alexius the Man of God in the area of the later Cathedral (Volkhonka); the Cathedral as originally built; the unfinished Stalin’s Palace of the Soviets; and the pit/swimming pool left after its failure. The second examines the current restoration of the Cathedral: the relative roles of society, the Church, and the state, the project’s scale and funding, public perceptions, and the meaning of the added underground basement. The conclusion discusses the role of geographical scale in the project and its implications for post-Soviet Russia.

Geographical Study of Religious/National Monuments

Many analysts have seen the current renaissance of the Russian Orthodox Church, after years of harsh Communist rule when literally
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Use</th>
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<tr>
<td>Convent of Alexius the Man of God</td>
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<td>Vitberg's cathedral</td>
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<td>Ton's cathedral</td>
<td>1831/1881–1931</td>
<td>Nicholas I</td>
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<td>Palace of the Soviets</td>
<td>1937–1941</td>
<td>Stalin (early)</td>
<td>Leader of the USSR</td>
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<td>Pit</td>
<td>1941–1960</td>
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<td>Open-air swimming pool Moscow</td>
<td>1960–1994</td>
<td>Khrushchev</td>
<td>Leader of the USSR</td>
<td>strong USSR</td>
<td>marginalized; subject to repressions</td>
<td>recreation completed</td>
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<td>Restored cathedral</td>
<td>1994/1997–present</td>
<td>Luzhkov</td>
<td>Mayor of Moscow</td>
<td>strong position of Moscow power group in post-Soviet Russia</td>
<td>formally independent; weakened by Soviet persecutions; depends on state support</td>
<td>main cathedral; historical memorial; headquarters of the Russian Orthodox Church; gathering/retail/parking</td>
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thousands of church buildings were closed, priests were killed or imprisoned, and the Church was brought close to extinction (Pospielovsky 1984; Davis 1995), as a sign of long-awaited religious freedom in the country (e.g., Hill 1991). Indeed, many nationalized churches were returned to believers, religious presses are now booming, and the denominational landscape is increasingly diversified. In this view, the restoration of the Cathedral, Russia’s preeminent Orthodox church, is a sign of the final dismantling of the antireligious Soviet system. At the same time, the Cathedral is a major national monument, and its reconstruction signifies the beginning of a new epoch in Russian history. This coupling of secular and Christian dimensions is very typical of Eastern Orthodoxy. From the very beginning, the Cathedral had a complicated double symbolism. It was built as a national war memorial, yet designed in religious form. The Russian Orthodox Church throughout its history has had very close ties with the state (e.g., Ware 1963): the Communist policies of manipulating religious monuments have roots in earlier tsarist practices.3

Outside Russia, geographers have examined the meaning of prominent monuments. Harvey (1979), for example, revealed the symbolism and politics involved in the construction of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Paris; Duncan (1990) studied the politics of landscape in the Kandyan kingdom; Feet (1996) explained the political significance of Daniel Shay’s Memorial in Petersham, Massachusetts; Loukaki (1997) contrasted interpretations of the Sacred Rock of the Acropolis; and Atkinson and Cosgrove (1998) examined various attempts by the Italian state to define national identity through the Vittorio Emanuele II Monument in Rome. These studies demonstrate that the construction of religious/national monuments typically involves political manipulations of their meanings.

The case of the new Cathedral is, however, unusual in three respects. First, this reconstruction, being a “second take,” self-consciously addresses the politics (i.e., the Soviet ideology) involved in a prominent landscape. At least superficially, the project is driven by critical and ethical motivations (to restore justice to the place). It will be argued here, however, that this process is only partially successful: not all historical injustices have been addressed, and some new ones have been added. Second, the Cathedral has been shaped by unusually dramatic sociospatial transformations of the state, society, and, especially, the Church. The result was that, in addition to the monument itself, the vacant space left after its demolition and the process of reconstruction are equally important for national identity. Third, while most monuments experience changes at different scales, the story of the Cathedral is unusually representative of the fact that scales themselves change, especially the national scale.

The traditional fixity of scale in human geography has been challenged recently by the so-called constructionist approach to scale advanced by Herod (1991, 1997), Smith (1992, 1993, 1994), Swyngedouw (1992), Meyer (1992), Jonas (1994), Leitner (1997), and Delaney and Leitner (1997). The common ground of this body of research is the assertion that geographic scale is socially constructed rather than ontologically predetermined, and that geographic scales are themselves implicated in the construction of social, economic, and political processes (Leitner 1997). The traditional understanding of scale as “neutral,” “objective,” and “fixed” is therefore challenged (Smith 1992; Agnew 1993; Agnew and Corbridge 1995), and there is a growing understanding that the concept is period-specific (Smith and Dennis 1987; Herod 1991) and political (Taylor 1982; Staeheli 1994). Some scholars have focused on examples of “jumping scales,” breaking imposed scales as part of social movements’ resistance to “scalar territoriality” (Smith 1992, 1993, 1994; Staeheli 1994; Miller 1994; Adams 1996). Since scale is socially produced, there is politics in its production (Herod 1991: 82), many facets of which are increasingly attracting the attention of scholars. For example, geographers have addressed the implications of a scale dissonance between globalized economic processes and the still primarily national forms of organization of political and social life (e.g., Cox 1997). Similarly, scholars have become more aware of cultural globalization and its discontents (e.g., Appadurai 1996), although the connection between political and cultural spheres in scalar processes needs more attention.

This paper studies mismatches in the extent of scales of the state, society, and the Church in the case of the Cathedral. For instance, the cultural and political domains of the Russian national state had a different territorial extent (e.g., European, Russian, international, local) in different historical periods, and the Cathedral’s evolving design reflects these shifts, despite be-
ing still formally considered as national monument. Initially a monument for the whole Russian Empire, the Cathedral reemerges today as a local endeavor. The effects of this “localization” of the national monument would arguably not be clear without incorporating the construction of scale into the analysis. Although nominally the intended scope of ideological influence (“ideological scale”) of the Russian state remained “national,” history shows that its effective borders have varied dramatically. The changing architectural scale of the “national” monument not only helps to reveal the significance of variations in ideological scale, it affects processes at the “national” scale, as has happened, for instance, in the current phase of the Cathedral’s reconstruction. By focusing on the link between the architectural scale of a monument and the ideological scale of the state, the following analysis of the Cathedral as monument also draws attention to themes that have been omitted from the current debates about geographical scale.

The Original Cathedral

The 1812 Patriotic War and Vitberg’s Cathedral

In the short night of June 12, 1812, troops of the world’s mightiest power of the time, Napoleon’s Europe, entered the territory of the Russian Empire without a formal proclamation of war and started a long march in a seemingly irrational direction. They were heading not, as one would expect, toward the splendid, Europeanized St. Petersburg, the official capital city of the Empire for the century since Peter the Great. Their goal, instead, was the old capital, the more Asiatic, unruly, and traditional city of Moscow. Napoleon explained his logic the following way: “If I occupy Kiev, I would embrace Russia’s legs, if I conquer St. Petersburg, I would grasp its head, but having taken Moscow I would strike its very heart” (Kirichenko 1992: 7).

The three-times smaller Russian army, scattered along the extensive western border of the empire, could not immediately consolidate forces and engage in a major fight with the invaders, so it instead allowed them to march into the seemingly endless interior of the country. One month after the invasion, in a manifesto to the nation, Tsar Alexander I had to appeal for popular support, although the formation of people’s militias and guerrilla warfare were nevertheless underway. Still, the boldness of the Tsar’s step cannot be minimized, for at that time, Russia was largely a feudal country. A similar bold step was Army Chief M. Kutuzov’s decision, after the exhausting battle of Borodino, not to fight further for Moscow but instead to keep consolidating the Russian army forces nearby. When in September, 1812, Napoleon entered undefended Moscow, most of its 270,000 residents had left the city. The capture of Moscow eventually turned into a failure for the victorious emperor: the army, demoralized by sacking, purposelessness, and drinking, was trapped in a desolate city almost completely surrounded by regular Russian troops and the people’s militia. In addition, Moscow was devastated by the greatest fire in its history, perhaps as a result of both guerrilla actions by remaining residents and the invaders’ barbarism. The fire ruined more than two-thirds of Moscow’s buildings, especially in the city center. A month after entering it, Napoleon had to leave Moscow, retreating along the only road not blocked by Russians. In 1813–1814, Russian troops liberated Europe from Napoleon and entered Paris.

All commentators, from the Tsar himself to Leo Tolstoy in his monumental novel War and Peace, agreed that the Russian success was largely a result of popular resistance. The name of the 1812 campaign, the Patriotic War, is thus very appropriate. Judging by the scale of general destruction, the role of civilian heroism, and the consequences for Russia’s national consciousness, the war could be compared to only one other milestone period in Russian and European history, the events following the Nazi invasion on the night of June 22, 1941, known in the former Soviet Union as the Great Patriotic War.

The first Patriotic War was also perceived as a holy war. The disaster of 1812 was considered by many in Russia not accidental. For the deeply religious majority of the country, the invasion was God’s punishment for Peter the Great’s policy of westernization in the eighteenth century, and for the consequent betrayal of national values, crystallized in Orthodoxy. Accordingly, the spectacular victory in the war also was largely received as divine salvation. In short, the victory was associated less with the state than with the people themselves and their religion. To immortalize both the nation’s “unprecedented zeal, loyalty to and love of the faith and Fatherland” and “to commemorate Our gratitude for God’s Prov-
idence" (Butorov 1992: 4), on Christmas Day 1813, Tsar Alexander I issued a decree to construct a cathedral-monument to Christ, the Savior of Russia. It is noteworthy that it was to be erected not in the official capital of the empire, but rather in Moscow, the traditional Orthodox core of society. Moscow sacrificed most for the victory, literally burning itself, and its postwar reconstruction was a major patriotic effort.

Although the winning project (selected in a competition in 1816) was never fully realized in its original form, the architectural competition was a critical first stage in the creation of this church-monument (Figure 3). This project was designed by a young architect of Swedish Lutheran descent, Alexander Vitberg, a deeply religious idealist. Being close to Russian Free Mason circles (which, in the local context, meant being sympathetic to westernization), Vitberg intended to interpret the monument beyond “exclusively the canons of the Greek-Russian Church . . . since its very dedication to Christ shows its belonging to all Christianity” (Kirichenko 1992: 29). Vitberg’s understanding of Christianity was within the philosophical tradition of romanticism. His project emphasized freedom of personality and people as creators of history. Vitberg proposed commemorating the names of every dead soldier, which, in a serfdom-based class society, was a revolutionary idea. His project venerated the individual over the state.

It is also remarkable how little the winning project’s design and location in the city had to do with the nation. For instance, the project’s location on the Vorob’evy Hills, at that time, the extreme southwest margin of Moscow beyond the river (Figure 1), did not pretend to establish symbolic links with the historical center of Moscow or with the city as a whole. The location lay, instead, between the two roads Napoleon’s troops used to enter and leave the city (Kirichenko 1992: 33). Since most Muscovites were pedestrians and no bridge existed nearby at that time, the large, distant building would most likely have been occupied only a few times a year, as historian N. M. Karamzin and others feared (Kirichenko 1992: 43).

Architecturally, the project had few distinc-

tive Russian influences, because it combined elements of internationally popular classicism and romanticism (Figure 3). The architect himself summarized his ideas on the project: “[f]irst, its colossal scale should reflect Russia's grandeur, second, . . . it must have in character . . . [a] strictly original architectural style, third, its parts should reflect the spiritual idea of a living church—man in body, soul and spirit” (quoted in Kirichenko 1992: 29). Accordingly, ideas of the Trinity dominated the project, which consisted of three churches: an underground church dedicated to Christ's birth, a ground-level church to the Transfiguration, and the upper church to the Resurrection. This Trinitarian symbolism also was intended to emphasize an ecumenical, European meaning of the monument; the three main branches of Christianity would unite here (Sirotkin 1995).

The total projected height of the structure was 237 m, 170 of them above the ground. Further elevated by the hill on which it was to be built, this edifice would compete with St. Peter's in Rome. In short, the architectural scale of the project was to signify the spiritual leadership of Russia in the post-Napoleonic world. At the same time, it was perhaps the first attempt to build a national cathedral-monument: through the added functions of national museum and monument, the church expressed the new national values of the nineteenth century earlier than other architectural forms (Kirichenko 1992: 29). Vitberg was fascinated by the breadth of the idea of the cathedral.

Realization of the project began in 1817 with a foundation ceremony, which turned into popular festivity. By 1821 the Commission for the Cathedral’s Construction had acquired 11,275 serfs and started foundation work (Kirichenko 1992: 37). The sudden death of Alexander I in 1825 interrupted construction, which was finally discontinued three years later by the new tsar, Nicholas I, at least partly due to Vitberg's amateurish management and consequent financial corruption. Doubts also existed about the durability of such a large construction on the sloping terrain. Yet the primary reason for the failure of Vitberg's project was a profound ideological shift personified by the new tsar's perception that the cathedral-monument could be meaningful only if built according to national (traditional Russian) architectural forms (Kirichenko 1992: 38). This meant that the focus of the Cathedral's meaning should be directed to the Russian state rather than to the European world.

The winner of the second design competition, in 1829, was Konstantin Ton, who stood in direct opposition to Alexander Vitberg's amateurism, idealism, and cosmopolitanism. A pedantic architect, tough manager, and widely experienced builder, Ton was able to anticipate the new ideological hegemony determining the Cathedral's meaning. While Vitberg's project was influenced by international Greek and Roman classicism, Ton's inspiration came from Byzantium and the ancient Russian church tradition (Figure 4). Ton called his style “Byzantine, which has been related since ancient times to elements of our nationality” (Butorov 1992: 11), and these national architectural forms were to become dominant in his lifetime. But before we discuss these themes in some detail, it is important to look at the new location chosen for the Cathedral.

Locating the Cathedral, and the Convent of St. Alexius the Man of God

To stress its link with the state (as well as to the historical past), the new Cathedral was to be relocated in the center of the city, near the
Kremlin (Figure 1). Ton suggested sites already occupied by churches or monasteries, offering Nicholas I, besides Volkhonka, the place of the martyr Nikita’s church, on the Moscow River southeast of the Kremlin, or the monastery of Holy Week (Strastnoi) on modern Pushkin Square, northwest along Tverskaia Street (Figure 1) (Kirichenko 1992: 44). Ton’s persistence in recycling sites already occupied by churches was probably not a geographical attempt to stress continuity with the ancient past, but rather was a response to the fact that the center of Moscow was already built over. It was also important for him to ensure the perceptual linkage between the new cathedral and the Kremlin. In any event, the tsar chose Volkhonka, which required demolition of an important Orthodox church complex.

The Convent of St. Alexius the Man of God was the oldest of Moscow’s convents, founded around 1360 by the Metropolitan Alexii, initially on the site of an ancient church of Alexius the Man of God, slightly southwest of Volkhonka. The Metropolitan (formerly, the title for the head of the Russian Church) was canonized after his death and became a divine protector of both the convent and the city. After a disastrous fire in 1514, the convent was moved into the walled “White City” in Moscow’s southwestern area of Volkhonka, on one of the city’s seven historic hills.

The convent’s demolition to clear space for the Cathedral provides an example of pre-Soviet manipulation of sacred places. Despite the historical significance of its location, the convent was moved to Krasnoe Selo on the opposite, northeastern edge of the city in 1837. The removal of the convent entailed sacrifice of some of its place-attached religiogeographical meanings. The convent’s main Cathedral of the Transfiguration, built in 1634 by the first Romanov tsar, Mikhail Fedorovich, with its three-hipped roof design (Figure 5), was a rare and prominent monument of Russian seventeenth-century church architecture. The destruction of this and other convent buildings to clear a place for a new state monument injured public consciousness. According to persistent legend, the senior nun, offended by the demolition, pronounced a curse that nothing would stay firmly at this place. Soon thereafter, a worker who was removing the convent church’s crosses fell and died in front of a large crowd of onlookers (Butorov 1992: 9). The demolition represented the first major injustice in the history of the Cathedral, one which is acknowledged today by the Russian Orthodox Church’s executives: “[p]erhaps, in the good deed of the erection of the new Russian sacred place this was the main, spiritually never solved contradiction” (Moscow Patriarchate’s “Arkikhram” 1995: 122). In contrast, current Moscow city authorities engaged in reconstruction of the Cathedral prefer to minimize the importance of pre-Soviet manipulation practices.

The convent exemplifies the traditional universal-local domain of typical Orthodox churches. Unlike Vitberg’s cathedral, the convent of St. Alexius the Man of God had not only a universal appeal but also local significance for Moscow. The convent in Volkhonka embodied the idea of “Moscow as the Third Rome,” or the Orthodox capital of the world, after the fall of Byzantium in the fifteenth century. It was highly important for its connection to Moscow’s divine protector Metropolitan Alexii (Moscow Patriarchate’s “Arkikhram” 1995: 119). In short, the convent reflected what some observers described as the vagueness and weakness of the national consciousness of the Orthodox majority within the tsarist Russian Empire (Pospielovsky 1989): it was both local (provincial) and international (universal Christian). This spatiality...
of Russian identity was to change with the invented national tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Anderson 1983) and its propagation through national monumentalization. The role of the Cathedral in the latter should not be minimized.

Construction and Design of Ton’s Cathedral

Despite the persistent popular distrust caused by the 1837 demolition of the convent, the construction of Ton’s Cathedral began in 1838–1839. The building was finally freed from scaffoldings in 1858, and its scale became prominent in the cityscape. Construction was completed in 1882, and it was officially consecrated the following year. Thus, construction required about 45 years for completion. A persistent legend attributes this to the fact that the project was funded by the Russian people, and it took time to collect money in the vast country. In reality, although popular support of the project was strong, the expensive construction was mostly funded by the state, which altogether provided 15,123,163 rubles and 89 kopeks (Kirichenko 1992: 130).

The Cathedral’s final form in the 1890s (Figure 5) was smaller than Vitberg’s design, yet still enormous compared to the churches in the Kremlin, and it would tower over the surrounding five or six-story buildings erected in the nineteenth century (Figure 6). The superhuman scale of the building was its most visible feature, serving at the time of its completion as a monument to Nicholas I’s authoritarianism: the monstrous cubic shape of the church was not in keeping with Moscow’s traditionally modest scale (Smolkin 1994). This scalar arrogance of the building within its setting, the cost and length of construction, and the grandeur of its interior help account for why the Cathedral captured popular imagination.

The Cathedral was in the center of a square, allowing observers to appreciate such external features as its traditional white and golden colors and sculptural compositions. Their themes were in part determined by the direction of the

**Figure 6.** Cathedral of Christ the Savior on the eve of its demolition in 1931. Source: Khram Khrista Spasitelia 1993 (1891, 1918).
Cathedral’s façades. The sculpture of the main western façade symbolically depicted Russian troops under protection of heavenly forces. The southern façade, facing the direction of the decisive battles of 1812, depicted events of direct relevance to that war. The eastern façade, facing the Kremlin, showed Russian national saints-protectors of the country, while saints who spread Christianity were dominant in the northern façade (Kirichenko 1992: 74–75). The cathedral was an unprecedented synthesis of religious and national-historical themes, and of architecture, sculpture, and paintings.

The interior grandeur of the Cathedral was marked by an impressive iconostasis in the form of a chapel (Figure 7), the scale of which was comparable to that of the main Uspenskii Cathedral of the Kremlin. The most renowned Russian artists, mostly academicians, participated in painting the interior. The historical character of the Cathedral was reflected in the large number of paintings portraying lives and deeds of Russian saints (Kirichenko 1992: 100). Like the external sculpture, the internal paintings were thematized according to the direction of their walls. For example, since Christianity came to Russia from the south, the southern wall paintings depicted the events before and after Russia’s 988 conversion to Christianity (Kirichenko 1992: 122–23).

It is noteworthy that the Cathedral became the most popular church in Russia in the collective imagination, although, among the educated elite, there was strong criticism of Ton. As quoted in Butorov (1992: 12), for critic Vladimir Stasov, Ton’s projects were “drawings of a writer-clerk from talented pictures”; aesthete observers such as Igor Grabar saw in the Cathedral “an example of pseudo-national style” and the “beginning of the final vulgarization and barbarization of tastes”; poet Taras Shevchenko described the Cathedral as a “fat merchant’s wife in povoinik”; and Vitberg called it a “simple village church.” The building’s minor towers were judged too small and distant from the main one, as some modern critics have noted (Butorov 1992: 12).

In any event, it changed Russian architectural thinking. Eighteenth-century European influences were replaced by a new ideology of national regeneration, understood largely as a return to ancient Russian architecture. The new project fully embodied Nicholas I’s ideas of filling the historical gap created by Peter the Great’s reforms. In contrast to Vitberg’s design, Ton’s venerated the state rather than the individual: his project commemorated only the names of officers killed in the war.

It is important to stress that, contrary to common perception, the Cathedral was not the official church in the empire, nor was it the most expensive (the forty-year construction of 101.5-m St. Isaac cathedral in St. Petersburg cost 23 million rubles [Antonov and Kobak 1994: 105–6]), nor was it the only cathedral-monument to the Patriotic War (St. Virgin’s Kazan Icon [Kazanskii] cathedral in St. Petersburg is another major example). Even in Moscow, the most respected cathedral was the oldest, Dormition of St. Virgin (Uspenskii) cathedral of the Kremlin, where enthronement of patriarchs of the Church and tsars traditionally occurred. It was popular support that elevated the Cathedral to a unique position in Russian national consciousness. This same popularity, as will be shown, was the eventual reason for its demolition fifty years after its construction.

Figure 7. Interior of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. Late nineteenth-century Christmas postcard. Source: Kirichenko (1992: 178), used by permission.
Destruction of the Cathedral and the Palace of the Soviets

When Bolsheviks took power in October 1917, they immediately issued a series of decrees targeting the Russian Orthodox Church. Lenin’s decree of November 8, 1917, nationalizing all land, made it illegal for the Church or parish priests to own land. The decree of December 11 confiscated all of the Church’s educational institutions; those of December 17 and 18 denied the legality of Church marriages; that of January 16, 1918 expelled the clergy from the army forces, and that of January 20 canceled state subsidies to the Church. Finally, a decree published on January 23 separated Church and state and nationalized all Church property (Mitrofanov 1995: 5).

Although these legal provisions formally separated religious and civil matters, the state continued its assault on the Church. In 1922 the state staged a schism within the Church, transferring about seventy percent of all Orthodox churches, including the Cathedral, to the unpopular Renovationists. In a series of campaigns, the Communist state succeeded, by 1927, in demolishing, closing, or converting to other uses forty-eight percent of all prerevolutionary Orthodox church buildings in the territory of the former empire (Sidorov 2000). The majority of Orthodox priests were killed or imprisoned. In 1927, to save the Church from total extinction, Metropolitan Sergii signed a declaration of loyalty to the new Communist authorities, thus formally ending resistance. After this milestone event, the perceived threat of the Church as a rival to the state diminished in importance, and there was a concomitant decline in state support for the Renovationist schism, which became insignificant.

While other major cathedrals survived as museums, in the case of the Cathedral, the nun’s curse proved to be true. It met the same destiny as the earlier convent only forty-eight years after its consecration, for superficially similar reasons: the site was cleared for a different sort of “cathedral,” the Palace of the Soviets. A major puzzle is why the Cathedral was so special that its demolition was as important for the new Soviet national identity as the construction of the Palace itself. The victory of the new state over the Church as an institution did not bring about much change in the general religiosity of society. Some believers went into external or internal exile after 1927, forming the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and the Underground Catacomb Church. Others kept their religiosity alive through personal practice: twenty years after the revolution, the 1937 population census indicated that 42.3 percent of the population still considered themselves Orthodox (41,621,572 out of 98,411,132 respondents) (Vsesoiuznaia Perepis’ 1991, 106–7). The Communist authorities wanted therefore to strike into the very heart of Orthodox religiosity by demolishing what the people regarded as their main cathedral.

On the frosty morning of December 5, 1931, after several powerful explosions, the original Cathedral ceased to exist (Figure 8; details in Kozlov 1991). The most important sculptural ornaments and precious metals had been removed beforehand, and the marble exterior was preserved for new government buildings and the subway. The real treasure of the Cathedral shared the building’s fate, however: its wall paintings by Russia’s best nineteenth-century

Figure 8. Demolition of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, 1931, shown in two stills (A, B) from a documentary film by V. Mikosha. Source: Kirichenko (1992: 262), used by permission.
artists were destroyed. Tsarist place manipulation practices thus continued in the Soviet period. The emptied place was to be occupied by a new “cathedral,” which would also emphasize a new ideological scale for the state. Although, territorially, the Soviet Union looked like a reconstruction of the previous Russian Empire, it was intending to become a global union-state. A new ideological scale required a new monumentalizing embodiment.

The history of Stalin’s proposed Palace of the Soviets began, perhaps, on December 31, 1922, in the Bolshoi Opera Theater, at the congress announcing the foundation of the Soviet Union. Party leader Sergei Kirov suggested the construction of a building as a monument to the young country, which would accommodate the growing number of delegates joining the Union and serve as a symbol of Communist global hegemony (Palamarchuk 1994: 174). Thus, the scale of meaning of the Palace was to be global. In this sense, the Communist replacement for the Cathedral was a return to Vitberg’s project of global inclusiveness (although at the time of Vitberg, “global” meant merely a European scale).

Although the new state’s ideas of the Union’s prime monument exceeded those of the tsars, the Palace’s final design of the early 1930s shared a number of features with the original Cathedral (Figure 9). First, both buildings served the double purpose of gathering place and monument (see note 1). Second, the Palace continued the original Cathedral’s stress on immense architectural scale; it should not only dominate the city, but also become the highest building in the world (Figure 9): this monument, with Lenin’s statue on top, would outstrip the heights of the Empire State Building and the Eiffel Tower. Third, it was located on the same site as the Cathedral, and it was to change the dominant architectural style in the country by substituting a new international modernist architecture for the traditional Russian one. Construction of the Palace was delayed until 1937, after the debris had been removed and a foundation laid, and by 1939, the walls had been raised to a level slightly above the ground. The beginning of the second Patriotic War (World War II) in 1941 changed priorities, however, and its steel foundation was reclaimed for the war effort. With that, the hoped-for global hegemony it was to represent died as well.

Figure 9. Architect’s drawing of the Palace of the Soviets, topped by statue of Lenin (final design), never built. Sources: Scientific Publishing Institute of Pictorial Statistics (1938); the author’s compilation, based on Kondrat’ev (1995), and Kirichenko (1992: 235). Architectural scale of the proposed Palace is compared with the Empire State Building, New York; the Eiffel Tower, Paris; and the Cathedral of Christ the Savior.

Postwar Pit and the Swimming Pool

In the immediate postwar period, the ideological scale of the state nominally remained global, yet, unlike the prewar period, was directed primarily towards the Soviet Union itself. Limited by postwar shortages, the Iron Curtain, and a general loss of the revolutionary impetus of the early Soviet period, the state could only declare global intentions. The process of creating a national monument reflected this uncertainty. A new design competition for the Palace took place in 1957–1959, this time for the Vorob’evy Hills site, but eventually the entire project was dropped. The sacred place of Volkhonka was abandoned, as was the very idea of a “cathedral.” Some of the Palace’s architectural ideas were eventually used in the design of Moscow State University (MSU) (1947–49), successfully completed as the highest building in
the Soviet Union almost on the original proposed site of Vitberg's cathedral, the Vorob'evy Hills.

Although MSU was the last attempt to combine architectural, communal, and spiritual symbols in major building projects, the grand scale of meaning of major architectural projects still fascinated Soviet authorities in the postwar era. The "world's highest" construction, a TV tower, was built in one area of the city, and the party's new gathering place—the Palace of Congresses in the Kremlin—in another. Lacking both a spiritual dimension and a prominent location, the TV tower remained primarily a technical construction and a tourist site, while the Palace, which lacked conventional architectural value, was not a landmark. Eventually, the long-term construction and design of another war memorial, for the Great Patriotic War, on Poklonnaia Hill, also distracted attention away from Volkhonka.

Why did the place of Volkhonka lose its importance to the postwar state? First, perhaps, the rulers did not want to be associated with the unsuccessful construction of the Palace of the Soviets or, after Khrushchev, with Stalin himself. Second, as a new generation of Soviet people came of age, the urgency of fighting popular religiosity diminished, thereby reducing the need to replace the Cathedral. Finally, the new projects were very different from the Palace of the Soviets and the Cathedral, and required other locations.

The original foundation of the Palace of the Soviet—the "pit"—was satirized by Andrei Platonov, Russia's most prominent contemporary writer, in his novel of the same title. The timing of Platonov's writing is significant (Pavlovskii 1991). Written in late 1929 and early 1930, on the very eve of attempts to build the Palace of the Soviets, the novel describes construction of a pit for a giant building for a "new world" which was to replace the traditional city. The novel's pit is endless and seemingly purposeless, yet ever-accelerating because of random decisions to enlarge it so that the building would accommodate the growing number of ever-more contented future citizens. First published in Russia in 1987, Platonov's novel became a bestseller under perestroika. Thus, the place's very emptiness acquired a new meaning, as an influential geographic symbol for the failed Communist endeavor; a pit serving ironically as the "highest" and "biggest" achievement of the "new society."

In 1960 the pit was recycled as an outdoor steam-heated winter swimming pool, one of the world's largest, in the shape of a 100-m wide circle (Figure 10). The swimming pool, which continued to carry the popular name of the "pit," was closed in 1993 in anticipation of reconstructing the Cathedral. There was no support group for the popular pool, yet its sudden closure in 1993 was not universally welcomed (Kolpakov 1994b). For years, the pool was the largest in Europe and, as such, its scale of meaning was significant. In 1993, 207 Moscow churches were attended by 500,000 people, but, beginning in 1960, more than five million people used the pool annually (Baskov 1994). Only three other outdoor pools existed in Moscow, a city of nine million residents with mostly polluted rivers, and this was the only outdoor pool the public could easily use. Nevertheless, no attempts were made to discuss publicly the pool's destiny.

The Post-Soviet Cathedral

Public Perception of the Cathedral's Reconstruction

As soon as Gorbachev's new policy of openness in the late 1980s allowed some religious freedom, the idea of restoring the lost Cathedral began to gain popularity. Very much like the Cathedral itself and the empty pit left in its place, the idea was to reconstruct a new national-identity symbol. Three initial groups of supporters can be identified in the period before the reconstruction idea became widespread and was monopolized by the state.

The intelligentsia of the country was at the forefront. Using various media, prominent artists and writers criticized the Communist regime and campaigned for restoration of the Cathedral. The artist Seliverstov offered the most notable design (Figure 11). Arguing that exact reconstruction of the Cathedral would recall only one period of the place's history, he suggested an original way to invoke the past through the erection of a steel-contour outline of the lost building, with just the original chapel-altar inside. This inexpensive project had the advantage of restoring the architectural scale of the original Cathedral, arguably its most famous feature, and leaving empty space for broader interpretations that would also have allowed thousands to gather and pray (Palamarchuk 1994; Pozdniaev 1994). There also was a proposal to leave the site empty for occasional holographic restorations of the Cathedral (Opolznev 1994;
Vecherniaia Moskva (1994), so that an even greater number of people could gather there.

The second group interested in the Cathedral’s resurrection was the Russian Orthodox Church. Cautious too about simply replicating the lost monument, the Church planned to indirectly revive the idea of the Cathedral. During perestroika, to celebrate the 1988 millennium of the Russian conversion to Christianity, the state agreed to allow construction of a new Trinity Cathedral in Tsaritsyno (Figure 12). Designed as a reminder of the lost Cathedral, the project nevertheless was to signify the new policy of separation of Church and state, and therefore to be located not in the center but rather in the residential outskirts of the city (Figure 1). This project has not yet been realized because the Church has characteristically lacked sufficient resources.

What united these two groups was the shared belief that a mere replica of the Cathedral was not only unnecessary but also unwanted. They argued for reviving the spirit of the Cathedral rather than its physical restoration. In contrast, the third group, consisting of lay believers, argued for replacing the lost Cathedral, creating a parish community for this nonexistent church, and they began discrete fund raising in public places. Once reconstruction started and became politically important, this community was eventually dismissed by the Church.

Eventually, the local Moscow authorities monopolized decision-making. The Russian Ministry of Culture was totally ignored (Segodnia, 1994), and even the role of the Russian Orthodox Church was minimized. As in tsarist times, the Cathedral’s construction was paid for by the state, with the Church’s role being merely to receive the building and legitimize the work. The public was left to debate only the narrow topics of the Cathedral’s de facto reconstruction. There were several important omissions from the public discussions surrounding the project. First, the location of the Cathedral was not publicly discussed. The authorities rushed to capture the site of Volkhonka, even though other locations, such as the site of the Millennium Trinity cathedral in Tsaritsyno, were available. Second, interdenominational justice had been
dealt a blow by the privileged positioning of the Russian Orthodox Church. There are now forty-five different denominations in Moscow, half of which are popular enough to be considered major (Grigor’eva 1994), with several being historically significant. Third, the goal of this reconstruction was not debated but officially proclaimed: to break with the Soviet past, with its antireligious and antinational practices, and to reestablish connection with the lost cultural heritage of the country. Therefore, the campaign for the project highlights the faithfulness to the design of the demolished original Cathedral, symbolizing a supposed end to the manipulation of place. As will be argued below, however, manipulation persists despite the abolition of the pit, the most notorious of the Soviet symbols.

In addition, the scale and design of the reconstructed Cathedral were not publicly debated. While Seliverstov’s arch project and the Millennium Cathedral in Tsaritsyno responded to the growing criticism of “grand scale” architectural thinking, the state-led restoration was to continue the tsarist and Soviet tastes for grandiose structures (Malinin 1994, 1995). This continuation of past monumentalism not only would leave smaller, yet important churches neglected, but it would also prioritize size over symbolic significance (Smolkin 1996). Finally, it was argued that the urban space of Moscow had changed considerably since the construction of the first Cathedral, making questionable the appropriateness of the new Cathedral to its place (Shimanskii 1994b).

The interior of the original Cathedral was painted by the best Russian artists of that time, but with that artistic tradition interrupted, there is no one today capable of reproducing it (Krotov 1994). As a result of the high cost and rapid pace of the process, the Cathedral is being built of ferroconcrete, an unsuitable surface for such paintings. An additional internal facing of the concrete walls by some other material is required (Krolenko 1994). The use of cheap, brick-faced ferroconcrete walls, as well as structural changes made to accommodate modern conveniences,

Figure 11. A proposal for reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, not built. Artist Yu. I. Seliverstov. Source: Rodina (1995: 16).

Figure 12. Architect’s model of the Trinity Cathedral of the Millennium of the Orthodox Baptizing in Tsaritsyno, not yet built (photo by the author).
has caused criticism from the Church. The walls of the Cathedral will have elevators carrying spectators to a viewing platform and the belfry. As one commentator notes: “The pillars of the Cathedral, hollowed out by elevators, staircases and ventilation shafts, yet simulating massiveness and firmness [is] the start of the lie in the revival of churches, both in a constructive and spiritual sense. May God save us from that!” (Moscow Patriarchate’s “Arkhhram” 1995: 117).

Given the sad financial fate of the first Cathedral construction (and the secrecy behind the current one), the possibility of corruption cannot be dismissed. One author compared the idea of restoring the Cathedral to the tricks of the hero of the popular Russian satirical novel Twelve Chairs, who was successful in collecting money for the “complete reconstruction of an abyss” (Shalaev 1993). To improve the image of the whole enterprise, a large-scale public relations campaign has been launched under the supervision of a former advertising agency director (Popov 1994).

One Orthodox priest conducted an unofficial opinion poll and was surprised, not that different people were against restoration, but that their arguments were based on the Bible, Russian history, and current realities: that to waste millions of dollars in a country with millions of homeless is a sin; that church construction in Russia always is associated with corruption, and that the Patriarch’s current Cathedral of Epiphany is semi-empty even on important holidays. The priest himself is in favor of the reconstruction, but not at this “Bolshevik pace” (Pavlov 1994).

It would not be an exaggeration to conclude, after surveying press accounts, that the reconstruction has been largely irrelevant to regions other than Moscow, and that the limited public discussions (in Moscow) were dominated by local concerns. The national monumentalization process is therefore revealed to be highly localized. In this sense, the project is a failure, since it has not become, as expected, an act of societal repentance for what was done during the Soviet era.

Scales of the Politics of Reconstruction

The new Cathedral’s characteristics must be understood in the context of changes in the scale of the Russian state. The breakup of the Soviet Union and the crises caused by the politico-economic transformation of Russia, have significantly weakened the state. Not only were its global ambitions relinquished, but its domestic role was fragmented. Since the 1990s, the new Russian national state has largely been unable to fulfill the primary responsibilities of any state, such as the provision of economic, political, and cultural security to its citizens. Tax evasions, unpaid state employees, violent regional conflicts, the criminalization of society, and the proliferation of foreign cultural products have all become characteristics of post-Soviet Russian society. In most instances, the local state is expected to take care of these “national” problems. It is only a slight exaggeration to conclude that, in many respects, the scale of the national state has become local.

Moscow provides an especially noteworthy case. The city became the undisputed financial and resource-exporting center in Russia in the 1990s, in relatively good economic health and with a balanced city budget. In contrast to the country as a whole, wealth rose in the capital city. For example, in July of 1995, the average earnings of Muscovites were 3.2 times higher than the Russian average, while the cost of a “consumer basket” was only 1.3 times higher. The level of officially registered unemployment in Moscow was one-fifth the Russian average (Savel’ev 1996). The Moscow concentration of wealth has been strongest in the city’s construction industry, which is patronized by Moscow Mayor Yurii Luzhkov, currently one of Russia’s most influential politicians.

By localizing a national monument, the builders enlarge the political scope of the local Moscow state, as the political context of the project attests. The early start and rapid pace of the current reconstruction came as a surprise not only to its critics, but even to those who deeply believed in the rebirth of the Cathedral. At the time there were several reasons for urgency. First, the 850th anniversary of the founding of Moscow was to be celebrated in September 1997 “as a nationwide holiday,” providing Moscow authorities with a chance to display their achievements, of which the crowning one was to be the restored Cathedral. Second, the Parliamentary and Presidential elections in 1995 and 1996 were seen as likely to result in political destabilization, and personal attachment to this significant construction project would allow Luzhkov to stabilize his position. Other factors operating at both the local and
national scales may have helped Luzhkov. A costly construction of sacred significance could demonstrate the power of Moscow authorities and allow the city's government to secure control of some of the federal funds made available for the monument. Finally, there is the symbolism of the second millennium of Christianity in 2000.

In addition to shifts in the balance of power, one of the main, if little-known, results of political dramas in Moscow in the early 1990s, such as the 1991 military coup and the October 1993 assault on the White House, was competition among power groups for local office space. The Mayoral Office, the Parliament, and the Federal Government all have changed their locations, and some other office complexes have been erected, such as the gas industry skyscraper and the City complex. This boom in new headquarters, although imprudent in times of general social unrest, nonetheless may have required legitimation by including provision for the holy authority of the Church. The top authorities of the Russian Orthodox Church had been presented by the Soviet government with a new headquarters complex in the Danilov monastery in 1985, which might have been taken as a challenge by the new Moscow government. Why could not post-Soviet authorities make a similar gift? This project would make its major agents look less “Soviet,” a politically important goal since most of them were powerful insiders in the previous system.

The current phase of national monumentalization has become largely an endeavor of the local state. It was this governing body that completed the long-term construction of the Russian Victory Memorial in 1995 at Poklonnaia Hill. Similarly, although Boris Yeltsin signed the July 1992 decree, “On the creation of a Foundation for Moscow's Rebirth,” in which restoration of the Cathedral was listed as the very first project (Nikol'skaia 1994), real restoration first began two years later, in May 1994, after the City of Moscow declared its decision to construct the Cathedral (Vestnik Merii Moskvy 1994). Six months later the process was in full force despite, or perhaps because of, an absence of debate about its location and general purpose.

Secrecy surrounds the level and sources of funding for the Cathedral's reconstruction (Barry 1995). At the beginning, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia and the Mayor of Moscow announced that it would cost US$150 million (Kuranty 1994). This approximates two percent of the Moscow budget (Bossart 1995), and six times the budget of Russia's Federal Program of monument restoration. The director of the Foundation of Financial Support of the Cathedral's Reconstruction believed, as early as 1994, that the final cost would be $300 million (Popov 1994), a figure also mentioned the next year (M. 1995), but the actual construction cost remains hidden from the public. In 1999, a representative of the Foundation estimated the cost as already US$500 million with collected funds at US$320 million (Korneeva 1999).

Initial stages of reconstruction almost certainly were financed from the Moscow City budget, in the form of an interest-free loan to be repaid once necessary donations have been collected (Pokrovskii 1994). Project officials insist that the Cathedral will not be built using money from the federal budget or tax revenue. They argue that financing will come from the Russian Orthodox Church, the Russian diaspora abroad, and donations from Russian citizens and commercial organizations (Popov 1994). Thus far, however, this order has seemingly been reversed; Moscow banks and companies are the main source of finance (Friland 1995). Finally, special memorial plaques for sponsors’ names were proposed for the Cathedral (Kuranty 1994). This amounts to a listing of the rich “new Russians,” replacing the listing of the 1812 heroes to whom the original Cathedral was devoted (Krolenko 1994).

The Cathedral as a Localized National Monument

The localization of the national monument has affected not only the social and political outcomes of this reconstruction, but also the Cathedral itself, despite the insistence of the authorities to the contrary. However accurate the current restoration could be (criticism is already growing; see Shimanskii 1994b), a complex of new functions has been built into the basement of the Cathedral, in the 8–15 m vertical space between the ground and the Palace floor. In fact, the former Palace's pit has been recycled and filled by a three-story steelwork basement, which, because of the sloping terrain, is only partly below ground.

The significance of this underground com-
plex goes far beyond a mere basement appendix to the restored Cathedral. It has changed its physical scale. While the total floor area of the Cathedral is only 3,980 m², the three-level basement has floorspace of 66,000 m² (Dmitriev 1994; Shimanskii 1994b), more than fifteen times the upper level. The new functions added in this space are even more significant. A comparison of the various proposals for using the underground space, provided by the Moscow Mayoral Office and the Russian Orthodox Church’s Moscow Patriarchate (MP), shows that the basement reflects a political compromise between them (Figure 13). The MP had two proposals for the basement (Moscow Patriarchate’s “Arkhkhram” 1995: 117; Figures 13A and 13B). The

Figure 13. Proposed designs for the basement of the restored Cathedral. A. “Modest,” and B. “Extended” proposals by the Moscow Patriarchate; C. Implemented design. Features: 1. the low church of the Transfiguration of the Convent of Alexius the Man of God; 2. the Holy Synod’s Hall; 3. the Church Council’s Hall; 4. dining halls; 5. systems of technical support; 6. garage for the Cathedral; 7. municipal garage; 8. theological center; 9. halls for exhibitions and book sale; 10. the Convent of Alexius the Man of God; 11. toilets. Source: author; based on Moscow Patriarchate’s “Arkhkhram” (1995), Posokhin (1995) and Lutskii (1995).
more “modest” included the restored Convent of Alexius the Man of God [10], with its Church of the Transfiguration and halls for the Church’s Councils, Figure 13A. The design of the basement in this variant included also a dining hall [4], and a 100-car garage [6]. The MP’s second, expanded, variant for the basement space (Figure 13B) proposed greatly increasing the seating capacity for the conference-hall and dining rooms [3, 4]. Major additions in this variant include a theological center [8] and spacious lobby halls [9] for exhibitions and book sales. It is understandable that the MP attempted to take this unique chance to remedy the results of both Communist and tsarist manipulation of the place. Those implementing the project were, however, more selective in their historical scope.

According to the restoration’s former director and leading architect, the city authorities initially wanted only the garages and the Church of the Transfiguration in the basement (Sokolov 1994): the underground parking garage alone was regarded as worth the effort (Semenov 1994). The struggle between these two parties had its victims: the director’s resignation was forced following the submission of the MP’s expanded version to the Mayoral Office without prior approval from the Mayor (Sokolov 1994). This was not the last politically motivated resignation. M. Yuvenaly, the chair of the interior decoration commission, resigned in 1999 for similar reasons (Revzin 1999).

The proposal that was finally accepted, and now implemented, was a compromise between the second, “expanded” proposal of the MP and the “utilitarian” aspirations of the city authorities (Figure 13C), but was still under constant modification; 700 designers were struggling to keep pace with the construction workers (Dmitriev 1994). In 1995, plans for the basement include the underground church of the convent [1], the Holy Synod’s Hall [2], a 1,200-seat conference hall for the Church’s Councils [3], the Patriarch’s office and a dining hall for 800 guests [4], recreational “chambers,” and the premises of ecclesiastical educational establishments (M. 1995). A TV center will be located there as well (Shimanskii 1994a). The rest of the space will be devoted to engineering facilities [5] and the much-expanded garages [6, 7], their capacity grown to six times the original proposal (Dmitriev 1994), because they are intended to serve the city’s needs as well [7].

The most striking absence in the final project is the convent; with all the added functions, no place has been found at the Moscow Patriarchate’s center for even a modest female convent. Only the convent’s Church of the Transfiguration will be restored in a limited “catacomb” version [1]. Church canons prevent the space immediately under a church from being used for any functions not in some way related to the service. The initial idea of locating the garage there (Krolenko 1994) has been dismissed.

Paradoxically, the Cathedral might be seen as standing on its head; as a reversed “pit,” because the lower MP headquarters and parking garage have become the largest, most significant, and even the most politically contested parts of the project. At the same time, the added new functions could significantly constrain its original gathering scale. The Cathedral most likely will not be easily accessible to the public; the Russian Orthodox Church headquarters will require a security guard, and the monument seems likely to be the target of terrorists of different kinds, given its specific history. It is expected to have “the most sophisticated” computerized security complex in Moscow with hidden video surveillance, fire detectors, and about a thousand technical specialists (Nikol’skaia 1999). Even at the time of construction, security is tighter than at Moscow’s banks (Vandenko 1996).

The localization of the national Cathedral described here poses questions about its future maintenance. The new Cathedral’s scale may be too large even for the state to maintain it properly, let alone the city of Moscow (Kolpakov 1994a, 1994b). The desperate status of many active churches in Moscow also makes the new construction ethically questionable. In 1993, 103 churches in Moscow were inactive, and many active churches lacked staff: fifty churches had no senior priests, and it was estimated that the number of deacons should be doubled and the number of priests tripled (Sluzhenie Tserkvi 1994). The Cathedral is to accommodate 10,000 people, although services in other downtown churches are less crowded than in residential margins. Moscow’s downtown has more than enough churches, whereas only one-sixth of the 138 churches preserved outside the central Garden Ring are active (Grigor’eva 1994). In addition, the nouveau riche presently moving into the downtown may be even less likely to attend services (Krotov 1994). All these factors, paradoxically, have resurrected proposals to restore the convent. The giant Cathedral...
will need nuns for its maintenance, and the City Mayor and the Patriarch have agreed to build a new complex for the sisterhood cloister (Pokrovskii 1994), for which land has been allocated nearby (Vestnik Merii Moskvy 1994). Yet even if the convent is reestablished, the long-standing conflicts over the construction of this place will remain.

Conclusion

Using the Cathedral of Christ the Savior as a case study, the paper explores the uneasy process of national monumentalization in Russia (Table 1). The first attempt to build the world’s largest church as a monument to victory in the 1812 Napoleonic War failed. The smaller project that was completed stretched through several decades (1831–1881), with a different design and location. The importance of this Cathedral to the national consciousness resulted in its 1931 demolition by the Bolsheviks, who attempted to replace it, both ideologically and geographically, with their own national monument, the giant Palace of the Soviets. This attempt also failed, and the foundation pit later became one of the world’s largest swimming pools (1960–1993), which in turn was replaced by the new Cathedral.

These changing forms of national monumentalization in Russia can be better understood if the corresponding spatial and social changes taking place in the nation are taken into account. Coincident with the monuments’ reconstruction, the territorial scale of the country which they were to represent has changed dramatically. The Cathedral’s design, especially its architectural scale, reflects shifts in the scale of Russian national identity as well as the interplay between the politically and spatially changing state, society, and the Church. This paper argues that the pre-, post- and Soviet religious practices should be examined more critically, as being affected by political motivations associated with the national monumentalization process. As a result, the emerging religious landscape is an arena of ideological and political contestation. There is need for further research into scalar as opposed to territorial justice, and the role of scale in social and political processes in general. Meanwhile the deepest construction pit in Europe these days is in Moscow, on Krasnopresnenskaia Embankment, in the core of the proposed office complex Moscow-City. The pit is nearly idle after the economic crisis of August 1998 (Trebuuiutsia 2000). Yet the Moscow government has not officially cancelled the project to build in this place the highest building in the world, the 648-m office tower Rossiia (Russia) (Nochuykina 2000). But this is a different story—or the same?

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Notes

1. Although Russians most often call the Cathedral khram [temple], it is usually translated into English as cathedral, but does not necessarily imply an administrative center for a diocese or the seat of a bishop, as in English usage. The Russian word sobor may be translated as cathedral—a main or large church—but also as gathering or council, very much like the word Soviet.
2. The “Orthodoxy-Autocracy-Nationality” formula was coined in the early 1830s by the Education Minister of the Russian state, Count S. Uvarov (Godienko 1988: 181–82).
3. For example, Peter the Great ordered the closing of thousands of chapels in 1722 (Palamarchuk 1992: 11) and prohibited stone church erection to save stone resources for the construction of St. Petersburg. The Church government was changed to a state department (Synod) approved by the tsar.
4. The convent complex was repeatedly restored after various disasters. The Communist closure in 1930 was only the final act of an ongoing injustice. In 1990, one of its two remaining churches (two others having been demolished or absorbed by new construction) was returned to believers (Palamarchuk 1992: 343–49).
5. Hipped-roof churches at that time signified prominent city complexes. The cathedral was part of the hipped-roof church system along the
Moscow River, which served control purposes (Moscow Patriarchate’s “Arkikhram” 1995: 119).

6. Strictly speaking, the first injustice was the replacement of the original pagan shrine in the area (“Strannoe Mesto” 1994).

7. Its location in southwest Moscow replicated that of the St. Diomid monastery in Constantinople, which also was known as “Jerusalem.” Therefore, the new Moscow monastery signified continuity with the Holy Land (Moscow Patriarchate’s “Arkikhram” 1995: 119).

8. A kind of karchief worn by married Russian peasant women.

9. Ton’s design of the Cathedral had references to the main competitors of the project. For example, the arcs of the façades were reminiscent of the Uspenskii Cathedral of the Kremlin.

10. As in some other countries, the army of the Russian Empire had Orthodox chaplains.

11. The category “Orthodox” included Old Believers, Ukrainian and Georgian Orthodox Autocephalists, Ioannites, and others.

12. There are indications that Nikita Khrushchev considered the Pit as a possible site for his projected television tower (Semenov 1994).

13. A Siberian suggested that the closed swimming pool on the site of the Cathedral was a secret monument to the chaotic and eventful Khrushchev period. While the Cathedral was a monument to bureaucratic Orthodoxy, the restored Cathedral would paradoxically serve as a monument to Stalinism: “I would prefer a morose Moscow evening, clouds of steam over the pool. And a secret sense of freedom,” the author states (Pokoznev 1994: 2).

14. The pool’s legacy may have a tangible manifestation. The swimming pool, along with postwar subway construction, riverbed cleaning, and groundwater, has further weakened the ground, which already had a poor soil texture (“plyvun,” or liquid mixture of clay and sand), making massive building construction at the site questionable (Shebanov 1995).

15. Arguments of the Church for the restoration can be found in Kuraev (1995).

16. As Moscow’s mayor, Luzhkov has become a leading post-Soviet politician and businessman. In 1995 he was the third most significant politician in Russia (Nezavisimaya Gazeta 1996), following the President and Prime Minister.

17. The most dramatic project of this sort is the proposed City district, a business center on Krasnopresenskaia Embankment that will include several Western-style skyscrapers.

18. This program has actually received only ten percent of the planned amount. In Moscow alone, the current funding for restoration is three to four times less than five years ago (Deich 1994).

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