The Quest for an Ideal Youth in Putin's Russia I. Back to our Future! History, Modernity and Patriotism According to Nashi, 2015-2012. By Ivo Mijnssen. Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2012. 215pp. Bibliography. Index. Appendix I. Appendix II. Paperback.

The Quest for an Ideal Youth in Putin's Russia II. The search for Distinctive Conformism in the Political Communication of Nashi, 2005-2009. By Jussi Lassila. Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2012. 205 pp. Bibliography. Paperback.

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In 2005, the Kremlin's grey cardinal, Vladislav Surkov, orchestrated the formation of a youth organization, *Nashi*, in order to counter youth apathy and the potential for opposition protest in Russia's capital. By 2013, Mr. Surkov, was dismissed from his position as the daunting architect of the political strategy that guided the first decade of Putin's rule. *Nashi's* founder, Vassily Iakamenko, registered a new political party named Smart Start that quickly failed. Most importantly, the *Nashi* existed in name only, eclipsed by competing youth organizations, including *Stal'*, the Young Guard, and the multi-headed All-Russian Youth Society. Against this vast shift in the political landscape, two complementary studies exploring the arc of *Nashi's* development appeared under the common title, *The Quest for an Ideal Youth in Putin's Russia*. Together, these significant works by Jussi Lassila and Ivo Mijnssen illuminate the persistent central tension inherent in Putinism, the negotiation of the line between modernization (openness) and stability (state control). Further, demonstrate how this tension produced *Nashi's* downfall.

There are a number of similarities across these paired studies. Both authors begin with the premise that while *Nashi* began as a state project, the state did not dictate its development. The organization was shaped by contextual and political factors—from historical referents to internal conflicts—that led to insurmountable contradictions and, ultimately, the demise of the movement. Both authors develop theoretic frames that rest in social theory, although their references are quite diverse. Both test their theoretic frames with evidence drawn from *Nashi's* official materials and interviews with group members. They develop their narratives around common focal points, notably the removal of the Bronze Soldier statue in Estonia in 2007. Yet, the pairing of the books is particularly effective because their distinct emphases provide a rich

picture of youth politics and, more generally, the evolution of the Putinism between 2005 and 2012.

Lassila relies on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural production to illuminate the tension between the image required of *Nashi* by the central state and the image the organization produced. The tension originates in *Nashi's* need to package the Kremlin's message into an image that can mobilize Russia's apolitical youth. To illustrate the conflict that emerges from this inherent contradiction, Lassila interrogates *Nashi's* core documents its manifesto and recruiting materials.

A number of striking findings emerge from the study. The first finding is the careful excavation of a very self-conscious and contentious process of constructing a new political reality for young Russians that would provide both a model to aspire to and also allow them to function effectively in the post-Soviet society. Within *Nashi*, these efforts take many forms, including Internet appeals, patriotic fashion, and emotional entreaties. Yet, Lassila effectively demonstrates that this process failed in large part because it was bounded by Soviet-era language and symbols that did not easily adapt to new situations and highlighted profound contractions between tradition and modernity, young and old. More broadly, Lassila's study of *Nashi* underscores the difficulty Russian youth face when talking about common opposition to youth policies or political elites. Absent permission to discuss politics within acceptable boundaries, youth are left to perform their protest or employ humor to diminish the potential consequences. As a result, the transfer of symbols, meanings, and worldviews from the adult world of the Kremlin to a new generation of youth proved ineffective.

Mijnssen provides a rich contextualization of *Nashi* rooted in the broader project of Putinism. The evidence presented in the study not only draws on *Nashi's* internal documents but the speeches and statements of Mr. Surkov and Mr. Putin. Mijnssen argues that the core of the Putin project is to create a new identity or national dignity rooted in a shared myth of enemies that define Russians. *Nashi's* task was to generate this identity for Russia's youth through a variety of functions, from street actions to patriotic education. *Nashi's* discourse identified a wide range of potential enemies including Western-leaning liberals, fascist and ultranationalists within Russia, and foreign threats beyond the border.

Mijnssen demonstrates that *Nashi's* discourse parallels Mr. Putin's own core themes: to safeguard Russia, promote modernization, and build civil society. These goals are in service to the building of a Great Russian state. Yet, Mijnssen strongly argues that this understanding fails to capture the deeper issue of how Russians relate to these constructed enemies. A crucial element in *Nashi's* downfall has been its inability to channel the new nationalism away from antagonistic and violent actions that have discredited it in the eyes of the population and national leaders. The extraordinarily interesting chapter focusing on Seliger, the famed summer camp of the *Nashi* organization drives home the difficulty that *Nashi* had in providing effective political education. Mijnssen identifies a host of problems that thwart the goals of the camp, including disorganization, hierarchy, internal conflict, and the preferences of the campers themselves. On

the whole, *Nashi* failed to channel the passions of youth in the service of the state, severely weakening its position in the political structure.

Together, these studies use the lens of the *Nashi* to provide a strong caution against overstating the capacity of the Kremlin to dictate outcomes in contemporary Russia. They effectively demonstrate the myriad of structural and political obstacles that undermine state hegemony. Moreover, they do so in the case where we might expect it would be difficult to find strong evidence of discord between the center and its client organizations. The findings presented here suggest that further studies of *Nashi's* rank and file members or regional organizations would provide even greater insights into the evolution of Putinism and youth policy. These books provide an excellent first step in this project and will be important reading for research scholars and students who are trying to understand the dynamics of the Putin system.