

Russia plans bikes and windmills in its Silicon Valley

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Architects on Monday presented ambitious plans for Russia's version of Silicon Valley, which they say will be the country's most ecologically friendly town, with cycle tracks, solar panels and windmills.

French architect bureau AREP Ville in February won a competition to design the four-billion-dollar "innovation town" of Skolkovo outside Moscow, backed by technology-loving President Dmitry Medvedev as part of his modernisation drive.

Architects showed designs for university campus-style tree-lined walkways with cyclists and footbridges over ponds in a settlement that is planned to have 15,000 residents, quite unlike anywhere else in Russia.

"The pedestrian will come first, followed by cyclists and public transport," said the project's "city manager," Viktor Maslakov, adding it will be linked to Moscow by high-speed trains taking 17-20 minutes.

Overseen by the Kremlin's top ideologue Vladislav Surkov, Skolkovo's main aim is to entice top scientists to the hub where they could focus on IT, nuclear and bio-medical technologies, energy and telecommunications.

The French design, chosen from a shortlist of six, has five zones for different technologies along a five-kilometre (three-mile) boulevard that will be "the backbone of Skolkovo," said Etienne Tricaud, deputy CEO of AREP group.

Architects plan for the town to generate its own electricity using solar panels, [wind farms](#) and wells that tap into geothermal energy.

"This model of renewable resources has never been realised in Russia on such a scale," said Maslakov.

"There are examples of this in Denmark and Sweden but in Russia so far it has not been done on a large scale. Skolkovo will be the first town to live off its own energy resources."

The construction project, due to be finished in 2015, is set to cost 120 billion rubles (\$4.26 billion) over the course of four years, Maslakov said.

"So far the figures are provisional, but the numbers have not changed." US software giant Microsoft said in November that it had signed a draft agreement to open a centre at Skolkovo with billionaire Viktor Vekselberg, who is in charge of the project.

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