

Russian Space: Conceptions and Reality*

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Abstract—The change in the way of life did not lead to the change of the spatial organization of the Russian Federation. The country mechanically follows the Soviet or the imperial model of development. The main communication lines come together in the capital, while the contrast between the latter and the regions is only getting stronger. The successful experience of a number of countries proves the effectiveness of the “national space” model, based on interregional ties, on assuming responsibilities and on self-sufficiency of the regions.

Keywords—*imperial space; national space; regions; infrastructure; strategy and policy of spatial development; architect; designer; manager; developer*

I. INTRODUCTION

In order to properly comprehend the present process of the formation of Russian space, of the country’s environment, we should include a short summary of what actually has been happening during the seventy years of Soviet power and the preceding imperial period, which lasted more than two hundred years [1, 2] It is an obvious fact that the space of each country is not isolated, meaning that it is subjected to outside influences, and, in turn, influences what goes on beyond its borders, so we may also take a closer look at what is happening around this area. The formation of national space is a long process. As it is generally believed, three forces, operating in different ways, participate in this evolution — the state government, managing institutions and the community [3]. This process is connected with a number of various phenomena, taking place, at least, on three levels. One is on a nationwide scale, which includes the problems of population settlement, interregional and inter-economic sectors. Then come separate regions or townships, regulated by general and regional plans. Finally, there is the level where we can sense the visible and directly perceivable reality by ourselves, an environment that we experience and live in.

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II. THE IMPERIAL MODEL

Two hundred years of Russian history were devoted to carrying out a grand imperial project, focusing on the “European” choice, access to the Baltic and Mediterranean seas, accompanied by a constant expansion eastward. This was the time when a special political strategy was formed, its core and essence being spatial expanse, settling new territories and building new towns, including the northern capital. The principal force behind this project was the state, or, better say, the ruling elite, which was successful in repressing any opposition on the part of society and equally successful in controlling the work of people involved in industry or trade.

One may ask whether this project had an alternative and what would have been its consequences. We may name other countries and regions which followed Russia as it entered the gates of contemporary development, such as Japan or China, the latter being in a prolonged political and economic crisis in the 19th~mid-20th century. If we look at the maps of Europe or of the whole world, basically, in the 18th and 19th centuries, there was no place for “non-empires” or countries that were more or less controlled by them. The imperial model, as viewed by the elite, had practically no alternative, even though it was realized in various ways. The Spanish and Portuguese models were in essence “aristocratic”; they were based on new local feudal lords, feeling the dependence on the mother country as a burden. The British model found its support in important business institutions, for example, the East India Company. The Russian imperial model was different from others in the sense that in this case the state played a dominant role, its roots being present in the culture and the pre-imperialist history of the country.

In order to easily distinguish imperial space from a non-imperial one, we may use, in general terms, the English term “national”. This does not mean some mono-ethnic space, but a space that covers the interests of the society as a whole, of all citizens. The space of an empire is motley and heterogeneous; one can easily see here layers of different epochs, which, like ready-made rings, surround the basic nucleus of a country. An empire represents an independent and self-sufficient world, a planet on another planet, pieced together by the center from different fragments, their borders and their actual structure leveling or ignoring ethnical-cultural differences and preferences. The imperial ideal means total control over space, centralized regulation, including determining the regular structure of a building, a

town and a whole country. An empire excludes all accidental and unforeseen things; it totally blocks spatial initiatives and actions, unsanctioned by the state. An empire emerges as a single, gigantic construction, as a single ensemble, like Versailles [4].

Probably one of the most important *raison d'être* of imperial space is its constant expansion. After losing this ability the Habsburg Roman Empire turned into Austro-Hungary. The interior policy of an empire turns out as a continuation and a consequence of its foreign policy, which presuppose external expansion. Its success is directly connected with the state of the “military-industrial complex”, i.e., essentially, with all the industrial, productive and economic potential of an empire. Compared to this, all social and human potential is, by definition, second rate, and, in a sort, is a supplementary resource. The army’s interests not only determined the actual place and the general deployment of industrial facilities, but also the fate of many new settlements and the general layout of planning settlements.

The object of special concern, of a particular cult, is the capital and the boundaries, the borders of the empire. Imperial space is mono-centric and the cities of the empire are agents of the center, guarding and protecting the borders, the outskirts and the periphery. The most important characteristic feature of imperial space, since Roman times, is believed to be a rigorously organized system of roads, leading from the capital to outlying districts. The experience of Great Britain and Spain confirmed the dominant role of sea communication and ports, while the Russian experience proved the vital importance of railroads, which saved the country in the Civil War and in World War II.

After the abolition of serfdom, the social and spatial image of Russia starts to change, the forces of the empire begin to fade. One may see an emerging interest in the lives of common citizens, a new *Zemstvo* institution is being introduced, i.e. a system of self-government. Stolypin’s reform creates a class of Russian farmers and landowners. The capital is becoming aware of the presence of the provinces; its relations with the Russian-speaking population of the empire assume a more balanced character. The provinces and the capital, after being in a state of enmity and competition, after a period of dominance of one of the sides, which may be compared with the situation in imperial Rome at the time of its breakup, were now turning to cooperation and partnership [5]. Life in small or middle-sized Russian towns ceased to appear as a sort of curse. The result of this full-blooded, normal life in the Russian province, which rose to having tolerable living standards, including employment opportunities, adequate education and healthcare, was a new atmosphere. This created the ground for intellectual development, and led to the emergence of the Russian middle class. It gave the world a large number of outstanding individuals, inventors and scientists, poets and artists, state officials and military officers, who were born and raised far from “both capitals” – Moscow and St. Petersburg. But the reason for the empire’s dissolution was not the rise of industrial production and personal welfare, but “orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality”, nationalist and counter-

nationalist ideas, which previously had little importance in the country.

The empire’s crisis did not put an end to the imperial model itself. The Soviet power, which came into being a hundred years ago, not only preserved this model, but turned it into a foundation of a gigantic geopolitical entity – the so-called *sotslager*’ (socialist camp), which appeared after World War II, and which included, apart from the USSR, Eastern European countries, a number of Asian countries, Cuba and a company of various other countries, which, at some point, chose “the socialist way of development”. The difference of the “Soviet empire” from the Russian one was that the former created and supported in its peripheral zones not some “impersonal” territories, governments or regions, but national geographic formations with relatively homogenous population in terms of its ethnic and cultural identity. This idea, which directly sprang from the notion that “nationalities have a right to self-determination”, was a part of an extensive “luggage” of socialist and communist ideas, implemented by the Bolsheviks, and later played a serious role in the disintegration, which took place in the early 1990s [6].

Among other ideas, present in that same communist “luggage”, was a denial of private land ownership, of individually-owned family dwelling and partly of entrepreneurship. The country was involved in carrying out gigantic nationwide projects and programs such as electrification, industrialization, collectivization, chemicalization, conquering nature, building new towns and radically reconstructing old ones, introducing new types of collective mass housing, presented by the state along with free general education and free healthcare. This new life meant erasing the differences between town and village, between living standards, between manual and intellectual labor, between life in the north, south, west and east [7].

The details of this scene, social and spatial, were specified and corrected, the instruments and ways of implementation were subject to change, the energy and persistence of the authorities varied, but the basic principles and the utopian character of the very idea of socialist or communist heaven on the whole of earth stayed the same. A direct consequence of the highly rigid adherence to this utopian model was an actually real anti-utopia, into which the USSR turned, with its Gulag, devastation of villages and constant deficit of everything necessary [8,9].

The imperial project is not fatally connected with the utopian one. Their integration is an exclusively Soviet invention. The imperial project defined foreign policy, the utopian – domestic one. At the same time it was the utopia which led to the relatively long survival of the project in general, including its spatial structure. The reason for this stability was the character of a whole number of quite productive and rational ideas, incorporated into the utopian model. Today their total rejection may inevitably cause regret, both because of the enormous fruitless efforts, the unjustified sacrifices, and for the reason that many of these ideas turned out to be in demand by a whole number of successful countries across the world [10].

The dissolution of the Soviet empire was preceded by the transformation of the Soviet utopia, by the changes in the vision of Soviet paradise. This vision, appearing so and being in reality quite original until the mid-1950s, was affected by the general impression of falling behind the West in terms of the standard of living and of meeting the basic demands of the citizens. Thus it turned into something else. This was the concept of “catching up with and leaving behind America”. It led to the situation when Communist abstraction gradually evolved into “real socialism”, which consciously or subconsciously was compared with the Western “way of life”. The new Soviet ideal at the time became not some existence in a communal flat in a “cell”, sharing a kitchen with other families. Presently, it was the so-called “triathlon”, consisting of an apartment in a panel block, a small country house standing on an area of 600 square meters (the standard Soviet size for a dacha) and a Zhiguli automobile. This “triathlon” fits in quite naturally into the system of micro-districts, “step-by-step service” and strict zoning, worked out under the unquestionable and unacknowledged influence of European post-war practice. The essential difference of Soviet micro-districts from its western analogues were the absence of any alternative, indicated in regulatory documents, and lack of social content, which supposed the creation of a self-governing neighborhood community, in which interests it had been actually invented in the West. All this, however, could not save Communism [11].

A mine underneath the post-revolutionary imperial model was planted a long time before. A cultural dialogue with the West, and, first of all, with the US was sustained by the efforts of those emigrants-revolutionaries, including Trotsky and Lenin, who came to power in 1917. Furthermore, the attitude towards America, unlike the one towards European neighbors, was respectful enough, which, disregarding ideological norms, made adoption of its achievements quite permissible. The most important result of this process proved to be tens, if not hundreds, of factories constructed with the help of Americans.

In the course of all the seventy years of Soviet Power it was the state which was responsible for carrying out large and small projects. The state was the principle, and essentially, the sole subject of spatial development. The giants of socialist industry and socialist towns, the post-war restoration and the great “construction sites of communism”, the so-called “reclamation of the virgin lands”, the construction of the Baikal-Amur Railroad (BAM) — all of them were carried out following the decisions reached by the supreme party leadership, and were made official by resolutions issued by the party and the government. Various branch ministries were responsible for attaining the designated goals, while the Soviets, trade unions and public organizations were meant to aid the party, mobilizing the people.

The Soviet project, combining imperial heritage and social utopias, diluted with Western adoptions, turned out to be artificial, inherently contradictory and difficult to realize. Reality gradually had less and less in common with the initial plan. Nevertheless, many Soviet ideas, particularly

those, which were not marked by provincial shyness and did not prove to be secondary, turned out to be lasting and attractive.

III. THE POST-SOVIET MODEL

Twenty five years of New Russia allow us to come to some conclusions and judge its evolution in the sphere of spatial development, where changes are hard to notice, and the force of inertia is strong. It took twenty five years for Catherine II and the Betsy Commission to carry out new plans for the towns and cities of the empire. Almost the same period of time was required for building the Trans-Siberian Railroad and finally settling Siberia and the Far East. An important mark was left by the radical spatial changes of the post-revolutionary years, as well as by the twenty five years which preceded the so-called “stagnation” period, noted by the construction of mass apartment blocks and new “micro-districts”. All of the mentioned above emerged as a result of a strong state policy in the field of spatial development, pursued, depending on the times, in accordance with specific priorities and changing views.

The peaks of spatial activity, including those indicated above, always coincided with radical changes in economy and the social sphere. The principle feature of the last two and a half decades, marked by the most decisive changes in the life of the country, was a lack of any attempts at pursuing a new policy of spatial development. A country, which still has the largest territory, which accumulated an enormous positive and negative experience of working with one’s own space, justly attracting the attention and respect across the world, proved to be indifferent towards this experience. Everything that was born before was forgotten: achievements of a large number of people, be it in theory or practice, of administrative workers, specialists in urban planning and architects, from P. Stolypin and N. Kondratyev to unknown creators of new towns.

Unlike Soviet Russia, in modern Russia there emerged, apart from the state and the leading federal institutions, new subjects of spatial development, such as local authorities, the business community and society as a whole, uniting, among other groups, owners of private flats and houses.

The theme of spatial development, owing to both objective and subjective factors, for a long time has been excluded from priority issues of the leaders of the country, and, consequently, from the priorities of the Duma and the Council of Federation.

In adopting the Town Planning Code and dozens of its amendments the legislative bodies are inclined to trust various lobbyists.

The structure and the behavior of the executive power practically confirm a lack of any particular interest towards spatial planning. Today Russian inhabited space is controlled by two deputy prime ministers and by at least seven branch ministries. These ministries include the following: of Economic Development, responsible for the national and regional planning and urban general plans; of Construction, responsible for planning and constructing civilian objects,

first of all, housing; of Culture, its sphere being management of protected areas and architectural monuments; of Industry and Trade, supervising the production of materials and instruments, i.e. construction technologies; of Nature, responsible for ecology and the state, and, among other things, of urban natural resources; of Transport, looking after the country's transport network; and of Agriculture, responsible for the villages and agricultural lands.

The center practically halted any kind of progress after transferring a large part of its authority, connected with spatial development, from the federal level to the regional one and from the regional to the local, the latter lacking sufficient resources and the right to come up with important legislative initiatives. As a result Moscow had occupied a unique place among the regions. Since there was no clear policy of spatial development, it turned into a sort of visual aid, an example to follow, a "model post-socialist city".

The Russian business community, the community of developers or builders, has an even more simple structure than the state bodies, because it does not have to observe various formalities. Big and very big companies of developers and landowners exert the real influence and control in this field. They are closely connected with the Ministry of Construction, supported by banks and local power, creating, essentially, a sort of state corporation, somewhat like *Rostekh* (Russian technologies) or *Rosnano* (Russian nanotechnologies). Nevertheless, in spite of these obvious preferences and privileges, the big developing business covers only a half of annually produced housing. The other half is formed by individual building, small-size and medium-size business, which do not influence in any way the policy of the state, lack any serious support and are pushed out into the "dark-grey" zone [12].

Society, local government and public organizations, consisting of activists, professionals, neighborhood communities, etc., have an even lesser influence on Russian space than small-size and medium-size business. Direct participation of local inhabitants in urban planning is something exotic in Russia, while the real opportunities of the communities of citizens and the authorities' awareness of their interests were tested during the work on the "renovation" project in Moscow. Somewhat more visible, even though lacking any durable influence on the policy in question, are the activities of the protectors of urban heritage and architectural monuments. Even though they do not intend to and cannot offer a specific concept of organizing the environment and national space, they do manage to defend their place in the "day's agenda".

Although it is not officially stated, the real national policy in the sphere of spatial development is finally shaped by big business, developer and landowner, by those who are active and ready to defend their interests. At the present, companies of this sort, in the absence of a clear state strategy, are capable of exerting influence on ministries and the Moscow mayor's office, as well as creating a powerful parliamentary lobby. The presence of this vaguely formulated policy, on the one hand, does not allow us to conclude that the policy of spatial development does not

exist as such. On the other hand, this policy cannot be seen as something really "governmental" and conducted in the interest of Russian society as a whole.

After making this conclusion it is necessary to ask some questions. Does a contemporary state, and particularly Russia, need a clear national policy of spatial development at all or its time has passed? May be in our days, when there is free market and competition, life itself will find the right decision. If one agrees with that, then this policy, after forming itself in Russia in some unnoticeable and independent way, without the state directly and visibly interfering, is right and should only improve. It seems that the results of the last twenty five years do not confirm this.

New Russia, unlike the USSR, no longer insists that its towns, which have been previously called "socialist", are essentially different from the other towns of the world. We like to compare Moscow with other megalopolises and seek to resemble them. The utopian models of our own making were, finally, completely ousted by "the best economic approaches of the world", "global trends" and "universal", meaning "western" standards.

However, as we move away from the center of Moscow, from the Garden Ring, the disparities of Russian space become clearer and clearer, the contrasts sharper; if we start comparing Russian towns and those of our close western and eastern neighbors and competitors. The experience of the latter shows one thing — whatever the model of the ruling power and the economy of the country, whatever the vision of the future, the presence of the state, the state policy of spatial planning, is a certain universal norm. Moreover, this policy becomes more active and forceful at the times of transition, when the changes begin, as new challenges and new opportunities arise.

The process of forming novel and real policy of spatial development, as in other political spheres in the Russian Federation, may be divided into two stages, of almost equal duration. The first one supposes a decisive break with Soviet institutions, like *Gosplan* (state planning) and *Gosstroy* (state construction), with centralized, rigid state regulation, accompanied by a shock, caused by the dissolution of the Soviet empire. The second stage — the administrative and business elites form gigantic and monolithic or quasi-monolithic establishments in all key economic branches, including civilian construction.

Civilian construction in Russia amounts to about a two-third of all output in this branch, both in terms of money value and actual production. It still remains, just like in the latter Soviet years, one of the most closed and conservative economic sectors. In its present condition this branch is hardly capable of fulfilling, as it is sometimes expected, the role of a locomotive for the economy, which strongly needs positive impulses. Since the construction sector is evidently not disposed to be involved in expected and necessary reforms, in self-motion and innovation, this provokes the appearance of simulations, pseudo-changes and optimizations. A house modeled in the 1970s is today treated in the same way as in the Soviet years the *Zhiguli* "classical" automobile was dealt with, i.e. improvement without change.

The present Russian developer-landowner is a direct successor of the omnipotent Soviet builder, producing large apartment blocks, invented by the latter. This construction is in social lease, and there is practically nothing else on the market. But unlike the soviet builder, who had to face certain limitations, like specific norms and general plans, and who was supervised by communist party authorities, the present developer forms the policy and shapes the city by himself.

The dismantling of the Soviet system of very rigid centralized planning and regulation, was concluded in the first decade of this century by an adoption of a new Town Planning Code, which, according to the intentions of its creators, placed the developer in the most comfortable conditions possible, while a distinct state policy of spatial planning did not exist. The level of decision-making went sharply down, while the decisions themselves ceased to have a clear sense and logical aim. Responsibility for the evolution of space, delegated to the regional and local authorities, was simultaneously accompanied by narrowing their financial, juridical and intellectual resources. People received property which they could not manage by themselves. The only hope was an investor – a developer, a benefactor whose wishes are supposed to be met. The developer turned into an actual owner of the city due to a number of factors. This was economic isolation, inability to maneuver and to cooperate with neighbors, lack of instruments that would encourage relations between different regions and municipalities, as well as mechanisms that would coordinate the spatial development of branches and territories. A direct consequence of this situation was the fact that the authorities ceased to strictly observe general plans and rules of land use and development. Documents, regulating these spheres, were marked by poor quality, given low status and often lacked a clear meaning. All this combined together brought a transition to “manual” control of spatial development practically everywhere and on all levels.

After getting into the open with his hands untied, and no one else present, the Russian developer concentrated on the most profitable business — construction of large houses in cities, with Moscow being the most attractive of all places. Land and investment deficit, combined with a quasi-monopoly, unofficial cartels and favoritism, have kept the prices on this product steadily high.

The developer, fighting for power in the cities, skillfully took advantage of the appearance of a totally new figure. In the Soviet epoch important positions in the field were usually occupied by those who had building experience and some notion of spatial development. At this next stage we are dealing with a manager, who, in the best of cases, has some experience in the sphere of economics and law, or may have some background in security organs or interior ministry. Inclined to admire the talent and the success of the businessman, the new Russian manager brought with him a new type of mentality, which may not be fully recognized, but which clearly satisfies his main partners and employers. This mentality is marked by a fundamental denial of any clear notions of aims, values and priorities, which should be determining one’s actions, or, at least, openly declared.

Instead of these basic guidelines, we see so-called “interests”, mentioned from time to time and shared by groups of influence, interests, which are not particularly stable.

A manager’s world is made of regulations, procedures and numbers; it cannot include physical space. The latter is a multilevel phenomenon of complicated structure, which does not have clear outlines and demands special skills and a certain predisposition for the subject. A manager exists in his own, specific time, which is measured by the duration of his authority and by filing reports, so “long-term” work and strategic constructions seem to him as something abstract.

A manager prefers universal decisions that have no alternative and offer a simple answer to any question. A return to type house or quasi-type house projects and to identical multistory edifices is not for him some tribute to the idea of social equality, but a way to reach the end with more simple means. A manager has no need of a vision of reality based on a systematic, overall and integral approach. He sees the world as something discrete, something consisting of various fragments, which are not connected with one another. He is not worried about the final results, but only about separate steps, answers to questions and reaction to signals. At the same time the appearance of a new, often unpredictable, assignment, of novel themes relieves him from the responsibility connected with his previous actions. A manager is obsessed by everything that is new, which for him is an indication of quality, replacing clearly defined values. This passion is so strong, that it constantly gives rise to a temptation to see innovations in what is already well-known. Pseudo-innovations, “discovering the discovered”, have a long history, and are nourished by lack of knowledge and information, which became characteristic traits of a modern manager.

A Russian manager values an external effect more than anything else, he prefers an instantaneous transformation made with limited efforts, and in this he is aided by “western experience” or, better say, adoptions and imitations of certain features of well-being, without essentially having the latter. Dressing in Dutch clothes in the hope of instantly turning into a Dutchman or persistent efforts of momentarily changing space and environment following a European example are similar acts. Renders and facades in the eyes of managers have more value than plans and sectional views, while facing and packing seem to be more important and meaningful than the constructions that are hidden from the eye or any engineering systems. The condition of the invisible, as a rule, is no reason to be concerned or agitated. “Green” thinking, which a long time ago became so widespread across the world, from America to India and China, ecological mentality, leading to new construction concepts, changing the appearance of houses and cities, do not take root in local soil [13]. Climate change, quality of water and air, renewable resources, energy-saving technologies, safe materials — all those things that the authorities of many foreign countries do worry about, do not bother the Russian management very much.

A Soviet construction industry boss, an official, sitting in *Gostroy* (State Building) or *Gosgrazhdanstroy* (State

Civilian Building), would usually have a professional background and feel some respect towards a professional. Today these qualities have completely vanished. One of the main objectives, successfully gained by the managers and developers during the last 12-15 years, is the dismantling of state institutions responsible for settlement, district planning, general plans and scientific research in the sphere of urban construction and typology.

The developing business justly sees in a consolidated and independent position of the professional community something like a threat. This is why it is not inclined to view an architect as its indisputable ally. This attitude was in a certain way encouraged by the interest in the figure of an architect on the part of the authorities and society in the years of perestroika and somewhat later. Both realized his potential capabilities, his role in protecting public interests and in creating something beneficial for society. The result of this attitude was the transformation of *Gosgrazhdanstroy* into the short-lived Ministry of Architecture and Urban Construction of the USSR.

A space that is cleared from professionals is instantly filled with a special sort of people, who are “molded” in a particular way to please the developer and the manager. These may be foreigners with Anglo-Saxon “designer” training or a rapidly growing class of local designers and urbanists, who may call themselves “architects” out of pure misunderstanding. Presently, a Russian architect is no longer trusted; he does not have a role to play in the contemporary scenario. Meanwhile, the designers, occupying his place, faithfully serve the developer, unlike their western colleagues, working within a system of strict legislative regulations and close public control.

The absence of clear zoning in Russia and of other western-style institutions was traditionally compensated by the presence of the chief architect of the city, responsible for observing the general plan and involved in protecting the spatial order even when the construction complex dominated. Today this obstacle, which created problems for the developer, has practically disappeared. The post of an urban chief architect, if it still exists, is given to people, who in the majority of cases lack both independence and any special authority.

IV. THE NATIONAL MODEL

By the end of the twenty-five-year period in the history of the country the joined efforts of the developer, manager and designer have shaped a de facto picture of modern Russian space. It is not consciously realized and formulated and consists of separate fragments. For the first time in many years this picture is not ahead of reality, it does not precede changes, but follows them. Its specific feature is also the fact that it is largely formed by the Moscow cityscape of recent years. This period is marked by the Russian capital officially becoming a model for everyone, outracing and leaving behind St. Petersburg, which was and still is its main and only rival.

The quite consistent, reasonable and logical policy, pursued in St. Petersburg, turns out to be less popular and

interesting, than initiatives coming from Moscow, if we look at the support and publicity of the latter on the part of the official media and federal authorities.

Moscow policy in the sphere of spatial development during the last several years may be reduced to separate, practically independent fragmentary moves. The most thrilling results bring the innovations on the “environmental” and “object” level. They avoid free, landscape planning, mixed types of constructions and other discoveries of the last century, while favoring a regular perimeter quarter, as a universal and “correct” solution, giving one an opportunity to refrain from analyzing social and functional consequences. Within the same sequence of events we can name certain “presents” for the middle class in the form of the Zariadiye Park, reconstruction of the All-Russian Exhibition Center (VVTs) and of Gorky Park. These are just separate objects, which are neither connected with each other, nor with the system of urban water and “green” environment. In this sense they remind us of commercial entertaining city gardens of the late 19th–early 20th century, like “Hermitage” or “Aquarium”. The most unexpected and impressive novelty of the last years was the paving of sidewalks and other open spaces, preceded by the destruction of small-scale retail shops and kiosks standing en route of pedestrians. Finally, the center of Moscow is marked by the almost permanent presence of “toys for grownups”, a sort of festive decoration, which with its splendor greatly impresses guests from the richest cities of the world.

Part of the “urban planning” ideas, realized by Moscow authorities, appeared to be the addition of new territories, which, contrary to expectations, have not become a government quarter or a place for innovative low-story suburbs. Urban planning activities also include the fight against traffic jams and the “renovation” program, but to analyze their final results is difficult and premature. Even though all these measures have a direct connection with the general plan and its realization, they are neither in any way interrelated, nor marked by any overall strategy of clear priorities and thus seem unexpected and unpredictable.

While all the above-mentioned activities are either financed directly from the budget or connected with forming the latter and with its implementation, they do not have distinctly set social and economic objectives, and, often, fixed timetables. The deadlines and the decisions themselves are being revised with time, in the process itself, while the changes in the frames of mind may turn out, like in the case of New Moscow, as unanticipated as the enthusiasm for a next project.

The Moscow city hall initiated the above mentioned activities, projects and programs, seeing the city not so much in the eyes of its inhabitants, but rather from the point of view of visitors. The mayor’s office wanted to make an austere and untidy city, inherited from the post-soviet period, to look more humane and orderly. It strived to create an impression of exterior stylishness and prosperity, to build up a picture of a city that would remind of something similar in the west. Moscow simply wanted to instantly have those achievements that this hypothetical western city accumulated

through the centuries, building up and enriching the culture of land tenure and land ownership, based on the efforts of townsmen who cared about their environment.

Moscow achievements and acquisitions of recent years is something totally unaffordable for the majority of Russian towns. Any proposals to follow the example of the capital look like an offering of an expensive make-up to a relatively unhealthy person. At the same time the business companies, nourished and protected by the authorities, who initiated the majority of these projects, being more or less successful, become once again the final and indisputable recipients of the profits.

When Russian authorities decided to abandon the soviet-style model of spatial development, without inventing any new strategies, this provoked a chaotic, uncontrollable expansion of the Moscow city region. However, unlike the growth of American and Asian capitals, in this case the expansion, as a result of demographic problems, led to a depopulation of vast territories, which have been previously inhabited, but now became something that is excluded from the economic and cultural life of the country. The state of things when cities are degrading, while towns are deteriorating, might have been at least a cause for some concern. But at a certain point this started to seem like something normal, a result of “natural” evolution and real progress. This mindset was shared by the same big developing companies, sympathizing economists and politicians.

Moscow, with its millions of inhabitants, has been treated by the Soviet authorities with special attention and concern. It was perceived as an oasis of relative prosperity, its accessibility safeguarded by residence permits. Presently it once again becomes the principal and most perspective link in the chain of urban settlement. Certain quite influential urbanists-economists, who, as often happens, address the topic of spatial planning for the first time, view the country as a sort of archipelago, consisting of ten-twenty odd agglomerations or large cities. Among these the capital plays the role of an absolute leader, of a standard that should be copied, just like it was before. Subsequent reflections come to a conclusion that there is an inevitable “shrinking” of populated space, meaning a death sentence not only to large and small villages, but also to small and middle-sized towns, which even the uncompromising Bolsheviks did not touch.

It would be unjust not to mention the fact that the idea of “controlled shrinking” produces a wide palette of feelings from skepticism to horror, which, however, do not crystallize into any clear and consistent notions. Not much may be heard beyond certain observations about supporting “small” and “historical” towns (as if within the space that has been inhabited through many centuries might exist “unhistorical” towns) at the expense of the federal budget or interior tourism. There are no ideas beyond that.

As the state is becoming gradually more interested in the territories of other countries, like the Syrian expedition or Crimean epospee, the spatial organization of the country after a period of meditation and uncertainty reminds us more and more of the old Soviet model. We see a familiar imperial

pattern, following the old route. But discussing today the strategy of spatial development, selecting new approaches and shaping policies, we may remember that the “imperial” space, as much as we have become accustomed to it, has an alternative which may be termed as “national”.

Unlike China or Europe, Russia has a relatively limited experience of organizing or settling its own national space. In search of a better life, escaping from authorities and enemies, Russian men quite easily moved south, north and beyond the Ural Mountains. England and France, before they started actively expanding, have managed to create a basis for national space. This was partly due to Roman imperial heritage in the form of towns and roads, as well owing to clearly set formidable boundaries, made by nature itself. The sea and mountains, enclosing natural space, combined with uncompromising competitors-neighbors, forced them to improve what they already had.

The potential of extensive, extrovert development in the modern world has practically reached its limit. It is only a question of time for Russia to change the vector of spatial development. This time is running out. Even with all the obvious cultural differences the national spaces of the US, the European Union and China with South-Eastern Asia acquire more and more common features, following a certain similar model. Adopting this model, which has little in common with the traditional imperial one, is mentally difficult and hard to implement in practice. At the same time this model of national space by itself does not contain anything particularly new or unknown, being built on basic goals, values and priorities. National space is “introvert”, it has a different direction of development, contrary to the “extravert” imperial model. The basis for the former is the framework of communication and infrastructure. Unlike the imperial space, which is star-shaped and monocentric, national space is polycentric, supported by many hubs, connected with a single network of roads and routes. It is marked by a higher density, by more efficient connections, which encourage cooperation and exchange. It stimulates the development of separate regions, their capitalization, their economic, social and cultural potential.

The appearance of a network base in the USA, EU and China was a result of a sort of “infrastructural revolution”, which was brought to life by willful acts initiated by the state. It does not matter whether it was connected with despotism or with democracy [14]. The authorities listened to the opinion of the business groups and of the professional community that transmitted the necessity to make important decisions. At the same time business companies and the public as a whole tended to react to these activities in different ways, sometimes actively supporting them, sometimes approving, while at other instances remaining neutral or hostile.

Russia is destined to enter the path of infrastructural reforms; it should experience an infrastructural revolution which, doubtless, will have its own local peculiarities. But in one sense it will follow its own tradition and will be subject to an almost universal law — it is the state that is supposed

to initiate this revolution, that state which declined spatial planning at the least appropriate moment.

The meaning and goal of the “infrastructural revolution” is the revival and development of regions. This phenomenon leads to a “territorial revolution”, the territorial complex becoming the center of the scene. A specific region, with its borders, its territory and resources, small and large settlements playing the principal role among the latter, will become such complexes [15]. Russian regions may well be compared in terms of their physical parameters with national countries, North American states, German lands or Chinese provinces. But they have much less rights and opportunities, and the center still becomes very alarmed when people start talking about giving them more independence and making the relations between the two more balanced.

The superfluous, exaggerated interest in the city, particularly a large one, springs from the Soviet and imperial tradition, which created a city that existed in contrast with its surroundings. It was a place opposed to what is around and outside it, being essentially a military camp and a center of power. This confrontation resulted in a disparity between the development of a city and its surroundings, between living conditions in a major urban center and the rest of the country.

In the system of national space a division between the “first-rate” and “second-rate” territories gives way to a policy of support for the regions, making them more self-sufficient and encouraging their full-fledged existence, when they may unite into macro-regions based on mutual interest. In this situation the regions themselves protect their cultural and environmental uniqueness. They count on local resources, develop agriculture, construction and small-size business, having direct connections and cooperating with their neighbors. As a result these entities enter a path of self-development, i.e. an evolution without outside financing, the constant support of the center and without depending on a major “anchor” taxpayer. As experience shows, many large western companies themselves favor small, reliable and successful regional towns more than the capitals.

The capital of national space is not necessarily the largest and most influential city. It often hands this role over to someone else, giving the other parts of the region more opportunity to cooperate and compete, more grounds to be on a par with each other and to enjoy equal rights. It is often believed that some of the most important obstacles for regional development are low density of the population, long distances and a shortage of human resources. Essentially this is nothing new for Russia, while for Canada or Australia these phenomena did not become a hindrance for realizing a quite successful model of existence. The population size is by far not the most important condition for success. The number of inefficient multi-millionaire and millionaire cities may be as high as that of efficient settlements with several thousand inhabitants. The potential to connect with the outside world and the “quality” of the population appear to be more important and reliable indices than the number of inhabitants. The Silicon Valley, Cambridge and Oxford are by far not the largest towns, but, what is most important, they don’t need to expand in order to stay attractive and strongly

influence not only the life of the region, but of the country as a whole. If relatively small settlements turn out to be successful and prosperous throughout the centuries, the present-day digital and non-digital networks make them even more viable [16].

The quality of the populace plays, and will play, an increasingly more notable role than its quantity. The conditions for achieving and enhancing this quality, or, in other words, raising the level of “human capital”, are created by “social industries”. Among them, apart from healthcare, education and social support, a very important place occupies the issue of habitation. Since long ago the latter is seen not in terms of just some square meters, but as a whole complex of accessible accompanying services and spaces, including the spaces of public gardens and streets, formed by residential houses and associated with the notion of “environment”. A normal, good-quality home is a basic factor for increasing life expectancy and birth rate, as well as for creating a favorable atmosphere in the family and society.

The Soviet power, in the end, proved to be unsuccessful either in providing citizens with a necessary number of square meters, or, even more so, with an accompanying complex, which was indicated in normative documents, regulations and indices. In new Russia the authorities placed the responsibility of providing the people with “affordable and comfortable” dwellings on the needy themselves. The role of major partners in the process was afforded to big developers and mortgage. Be it the banks, offering money, the developing companies, selling meters, or housing organizations, providing services –they are not interested in solving the housing problem or setting up a humane and decent environment. Many-colored facades, benches and installations in yards are involuntary bonuses to a product badly sold. The branch has reached a dead end, and is greatly in need of a revolution.

The “environment” and “housing” revolution should change the scene, when a citizen ends up as a tricked investor, a homeless person devoid of space and an obedient victim of new, capitalist housing managers and greedy ZhKKh (housing and communal services). He will then become the principal character on stage. A new norm should be introduced — diversity and accurate addressing in connection with the “environment” and “housing fund”, a return to the practice of social rent, appearance of low cost housing, its price being comparable with the actual income of a person. “Environment complexes” must be in line with the actual diversity of demands, opportunities and ways of life. One needs “integral environment standards” or “standards of residence”, when a necessary basic complex, formed in the center of a large city or far beyond its boundaries, is provided with various communications and ways of access, without depriving anyone of education and health service.

An apartment, following the example of many neighboring countries and competitors, should cease to be the base of the national housing fund, at some point replaced by a family house, standing on a piece of land, its maintenance being the job of a responsible owner, who uses

accessible and efficient technologies. The system of state-run housing and communal services will be gone [17].

A person who lives in a separate house is fundamentally different from a resident of a flat, who avoids contacts with his neighbors. The former is bound to enter in a more simple and natural way the variously organized and integrated self-governed communities of people living close to each other. The most effective and well-known among these are various types of cooperative societies. A family house, a community of neighbors, and a community uniting communities are the principle nucleus of national space. This phenomenon, with its legal and cultural characteristics and traditions, was thoroughly driven out from Soviet everyday life and found no support in the post-soviet practice. The concept of renovation, of eliminating and settling in a new place traditionally formed housing entities does not presume, among other things, that neighborhood communities, built up through many years, have any value. And in this sense the present government is hardly distinguishable from the Soviet one, which relentlessly depopulated “unperspective” villages, towns that were expected to be submerged by water reservoirs and quarters of old Moscow reconstructed by the authorities.

An inhabitant of a private house, standing on a piece of land, builds up his own relations with the environment, be it nature or culture, and is ready to become a full-fledged partner of the state. This person is logically ecology-minded and is just as logically a supporter of “green technologies”, which do not concern the big developer and the authorities that back him.

Real estate proprietors and local neighborhood communities are the main consumers and creators of that valuable thing which is traditionally termed urban environment. The latter is a product and a derivative of local, regional culture, which is hard to borrow and adopt, standardize and replace. The environmental poverty of a Russian town was inherited from the Soviet past, when there was neither a place for private land ownership, nor a distinct culture of land tenure. People remember it in connection with the “residual principle” of financing. National space, on the contrary, is perceived as a single, public environment of life activity, persistent in space and time. It is perceived as a process of self-motion, which begins from the bottom. It is harder to launch it, than just to pave the sidewalks.

V. CONCLUSION

The short periods of possible, desirable or necessary reforms, which, somewhat conditionally, are called here “revolutionary”, usually give place to lengthy periods of calm, natural development. At that point both society and business groups feel themselves more confident and comfortable. Radical changes are not fatally connected with shock and trauma. Everything depends on the capability of the ruling power to explain and foresee. The periods of quiet development, in their turn, require constant monitoring and administrative activities that correct and regulate. The choice of adequate policy may only be made based on an accurate diagnosis [18]. Neither the imitation of environmental

prosperity, nor the adoption of American legislative norms, useful for big business, can replace active reformative measures. In a situation that calls for changes, it is difficult and inefficient to imitate other experiences, and to compare oneself with those who have successfully made these hard changes a long time ago.

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