12. Property Relationships and Post-Soviet Urban Planning: Three Critical Cases

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Introduction

In contemporary Western world cities, the distribution of property rights and clearly established borders between types of tenure serve as a starting point for urban planning. Since urban property owners are assigned the title of stakeholders, it is argued that the "stake" allows them to take part into negotiations and decision-making when it comes to spatial transformations affecting their property, since stakeholders share rights, obligations, and the intention to use their property as an economic asset given and granted by the bundle of rights. The concepts of stakeholders and property owners are relatively new to urban planning in Russia, emerging with the restoration of private property as a legal and economic entity by the 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the organization of the state underwent a major and sudden shift toward a capitalist model of governance and economy (Golubchikov 2017). This shift implied the establishment of the institutional infrastructure for private property rights, estimation of market pricing on the assets—namely land, housing, industries, et cetera—and the creation of a strata of property owners via the politics of asset privatization. On the jurisdictional level, this transition to the new modus operandi was sealed with the commencement of a number of laws and legislative acts. However, on the level of daily practice, the adoption of these newly born regulations had been met with a number of obstacles.

In this paper, the issue of institutional transfer (Deeg 1995) is addressed, critically confronting the perceived totality of the institution of private property. It should be noted that we intentionally excluded industrial and capital assets from the analysis and focused on land and housing, since the privati-

zation of the former had been carried out on a nontransparent basis and demands independent inquiry.

Exploring three critical cases, the transition to the standard liberal model of property is examined and the perceived totality of private property as an institution is investigated, following the model of intensifying processes of centralization of urban planning (Zupan et al. 2021). In order to explain the transition to the standard liberal model of property (Hann 2006) and the obstacles it had faced in the process of transfer, we analyzed the cases of Vladivostok, Ulan-Ude, and Vorkuta. Spatial characteristics and socioeconomic situations resulted in the emergence of hybrid formats of property regimes (Canfield 2020). The findings of this research shall contribute to an understanding of the emerging East European countries' problems in the established domains of urban theory and practice.

The city of Vladivostok faced significant increase in the automobilization rate during the early 1990s, which resulted in the current heated contestation of public spaces (Springer 2009) among urban stakeholders. The theoretical underpinnings and empirical evidence from this case analysis shed light on the variety of forms that practices of civil society related to property (von Benda-Beckmann 2006) may take during the process of post-socialist transition. The second case represents a unique phenomenon of so-called "unplanned" suburbanization (Breslavsky 2014), stimulated by rapid growth of unofficial *nakhalovki* [squatter] settlements (Karbainov 2018) in the urban periphery during the 1990s and 2000s. The last case is dedicated to the city of Vorkuta, where dramatic depopulation during the post-socialist period has prompted residents to relinquish ownership of their real estate.

In the first part of the paper, the theoretical and historical grounding for the further analysis is established. The second part of the paper is dedicated to the case analyses, where the specificity of the selected cases is uncovered. The paper ends with the conclusion section, summarizing the findings and stating topical questions for further research.

Private Property in Post-Soviet Russia: Key Concepts, Critical Points, and Criticism

The concept of private property provides a basis for contemporary urban planning. In Western societies, property rights have been long associated with liberal values that provide personal freedoms and act as a basis for the formation

of civil society (see, e.g., Pipes 2000), and therefore they are often called "ownership societies." The right to exclusive ownership is frequently promoted as a desired status quo, since, on one hand, it "provides the basis for efficiency [...] by creating the optimum structure of incentives" (Hann 2003) for national economic development and, on the other hand, acts as a source of economic security for households, providing widespread access to economic assets and exerting an equalizing role in wealth distribution (Arundel et al. 2020). Subsequently, under the capitalist economy, the liberal model of property implies the commodification of property rights. Under this paradigm, property owners are treated as rational economic agents that strive to maximize the economic value or revenue of their assets.

This view of property rights is relatively new to the Russian state, since the tradition of exclusive property rights had been disrupted by the anti-egalitarian property regulation of the Soviet period. Despite the existence of a free-market economy and the strata of property owners in the Russian Empire, property rights had never been widespread and instead contributed to the hierarchical structure of the society. Under these conditions, ownership had been the means of wealth accumulation secured by inheritance law. With the establishment of the socialist agenda, the system of private property had been reformed into a system of communal property, proclaiming the state as the one and only stakeholder, and a system of personal property, under which Soviet citizens could acquire and use personal belongings but could not sell them. Another legal novella of the time was the succession ban that prohibited citizens from inheriting land and dwellings. Trudolyubov (2015) argues that the pre-Soviet tradition of property relationships had been eliminated when the generation of owners fled the country and had not been restored until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and therefore the transition to the market economy required the institutional transfer of private property.

In the transitional period, the system of private property was transferred to the state organization, in which privatization policies played the crucial role. This allowed the authorities to form the strata of property owners and entitle them with a certain bundle of rights and responsibilities. Puzanov notes that one of the core ideas behind the privatization of land and housing was wealth distribution, which provided the owners with economic security and a sense of stability in turbulent times of state reassembly (Puzanov 2018). However, housing privatization did not include privatization of the land beneath large housing estates, thus resulting in a hefty amount of non-subdivided urban land. Despite the high rate of privatization on the national level, the rate varies

greatly on the regional level, where the central and southern parts of the country tend to have higher levels of privatization and ownership than their eastern and northeastern counterparts (Shomina 2018). Verdery (1999) argues that the institutional transfer resulted in the emergence of fuzzy property, where the system is composed of an inseparable mixture of exclusive and collective property rights.

In recent decades, the liberal model of property has been actively criticized by social anthropologists. Their main critique is aimed at this model's claim of versatility, which denies the complexity of property relationships, especially for the countries in the transitional period, and its inability "to grasp the discrepancy between the idea of property (what should be ideally) and the institution of property (what is really going on)" (Hann 2006; Karbainov 2014). Uncovering the cases of informal land tenure in Ulan-Ude and Sochi, Karbainov determines that two major approaches to private-property institution analysis currently dominate the academic discourse and both of them contribute to the perception of property relationships as homogeneous entities (Karbainov 2014). The liberal approach suggests that the imperfection of the legal framework impedes the development of private property to its full potential. On the other hand, civilized approach demands a separate framework for post-socialist property studies as this system drastically differs from the liberal one.

The fundamental shift in the organization of the state challenged the command modus operandi in urban planning, introducing a neoliberal agenda into planning theory and practice. Despite proclaimed municipal independence, federal authorities maintained the leading role in imposing planning goals on regions and municipalities, reinforcing processes of centralization of power and resources via budgetary, tax, and local-government policies. With the adoption of the liberal paradigm, the metaphor of growth has been leading Russian urban development in recent decades.

Concept of Socioeconomic Growth: Major Trends and Local Specifics

The concept of future economic growth has become one of the key approaches in Russian urban planning. A prospective increase of basic socioeconomic indicators, especially absolute ones—population numbers and various indicators of the urban economy—is included in strategic planning documents by de-

fault. For the medium and long term, municipalities' General Plans and Strategies for Socioeconomic Development are often based on the values of indicators that differ significantly from those observed today in reality.

This situation is the result of at least two discourses that have developed in Russian urban planning. First of all, this is a continuation of the Soviet urban planning tradition—it was assumed that a city's General Plan is a tool for planning urban development in the long term, not in the foreseeable future. Secondly, this discourse is stimulated by current governmental policies. The national project Housing and Urban Environment, aimed at improving the comfort of living in Russian cities, has strict targets for the commissioning of residential areas. Particularly, they include:

- Growth of new housing construction levels to 120 million m^2 annually
- Improvement of housing opportunities for middle-income households (through incentives for mortgage lending)
- Securing a sustainable reduction in uninhabitable housing stock
- Overall increase in the average value of the integral Urban Environment Quality Index of Russian cities by 30 percent and a decrease in the number of cities with low index values by half
- Creation of a mechanism for direct participation of citizens in the process of improving the urban environment, and increase of the share of participating citizens to 30 percent

The result of such discourses is the widespread inclusion of areas for new housing construction and the increased number of residential areas put into redevelopment in municipal spatial planning documents. This has also become one of the important performance indicators of municipal administration teams.

However, the urban development discourse on "growth" does not always correspond to the actual situation in Russian municipalities. There are several main groups of cases in which the policies of growth, together with the nonliberal model of property, contradict or even turn out to be in direct conflict with the goals of urban planning. We shall shed light on them using our three exemplar cases, in which the collision between these discourses and actual socioeconomic tendencies has become critical.

Public Space in a City of Private Property: The Case of Vladivostok

Vladivostok is a city in the Russian Far East with a population of about six hundred thousand people. The city is Russia's key Pacific port, and port functions have always been the basis of its economic specialization.

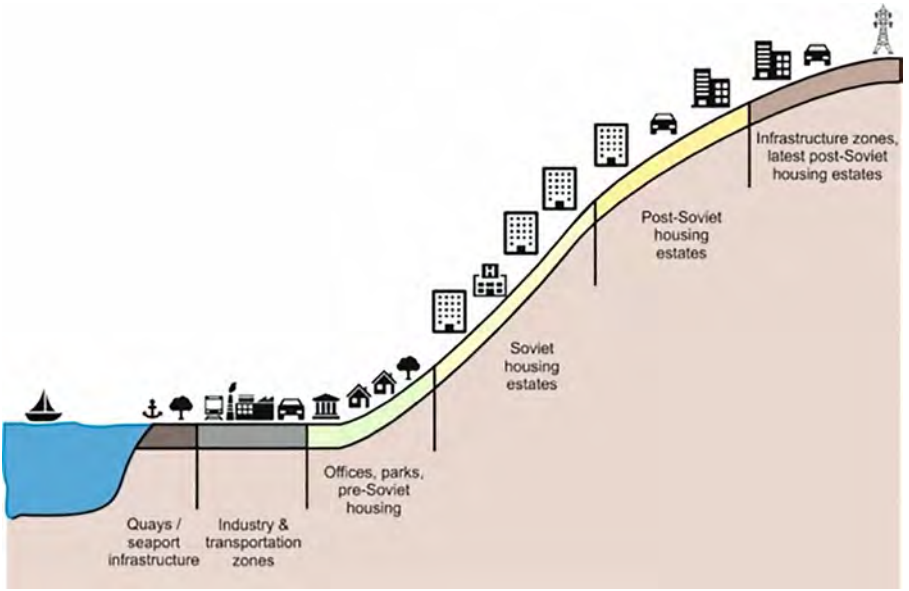
Speaking in terms of urban planning, Vladivostok is a unique city in Russia. Historically, the city was formed around a seaport, which required access to convenient bays at the southern end of the Muravyov-Amursky Peninsula. But as the city spread, the space convenient for building construction ended, and soon it became necessary to transfer residential construction to the slopes of the mountains adjacent to the city, called "sopki." Subsequently, Vladivostok became the only large city built in the countryside, with most of its residential buildings actually located on the sopki slopes (fig. 1).

Figure 1: Large Soviet and post-Soviet housing estates on the slopes of Vladivostok sopki.

Source: sergeybrut.livejournal.com.

During the Soviet period, the expansion of the city's territory was constrained by attention given to projects for the development of sopki slopes. In the post-Soviet period, the situation has changed. The scarcity of land and the expansion of the city along the seacoast has led to an increase in the number of development projects on the slopes and even the tops of the sopki (fig. 2). This situation has led to a significant increase in infrastructure costs: at the moment, Vladivostok is the leader in the number of retaining walls within urban confines and the cost of their maintenance.

Figure 2: Average height profile of urban zoning in Vladivostok.



Source: Authors.

The situation was worsened by the influence of another factor: The proximity to South Korea, Japan, and China has meant that in the 1990s and 2000s, Vladivostok became a key port for the import of cars from these countries to Russia. Quite quickly, the level of motorization in the city became the highest in Russia: today it exceeds 600 cars per 1,000 inhabitants, which is commensurate with the values typical for the suburbs of US cities (the average level of

motorization in Russia is slightly over 300 cars per 1,000 inhabitants). Owning a private car has become a desirable personal attribute for most of the locals. An attempt to adapt urban transport policy to a high level of motorization has led to degradation of the public transport system (including almost complete disappearance of trams and trolleybuses), degradation of the pedestrian infrastructure, and a decrease in the rate of development of micromobility. In addition, the city budget incurred significant costs for the construction of the infrastructure of highways, bridges and overpasses, and the establishment of parking spaces. At present, the city authorities have decided to rethink the situation involving the level of motorization, viewing it as an important problem of urban planning, but the contemporary consequences of the changes are not yet obvious.

As a result, a significant land use problem arose in the city. The growth in housing construction on the sopki has led to a reduction in the area of places occupied by public spaces and social infrastructure. In addition, construction on the sopki slopes made it impossible to organize full-fledged adjacent public spaces for new housing. The small space that remained unoccupied was mainly used for parking. The situation was aggravated by the undefined status of the adjacent land. As in many other cities of Russia, there was a phenomenon in which the privatization of apartments in residential buildings was not accompanied by the formation of land plots under them. Therefore many houses in the city do not have officially registered land plots, and the ways for their residents to use them legally are strictly limited.

When Supply Does Not Meet Demand: The Case of the *Nakhalovki* Suburbia in Ulan-Ude

Ulan-Ude is also located in the Russian Far East (southeast of Lake Baikal) and is the capital of the Republic of Buryatia. Presently, the population of the city is slightly over four hundred thousand people. Ulan-Ude became the place where one of the phenomena that is unique for Russian urban planning—uncontrolled individual housing construction on the city outskirts, named *nakhalovki*—emerged. In fact, the *nakhalovki* were an illegal self-seizure of the agricultural land surrounding the city, which at the time of the appearance of the phenomenon (in the late 1990s) had not been used intensively.

Let us take a look of the reason for this phenomenon. There was an extremely unfavorable economic situation in the Republic of Buryatia in the

1990s, which resulted in a decrease in the income of the population and a high level of unemployment. The capital had become the most favorable city in the region in terms of quality of living standards, which has led to a sharp increase in migration (the city's population has grown by almost a third). Nevertheless, the low rates of housing construction, combined with the lack of opportunity for the majority of low-income people from rural areas to buy (or rent) housing, has made it necessary to find a new format of housing. So far, the *nakhalovki* have become the solution.

Figure 3: Housing estates of Ulan-Ude, surrounded by expansive, dense nakhalovki settlements.

Source: gazeta-n1.ru.

Nakhalovki have a number of typical features. For the most part, they represent an "urban" settlement format that is visually easily distinguishable from the other, rural suburbs of Ulan-Ude, which were formed earlier. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to call them the result of "suburbanization"—rather, this process stands on an intermediate position between "classical" and "false" urbanization (fig. 3). A rather low level of life quality has become an inalienable

characteristic of the *nakhalovki*: the unplanned nature of their occurrence has led to a lack of necessary infrastructure in their areas. The completion of this infrastructure will cost the city and adjacent municipalities large investment expenditures in the future. This has not been the only negative externalization of the *nakhalovki*, because their residents' use of cheap coal for heating has led to a deterioration of the ecological situation.

At the moment, the city authorities are paying special attention to *nakhalovki*. During the so-called "dacha amnesty" that took place in Russia in early 2010s, many of them were legalized. Nevertheless, planning and infrastructural problems caused by the spontaneous nature of their emergence, as well as the low rates of their residents' participation in urban life (as noted by researchers), still remain a barrier for solution of this problem.

Not Public, Not Private: Case of Housing Property in Vorkuta

Vorkuta is a city in the north of the European part of Russia, in the Republic of Komi. The population of Vorkuta today is about fifty thousand people, and several tens of thousands more live in the mining settlements adjacent to the city. Vorkuta was founded as a city in the middle of the twentieth century on the grounds of the Pechora coal basin, and from that moment on, the history of the city was inextricably linked with the coal industry.

At the end of the Soviet period, the population of Vorkuta exceeded one hundred thousand people, and taking into account the surrounding settlements, it was about two hundred thousand people. Subsequently, the decline in the economic profitability of coal mining in the Pechora basin and increased competition between coal mining companies as a result of the post-socialist economic transition led to a reduction in production levels and the gradual closure of mines. The population outflow has been the major consequence of this process. It was amplified by other aspects of the city—the harsh climate and Vorkuta's unfavorable media image (the city is widely associated with the Gulag system). Vorkuta has become one of the "classic" examples of urban shrinkage in Russia (fig. 4).

The sharp decline in population has led to a large number of problems in local urban planning. First of all, the decrease in the population required an increase in per capita expenses for maintaining the communal infrastructure, especially heating. This has become a critical problem in the surrounding set-

tlements. Subsequently, this became the reason for even greater depopulation and subsequent resettlement of some remaining residents.

Figure 4: Abandoned mining settlement of Rudnik, located near the city of Vorkuta.

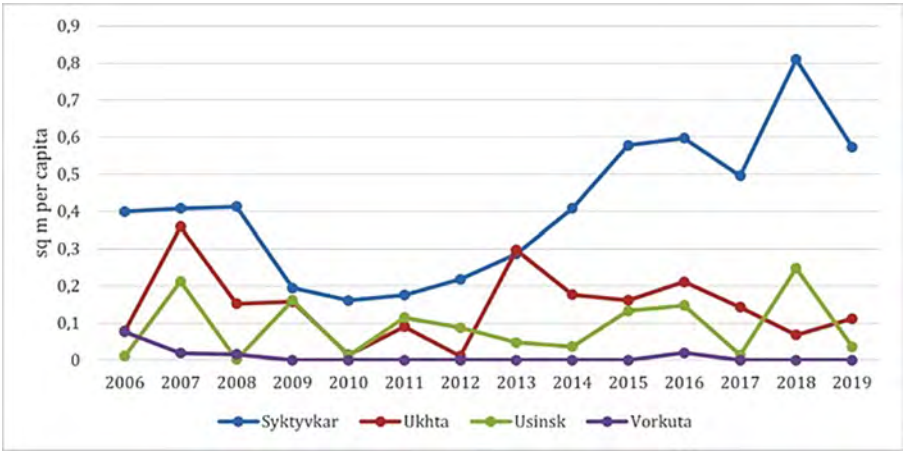
Source: Denis Sinyakov, 7x7-journal.ru.

This process resulted in two interrelated problems. Firstly, there is a phenomenon that is unique for Russia, particularly taking into account the Russian context of the implementation of the neoliberal model of private property: Citizens who previously privatized their apartments now want to return their property back to the municipality. This is explained chiefly by extremely high payments for the use of communal infrastructure. The values of residential real estate in the city have hence dropped significantly. The practice of "informal deprivatization" of private property has also become widespread. For example, some residents try to transfer their property to insolvent groups of local inhabitants in exchange for informal compensation.

Secondly, the authorities of the municipality found themselves in a difficult situation in terms of making planning decisions. Not so long ago, subur-

ban settlements were merged with the city into a single municipality. In this regard, on the one hand, the current situation forced the city authorities to support the resettlement of these settlements and inner urban districts that have experienced significant depopulation. On the other hand, the situation observed nowadays contradicts the discourse of "growth" (fig. 5): despite the current circumstances, the urban planning documents of Vorkuta still assume future expansion of the city, but, with rare exceptions, do not offer approaches to solve the problem of rapid urban shrinkage.

Figure 5: Housing construction tendencies in cities of Republic of Komi with population over forty thousand people.



Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the Russian Federal Service of Statistics ("Rosstat").

Conclusion

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the organization of the state has undergone significant transformation. The newly established system of private property has been introduced into planning policies and urban development. However, the emergence of fuzzy property aspects has challenged the unifying character of the standard neoliberal private-property model.

The cases analyzed in this paper illustrate the variety of ways in which property might be practiced as a sociological concept. The case of the city of Vorkuta challenges one of the basic ideas of property as an institution—that of ownership being the means of wealth accumulation, thus demonstrating the institution's downside. The case of Ulan-Ude demonstrates the significance of the informal systems for urban development and their spatial consequences for the city in the long term. In the case of Vladivostok, the received practices of ownership demonstrate the interrelation between the processes of enclosure and contestation for public places.

Another idea that in some sense unites these cases is the lack of sensitivity to the local context that is embedded in urban planning policies at the national level. Despite its transition toward a market-based regime, Russia has generally maintained its highly centralized approach toward urban planning, with little room for municipalities to act. Focused on the growth metaphor, this approach suggests that national and local development goals may contradict each other, leaving the local authorities and citizens in limbo.

In this paper we have attempted to highlight the significance of the anthropological perspective on urban planning in general and property studies in particular. Accompanied by other quantitative and qualitative data, it may provide valuable insights into the fuzzy aspects of the "property" concept and may address the current challenges of urban development in the transitional period.

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