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Not a City Yet, not a City Anymore: the Internal Suburbanization and the Evolution of Non-Urban Spaces of a Siberian City

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Abstract. The article considers the evolution of specific spaces of the Soviet and post-Soviet cities of Siberia and the Russian Far East, defined as the «private housing sector». Based on interviews and observations in the regional centres of Siberia and the Russian Far East, the authors show that in the Soviet city, the «private housing sector» is a locality where the architectural landscape, everyday practices, and the organization of communities are weakly associated with urbanism. This exclusion was consolidated by the system for placing urban infrastructure, which can be traced according to the data of urban GIS. At the same time, the specifics of cities enlargement in the Soviet period led to the close integration of such localities into the urban space. The evolution of the «private housing sector» in the post-Soviet period did not lead to the inclusion of such localities in the practices of urbanism. On the contrary, they develop predominantly along with the inner suburb model, reproducing non-urban architecture and everyday practices. Nevertheless, such localities continue to remain an integral part of the post-Soviet city, determining the eclecticism of its physical and social space. This lets us suggest that the organic inclusion of non-urban localities and communities in the urban space can serve as one of the key reasons for highlighting the «Global East» model of the city.

Keywords: post-soviet city, «private housing sector», suburbanism, global East

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Еще не город, уже не город: внутренняя субурбанизация и эволюция негородских пространств сибирского города

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Аннотация. Рассмотрена эволюция специфических пространств советских и постсоветских городов Сибири и Дальнего Востока, определяемых как «частный сектор». На материалах интервью и наблюдений в региональных столицах Сибири и Дальнего Востока показано, что в советском городе «частный сектор» представлял собой локальности, в которых архитектурный ландшафт, практики повседневности и организация сообществ были слабо связаны с урбанизмом. Такое исключение закреплялось системой размещения городской инфраструктуры, что прослеживается по данным городских геоинформационных систем. Вместе с тем специфика разрастания городов в советский период обуславливала тесную интеграцию таких локальностей в городское пространство, хотя эволюция «частного сектора» в постсоветский период не привела к включению их в практики урбанизма. Напротив, они развиваются преимущественно по модели внутреннего пригорода, воспроизводя негородские архитектуру и практики повседневности. Тем не менее такие локальности продолжают оставаться неотъемлемой частью постсоветского города, определяя эклектичность его физического и социального пространства. Это позволяет предположить, что органичное включение негородских локальностей и сообществ в городское пространство может служить одним из ключевых оснований для выделения модели города «глобального Востока».

Ключевые слова: постсоветский город, «частный сектор», субурбанизм, глобальный Восток.

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Научная специальность: социология.

Introduction

The so-called «private housing sector» is considered to be an important legacy of Soviet urbanization, defining the appearance of many, if not most of the provincial cities of Russia. It represents vast space of low-rise and low-density single-family houses – a kind of «parallel city» (Holston, 1989), an invisible twin of the official image of the city that is similar to the massifs of slums formed in the fast-growing cities of China and India (Vakhshain, 2014: 13). These vast urban areas

and their communities, in fact, are beyond the focus of contemporary Russian urbanists and are not included in the image of the Russian city in the academic text and in the media. There is almost no «private housing sector» in the urban management, as the urban management tends to regard it, above all, to be a space resource for the growth of the city in the future. The municipal authorities see the «private housing sector» to be only a problem territory where there are almost no citizens and their communities.

Having formed mainly outside state support and direct regulation (the government encouraged individual housing construction only in the period of post-war reconstruction (Kalyukin, Kohl, 2020: 1775), the private housing sector has formed vast spaces even in the largest cities with the population of over one million, where the share of single-family houses is from 15 % to 45 % (Prelovskaja, 2017). In Siberia, during the Soviet period the construction of single-family houses remained on a significant scale until the second half of the 1960s (Dolgoľjuk, 2008), the private housing sector occupies large territories that not only fill the gaps between blocks of multi-storey buildings, but also form whole areas with the specific non-urban organization of space (Grigoriev, 2019). These spaces, defined by municipal officials and city planners as a «development reserve», «development zones of built-up areas», along with their communities, as a rule, turn out to be «invisible» to the authorities (Bliakher, Ivanova, Kovalevski, 2021).

This view almost excludes not only the understanding of the specific traits of life and self-organization of local communities within the «private housing sector» of a Russian provincial city, but also the raising of the question of the «private housing sector» role in the historical and further development of a provincial Russian city. At the same time, the «private housing sector» is a vivid example of «non-urban» localities that are an organic part of the Soviet (Dyatlov, 2021) and post-Soviet cities (Grigoriev, 2019; Grigoriev, 2021a). These vast spaces, which do not fit the image of the «correct» urbanism, remain largely marginal in relation to the image of the city, represented both in the discourse of the authorities and in the mass consciousness. (Timoshkin, 2020) This is probably why the marginal «non-urban» localities of the Russian city, with the rare exception (Karbainov, 2018), do not draw interest among Russian researchers.

In our opinion, the study of marginalised urban spaces and urban informality makes it possible to go beyond the post-socialist discourse, linking it with the developed areas of urbanization (Galuszka, 2021). In this article, we attempt to demonstrate that the «private

housing sector» largely determined the nature of the development of not only Soviet, but also the post-Soviet city, which cannot be adequately defined through the prism of established theories of urban development. Based on the ideas of comparative urbanism (Özgür et. al., 2020; Robison, 2011, 2013), we assume that the close integration of «non-urban» localities into the urban space not only on the periphery, but also in the central regions can be defined as the feature of the post-Soviet city, which characterizes a permanent state rather than transitional processes.

The article is based on studies of the «private housing sector» in the regional centres of Siberia and the Russian Far East (Irkutsk city, Omsk city, Khabarovsk city, Krasnoyarsk city, Birobidzhan city, and Tomsk city) conducted in 2020–2021. The main empirical material consists of a complex (43 units) of focused and biographical interviews with residents of the localities to be studied. Basically, the respondents are the second and the third generation of residents of such localities, as well as new settlers in the «private housing sector» (7 people). In addition, the materials of the observations conducted by the Flânerie method (Benjamin, 1968) and data analysis of urban geographic information systems («2GIS») were used.

«Not a city yet»: the «private housing sector» as an urban village

The «private housing sector» of a Russian city, although it was genetically linked to the pre-Soviet practices of shaping urban space, is nevertheless a product of the Soviet period. As Viktor Dyatlov emphasizes: «Before the Soviet regime, there were manor-type houses, areas of wooden slums existed (they even could predominate in a number), but there was no «private housing sector». The buildings became the «private housing sector» in the system of relations of the Soviet city» (Dyatlov, 2021: 20) Contrary to the ideas of the early XX century about the enlargement of single-family houses in Russian cities (Raevskij, 1918), by the early 1930s the concept of an individual house was maintained only as housing for privileged groups («for top management») (Meerovich, 2014: 245) The bulk of the «private housing

sector» was marginalized both by the notion of the temporality of such resettlement and by the ideas of labor-household communities as the basis for planning a Soviet city (Meerovich, 2008: 31)

Rapid urbanisation in 1930-the 1950s resulted in a powerful migration inflow of rural migrants to cities. This exacerbated the problem of providing housing for people in cities that had formed in the 1920s. Under these conditions, providing new dwellers of the city with housing was postponed for the future (Kotkin, 2002), on the one hand, due to the lack of resources, and on the other hand, within the framework of the implementation of the state housing policy as an instrument of domination. (Meerovich, 2008) However, even in this situation, the state did not consider the «private housing sector» to be a full-fledged part of the Soviet city. After short-term support of individual housing construction in 1946–1950 to overcome the consequences of World War II, the state again limited the possibilities for the construction of individual houses (Kalyukin, Kohl, 2020: 1775). In Siberian cities individual houses construction remained on a large scale until the 1960s, but in the 1970s it began to decline sharply (Dolgolyuk, 2008: 89). Nevertheless, even by the end of the 1980s, about 20 % of housing was in personal ownership in the cities of Soviet Russia (Kalyukin, Kohl, 2020: 1775), with the bulk of which consisted of single-family houses.

The architectural landscape of the «private housing sector» was formed mainly by uncomfortable housing with a predominance of buildings such as a village house, often transferred from villages. The prevalence of this type of dwelling not only determined the non-urban visuality of the «private housing sector», but also resulted in the complex of village practices of everyday life associated with dwellings and farmsteads (Grigoriev, 2021b). The system of economic interactions based on the elements of the gift economy (Mauss, 1970), is possible in the city only as a rudiment. (Harvey, 2018) However, in the Soviet city these practices were reproduced not only in the first and second generations of residents of the «private housing sector», but also in other

urban communities (Barsukova, 2003) As a result, the communities that emerged in the modernization logic of urbanization reproduced the principles of self-organization and economic forms that dominated in the pre-modern society (Polaniy, 2002).

The limited access to urbanism was also consolidated in the system of placing urban infrastructure, focused primarily on urban areas with a high population density. This approach, justified from the point of view of urban planning, led to the emergence of vast spaces with minimal or even completely absent urban infrastructure in the cities. Since the layout of urban infrastructure facilities was fixed in the urban planning documents (general layout) for a long period of time. This meant, in fact, the institutionalisation of non-urban localities within the city space. The layout of educational, cultural, healthcare and leisure facilities that developed during the Soviet period is considerably preserved in the regional centres of Siberia and the Russian Far East that we studied to the present day.

A search in the city geographic information system 2GIS according to data from Irkutsk city, Khabarovsk city and Omsk city in the categories «Pharmacies», «Schools», «Public Healthcare Centres» and «Kindergartens» reveals that the density of elements of urban infrastructure in the areas of the «private housing sector» is sharply limited in comparison with the territories where multi-storey buildings dominate. At the same time, in the localities of single-family houses located in the city centre, framed by multi-storey buildings, such infrastructure elements are inclined to be placed on the periphery of the «private housing sector» and large streets. In the localities of the «private housing sector», located on the urban periphery, such infrastructure objects cannot be found at all.

This feature of the distribution of urban infrastructure for cultural and leisure facilities is especially noticeable. A search by the categories «Cinema», «Cultural Centres» does not reveal a single object in the localities of the «private housing sector» of Irkutsk, Khabarovsk, and Omsk. Libraries are a certain exception, but they are also located on the border of single-

family houses areas and multi-storey buildings, and in large spaces of the «private housing sector» they are completely absent. Thus, urban infrastructure, which significantly influences the possibility of an urbanistic way of life, is beyond the living space (Lefebvre, 2015) of the residents of the «private housing sector», and access to it was possible only if it entered the space of a «normal» city.

The distribution of urban facilities in combination with the prevalent practices of everyday life resulted in the paradoxical situation: while staying within the same city, residents of the «private housing sector» changed their lifestyle from rural to urban and vice versa during the day. Such «partial» or «temporary urbanism» not only distanced the residents of the «private housing sector» from the city, but also consolidated the place of non-urban localities into the urban space. The controversial incorporation of non-urban localities into the city was institutionalised by the practice of switching between lifestyles on a daily basis. The specific feature of the concentric growth of the Soviet city, with the construction corresponding to different epochs (Kalyukin, Kohl, 2020), led to the fact that quite often the switch to an urban lifestyle occurred on the way from the central part of the city (from the place of residence in the «private housing sector») to the outskirts (to the place of work). And the switch back to a non-urban lifestyle was associated with a return to central city areas.

As a result, the Soviet provincial city immanently included a complex of spaces that often occupied up to half of its territory, which were associated with urbanism neither by the architectural landscape nor by the way of life of its residents. The Soviet features of the urban sprawl did not imply the displacement of such localities to the periphery of the city, on the contrary, it allowed their preservation in the central parts of the city. The mixture of urban and non-urban spaces was typical for all regional cities of Siberia and the Russian Far East. This allows us to assume that the combination of urban and non-urban spaces and the mixed way of life determined by it was a significant feature of the Soviet city.

Not a city anymore: private housing sector as a space of internal suburbanisation

The «invisibility», «emptiness» (Filippov, 2009) of the vast spaces of the «private housing sector» for the authorities and researchers determine the invisibility of the modern processes to take place here. During the post-Soviet decades, the localities of the «private housing sector» were dynamically changing, moving farther and farther away from the image of a «village in a city», which was a mechanism and a symbol of the process defined by V.L. Glazychev as «slobodization of cities» (Glazychev, 1995). We can more or less confidently talk about the general trend of this process associated with a departure from rural practices of organizing living space (Grigorichev, 2021a) and local communities (Grigorichev, 2021b).

Such changes are captured well through the visibility of the «private housing sector», reflecting a wide range of options for transforming such «non-urban localities». Their common features are the horizontal vector of development and the preservation of commensuration to a person, however, the forms and pace of transformations are considerably different. Along with the actively changing localities of the «private housing sector», where typically rural and single-family houses give way to comfortable houses, there can be found places where the appearance and «the urban village» style prevail. These are contrasted with the compact, but well-visible areas of cottage settlements found in Irkutsk, Omsk, and Khabarovsk developing according to gated communities (Hirt, 2012) model in the logic of post-communist transformations (Gasior-Niemiec, Glasze, Pütz, 2003).

Our studies in Irkutsk, Omsk, Khabarovsk, Tomsk, and Birobidzhan in 2020–2021 made it possible to identify both compact localities of the transforming «private housing sector» and multiple dispersed cases of modernization of single-family houses. In the first case, as a rule, we observed the formation of «cottage settlements» that do not have a separate status, in contrast to similar formations on the periphery of the urban space or in the outer suburbs. Determining the exact number of such formations within even one city is an almost impossible

task due to both the scale of the «private housing sector» and the high dynamics of its transformation. We specified at least five such localities in Irkutsk, three in Omsk and Khabarovsk, two in Tomsk, and one in Krasnoyarsk and Birobidzhan.

They do not fully reproduce the gated communities model described by Sonia Hirt in relation to the post-socialist situation (Hirt, 2012). Unlike the «cottage communities» built outside the city limits, the boundaries between gated spaces and the surrounding space are quite permeable. «Out of service» berries, gaps in the fence, with pedestrian paths being laid through it, and not rarely, only the intended physical fence of the villages act not so much as a physical and symbolic border, but as a symbol of the permeability of this borderline. Social distance constructed primarily from the inside by the communities themselves, is also heterogeneous and permeable, as far as our field data can demonstrate. To a large extent, this is determined by the heterogeneity of the communities of most of these localities, in which, according to one of the respondents, «each creature in pairs» (a man, interview, Irkutsk, 2019). The unifying principle for such communities is rather the desire not for social homogeneity and isolation, but for a non-urban lifestyle: «to live in a city, but not like in a city» (a couple, Omsk, interview, 2021).

The strive for a non-urban lifestyle is especially noticeable in the few gated communities that are closest to the classical models, emerging within the urban space as an alternative to both the traditional «private housing sector» and multi-storey buildings. Such settlements, as a rule, appear in the most attractive recreational areas of the city, but in close proximity to the city infrastructure (a complex of cottages in the «Green Island park» in Omsk, the «Kazachya Gora» cottage village in Khabarovsk, «Birgard village» in Birobidzhan, and others). These settlements, on the one hand, remain a form of status consumption formed back in the 1990s (Humphry, 2002), but on the other hand, they turn out to be the most pronounced form of manifestations of a non-urban lifestyle within the city limits. Such a manifestation reveals itself in the contrast not only of the architectur-

al landscape, but also of everyday practices: car parking (own garage for two-three cars versus packed parking lots near multi-storey buildings), recreation areas (the presence of own bathhouse and barbeque area versus the need to travel out of the city for residents of high-rise buildings), etc.

In our opinion, it is the combination of the manifestation of a non-urban lifestyle and status consumption that is significant, since it is fundamentally crucial for residents of such localities to realize both within the city, while maintaining the status of a city dweller. As a result, such «non-urban» localities are integrated into the image of the city and included in the local discourse as a marker of local differentiation and reformatting of urban space. In their interviews, city dwellers define urban areas through such localities and the modern development of a city. Along with multi-storey buildings, such localities shape the image of a modern provincial Russian city.

A similar process of creating new non-urban spaces in the city is related to the movement from multi-storey buildings to single-family houses outside the «cottage villages». Such examples can be found in all regional centres we studied (Irkutsk, Omsk, Tomsk, Krasnoyarsk, Khabarovsk, and Birobidzhan). We specify two main options for such a strategy: 1) construction of a new or rebuilding of an old house in the private housing sector or on «free» land; and 2) construction of a house on a dacha area that is within the city limits. The first option is more widespread, and we have observed it in all the cities to study. The second option is more common in cities that experienced rapid expansion after the initial Soviet industrialization, as a result of which development circles of the city were formed, reflecting its growth in the Stalinist, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev eras (Kalyukin, Kohl, 2020) Thus, dachas emerged in the Khrushchev era on the urban periphery later found themselves inside the city in close proximity to transport and other urban infrastructure. After permission to register at the place of residence in dachas (‘horticultural non-profit partnership’) (Federal, 2017), such localities along with the «private housing sector» become attractive for the implementation

of a model of a non-urban lifestyle in the city. In both variants of the strategy implementation, a lifestyle, that is close to suburbanism, is shaped (Fava, 1956; Walks, 2013). This lifestyle is based on easy access to urban infrastructure and the status of a city dweller.

We assume that the spread of the strategy of moving from a multi-storey building to a single-family house is a reflection of the process of forming new values that determine the specific features of the city. Earlier, moving from a «private housing sector» to a multi-storey building meant the completion of urban migration (Grigoriev, 2021), the final transformation of a native of a village into a city dweller, and their acquisition of the right to the city. Nowadays the movement from high-rise neighborhoods to single-family houses is becoming a tool for gaining the right to a non-urban lifestyle, preserving the status of a city resident and access to urbanism. It is crucial that there is no manifestation of the non-urban status of residents of such localities. On the contrary, describing the differences between such a way of life and emphasizing its value as opposed to «living in an apartment», the dwellers of the new «private housing sector» stress their status as city dwellers.

As a result, expanding areas of the «inner suburbs» are being formed in the vast non-urban spaces of the Russian city, where suburbanism is gradually becoming the dominant way of life. The development of such spaces follows the logic of the dualism of urban and suburban lifestyles (Walks, 2013), but with the exception of car dependence, which is caused by the territorial position of the private housing sector, often located in the central districts of the city and, therefore, included in the public transport routes. The formation of the inner suburb as a variant of post-Soviet development is also observed in other post-socialist countries, for example, in Poland (Spórna, 2018). However, in Poland, internal suburbanization in the cities looks like the absorption of a «normal» city (Spórna, Krzysztofik, 2020), while in Russia it is more likely to be the preservation of non-urban localities in a new capacity.

In other words, the modern transformations of the «private housing sector» are not

linked to its exclusion from the city by demolishing single-family houses and building multi-storeyed ones, as Soviet architects assumed. On the contrary, the evolution of the «private housing sector» turns out to be closely related to the further integration of non-urban spaces into the modern Russian city as its specific feature. If in the Soviet era the distinctive feature of such localities was the rural character of their architecture and everyday practices, nowadays suburbanism is becoming an attribute of their non-urban character.

Conclusions

The «private housing sector» that was an integral part of the Soviet city, seems to have determined its most important specific feature – the organic inclusion of non-urban localities into the urban space. Not corresponding to the city either in terms of the architectural landscape, or the way of life, or the basis of the formation of local communities, such localities shaped the specific characteristics of the Soviet provincial city, which cannot be imagined without vast spaces occupied by the «private housing sector». In urban narratives, these spaces are confidently opposed to the «centre», which acts as the represented space of the City and its standards. In this sense, the «private housing sector» found itself on a par with barracks areas, remote urban settlements, dacha areas, only nominally included in the city limits; but in the minds of residents, media, and the authorities, the localities of «private housing sector» are «not a city yet», and a space where «real» city will appear in the future.

These localities do not remain unchanged and are being intensively transformed following the changes in the economic system, urban planning, and other revolutionary transformations of the post-Soviet transit. However, these transformations are associated not with the dissolution of the «private housing sector» in the «common» urban space, but, on contrary, with the formation of new non-urban localities. The way of life emerging in these localities turns out to be much closer to suburbanism, and it contrasts the areas of single-family houses with the represented city («Centre»).

In other words, one of the specific features of a modern provincial Russian city is once again the organic inclusion of non-urban localities into the urbanized landscape. This combination reproduces the spatial and temporal hybridity of a post-Soviet (post-socialist) city, which T. Tuvikune proposes to consider not as a sign of transition (from the Soviet to some other city), but as a permanent state (Tuvikune, 2016: 138). This viewpoint based on the example of Tallinn (Ibid) allows us to propose a new theoretical perspective in which the post-Soviet city emerges from the shadow of the dominant regional concepts (Euro-American and Asian African ones).

In turn, this leads to the need for a new conceptualization of the city which is not included in the images of urbanization of the global North and the global South, for example, through the idea of the Global East (Müller, 2020; Trubina, 2020). Being nonidentical to «post-socialism» (Müller, 2021), this concept allows, on the one hand, to highlight the specific features of the post-socialist city (above all, its eclecticism arising from large-scale experiments), and on the other hand, to overcome

the transitional and ideological contexts (Ousmanova, 2020) in its description.

We assume that despite all the paradoxicality of the comparison, the «private housing sector» and its transformations can serve as the same marker of the city of the Global East like the post-Stalinist architecture (Wolkenstein, 2020). In this perspective, the most important property of the «private housing sector» is not only the organic nature of its non-urban space in the modern Russian city but its eclecticism and dynamism. «Not a city yet» and «not a city anymore» do not just go hand in hand, but are closely linked by similar practices of access to urbanism, forming local communities and relations with the authorities. The changing architectural landscape of the «private housing sector» simultaneously demonstrates different epochs, economies, communities, closely integrated within the common space. This eclecticism, a combination of the incompatible things, in our view, can serve as one of the foundations of the definition of the city of the Global East which allows one to go beyond the temporal and spatial understanding of the post-Soviet city.

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