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The Role of the City in Fostering Intergroup Communication in a Multicultural Environment: Saint-Petersburg's Case

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**The Role of the City in Fostering
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Saint-Petersburg's Case**

Natalya V. Taranova
NOTA DI LAVORO 72.2003

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The Role of the City in Fostering Intergroup Communication in a Multicultural Environment: Saint-Petersburg's Case

Summary

In this paper two aspects of the issue will be discussed. First, there is the role of authorities, NGOs in forming the multicultural environment in the city with cultural diversity. Second, the city as social context, the images and myths of the city determine discourse on multiculturalism and influence the cross-cultural communication in the city. After describing historically shaped images of the city, employment of city's myths and symbols in discourse and policy of multiculturalism, and role of city's institutions in fostering inter-group communication, this paper will discuss the inclusive culture of the city, shaped by the networking interaction, which blurs the distinction between «insiders» and «outsiders». Here the trends of (post)modern inter/trans-national relations will be extrapolated on the trans-cultural interaction in the multicultural city, taking into consideration that network interactions build up not between the territories, but in the space, where logic of borders overcomes.

Keywords: Multicultural, Identity, Image, Myth, Discourse, We-groups, Inclusive networks, Inclusive culture, Transnational interaction, Transnational civil society

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The role of the city in fostering intergroup communication in a multicultural environment: Saint – Petersburg's case

Saint-Petersburg is called “The Window to Europe”. Ask residents of Petersburg what is meant by this expression and, besides answers of comparatively democratic orientation and the historical purpose of the city, they are sure to mention the atmosphere of tolerance and respect in relation to different cultures and religions.

Over the last ten years there were problems in interethnic relations in Russia, though even in the tensest periods in St. Petersburg, a nearly 5 millions city where representatives of more than 50 nationalities live, everything was quite.

St. Petersburg, a nearly 5 millions city where representatives of more than 50 nationalities live, is an interesting example and suitable object when we discussing the role of city in fostering intergroup communication in multicultural environment. Developments and tendencies having place in St. Petersburg have broader implications and not only because the city often serve as a kitchen of political thinking for Russia. What is more important in this context is the symbolic role of St. Petersburg for Russia and, to a certain degree, for (Northern) Europe.

In the case of St. Petersburg I find it possible to speak about two aspects of the issue. On the one hand we should discuss the role of city in face of city authorities, public institutions and nongovernmental organizations in shaping the way people interact in multicultural environment and in forming the multicultural environment in the city with cultural diversity. On the other hand, the city as the social context, the image of the city determines to a certain degree discourse on the problem of multicultural interaction and influences the behavior of individuals and groups in multicultural city.

I will start with the latter, as the image and myths of St. Petersburg influence the cross-cultural communication and conducting the policy of multiculturalism in the city. These myths of St. Petersburg are often employed by the officials in connection with outlining the main characteristics of the city image on the eve of 300-years anniversary. Then, after describing the historically shaped image of the city, employment of city's myths and symbols in discourse and policy of multiculturalism, and role of city's institutions in fostering inter-group communication, in this paper will be discussed what I determine as the most important in influence of the city on multicultural interaction, - the inclusive culture of the city, shaped by the networking interaction and determined by the discourse on the issue.

Historical roots of the way of cross-cultural interaction in St. Petersburg

The image and role of St. Petersburg have been forming through the history and provide nowadays a number of myths and cultural symbols.

What forms the so-called inclusive culture of the city, and where are the possible implicit complications here? It is interesting to answer these questions drawing the analogies with the Dutch experience.

First, St. Petersburg was built to secure the entrance to the sea, crucial for Russian trade and contacts with Europe, on the land reclaimed from the marsh. The city was build to tie different cultures, to promote trade and to learn from other cultures. Tolerance is one of the city's myths, a pattern determining the intergroup

communication. Tolerance is the part of St. Petersburg's identity quit as the Netherlands "polder model".

The "polder model" is related mostly to the practice of policymaking; however an ingrained habit of co-operation and consultation concerns multicultural issues as well. The Dutch republic was long welcoming to outsiders and today's Netherlands still prides itself on this. Especially since the WW2 the Dutch have been highly sensitive to anything that smacks of picking on ethnical minorities. Yet behind this the Netherlands has never come to terms either with being an immigrant country or with multiculturalism.

Second, the territory of St. Petersburg and the NWFD as a whole historically was the meeting place of different trans-national and trans-cultural experiences.

In a history of Petersburg the harmony neighbourhood of people of the various nationalities shriving various religions which, keeping the national colour and a way of life, all together created an atmosphere of mutual understanding and mutual respect is surprising. Alexander Djuma named Petersburg as the city of liberal attitude towards religion, seeing in it one of the main peculiarity of St. Petersburg.

Third, the cultural space of the city is broader than any boarders and overcome dividing lines between cultures, religions, nations, etc. The city was created as multicultural by the founders of different nationalities and cultures.

The toponymics of Petersburg up to now has kept traces of these old demographic processes: Swedish and Finnish lanes, the English and Greek prospectuses, the Italian street, New Holland, etc.

Active participation of foreigners in economic and public life of Petersburg, diffusion and interference of cultures have created original colour of the western city. Foreign influence affected in all aspects of household life of capital and was shown in language, clothes, cuisine, and a way of life.

Traditions of interaction of various cultures and nations already since the time of foundation of the city have generated special type of supranational culture of Petersburg, and special character of a tolerant to a national variety Petersburger.

Concepts versus symbols: Ideas determining and legitimating policy.

St. Petersburg has multiple images, both in Russia and internationally. Ideas, formed and forming in and around St. Petersburg can be regarded as «symbolic technologies» of fostering inter-group communication in multicultural environment of the city.

These ideas, on the one hand are employed by authorities in promoting image of St. Petersburg. Here, according to the «Strategic Plan of St. Petersburg», a document, produced by the Leontief Center, one of the most authoritative of St. Petersburg's think tanks, in promoting the idea of a «St. Petersburg mentality», the city authorities have to look pragmatically for further concessions from the federal center and make it take those decisions that will contribute to the city's well-being¹.

On the other hand, the discourse on multicultural relations becomes independent from its producers and gets its own development, influencing behaviour of political and social actors regarding the issue.

¹ <http://www.stratplan.leontief.ru/textsp/1napr.htm>

Qualitative division of ideas into cognitive and normative will help to understand two aspects of influence of the city on inter-group communication. Cognitive ideas take the form of concepts, programs, strategies, and policy prescriptions that help decision makers chart a specific course of policy action. Normative ideas, in contrast, are images, symbols and metaphors that tend to produce a certain type of imagination and help public authorities legitimize their policy interests². Normative ideas are products of human interpretation, not of expert analysis. If cognitive ideas, as a rule, are policy elite-oriented, then normative ideas are much more open to the general public and represent a kind of «dream world», a «world of illusion» to be identified with³.

St. Petersburg as a context with its historically and practically given objective norms of cross-cultural behaviour influence production of cognitive ideas. City provide a context that is taken into consideration in expertise and analytical assumptions on which concepts, strategies and programs dealing with trans-cultural communication taken by authorities are based.

These ideas are future oriented, as they are aimed to reinvent and rediscover a new reality in multicultural environment. They are oriented on those who take decisions. But, as Andrey Makarychev puts it, "cognitive ideas have to share intellectual space and compete with other products of intellectual creativity, all of which are also parts of specific PR- based manipulative technologies"⁴.

The example of St. Petersburg illustrates the roles and functions of images, myths and stereotypes within the frameworks of discourses. There is a group of symbols, images, stereotypes and metaphors which have strong historical implications and retrospective outlook.

These symbols and images contain a great deal of emotions. Aiming at policy legitimating, they are oriented to the general public. Each of the images is supported by its own narratives and discursive practices.

Evidently, there is an attractive image of open city with multi (trans-) cultural harmony and tolerance as a part of city's identity that is at the same time unique. In promoting this outward-oriented image it is easy in case of St. Petersburg to take advantage of the city's historical resources. One can talk about capitalizing on the past. To some extent they can be part of what Viacheslav Morozov has called the «official discourse»⁵.

Obviously, the "official discourse" can shape the way people interact in multicultural environment and make one of the ways as city in face of authorities influence the inter-group communication.

Local authorities widely use them to accomplish discourse on multiculturalism in St. Petersburg and to confirm their international identification. As Malcolm Waters

2 Arnum, Hans. Ideas and Institutions in the European Union. The Case of Social Regulation and Its Complex Decision-Making. Copenhagen Political Studies Press, CORE. Copenhagen, 1999. Pp. 68-75.

3 Kertzer, David. Ritual, Politics, and Power. Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1988. P.5.

⁴ Makarychev Andrey S. Ideas, images and their producers: the case of region-making in Russia's North West Federal District. Copenhagen Peace Research Institute Working Papers, 24-2002, - URL: www.copri.dk

5 Morozov, Viacheslav. The Discourses of St. Petersburg and the Shaping of a Wider Europe: Territory, Space and Post-Sovereign Politics. Copenhagen Peace Research Institute Working Papers 13/2002. P. 14.

puts it, «symbolic exchanges» are easily transportable and hence easily «go global»⁶. Furthermore, globalization has widened opportunities for trading international images⁷.

While initially the reference to St. Petersburg as «Russia's window to Europe» symbolized the empire's foreign policy ambitions, later the name was transformed into the "bridge" metaphor. It became the metaphor of the city build to tie different cultures, to promote trade and to learn from other cultures.

The «Northern Palmyra» or «Northern Venice» titles of St. Petersburg refer to its image of Russia's cultural capital and the depository of world-class masterpieces of art and architecture. Therefore, the cultural space of the city is broader than any boarders and overcome dividing lines between cultures, religions, nations, etc. The city was created as multicultural by the founders of different nationalities and cultures.

Remarkable also that renaming of St. Petersburg was highly symbolic. The re-emergence of St. Petersburg represents an endeavour to strengthen the culturalization of political space.

St. Petersburg is a historical reminder of that it has once been possible to adopt a posture that contained an identity sufficiently unique and yet open for the more general. The identity should not be defined in terms of distinct difference, and become something that required a distance to anything "other".

St. Petersburg articulates a vision of the future by calling upon the past in a way that transcends the recent isolationist and closed period of Russian history. It aims at establishment a new identity, but does so without denying previous experience. According to Pertti Joenniemi of COPRI, above all St. Petersburg introduces a self-understanding that is far more conducive to an opening up and linking in with European integration than some other articulations present on the Russian politico-cultural scene that also aim at influencing the course of future development⁸.

Images analyzed here represent the products of «symbolic technologies» used also in shaping the inter-cultural communication in St. Petersburg.

Implicit complications in trans-cultural relations in the city

Here the discourse and historical roots of inclusive culture of the city were described. But before coming to multicultural policy and networks of interaction it is worthwhile to depict possible implicit complications here.

One could be traditionally welcoming to outsiders and be highly sensitive to anything that smacks of specifying ethnic minorities, and yet behind such political correctness coming to terms with being an immigrant country or with multiculturalism may lead to some difficulties, mainly connected with emotions and identity.

In the situation of (post)modernity the degree of diversity in European Union and Russia will further increase. In this new context it is strange to build one's identity

6 Waters, Malcolm. Globalization. Routledge: London and New York, 1995. P. 9.

7 Mattelart, Armand; Delcourt, Xavier, Mattelart, Michelle. International Image Markets, in: Search of an Alternative Perspective. London and New York: Comedia Publishing Group, 1984

⁸ Joenniemi Pertti. Finland, Europe and St. Petersburg in Search for Role and Identity / Studia Slavica Finlandensia yearbook, Helsinki, 1996, P. 102

on distinguishing from “the other”, on bilateral oppositions (what was common for the modern period).

The problem of identity redefining is a challenging issue both for the European Union, taking into consideration enlargement process and immigration, and for Russian Federation, where ethno-political (dis)order is a pressing issue. In Russia, where civil society is developing and self-identification is a vital question it's important not to seek it in bilateral oppositions.

During a (post)modern time distinctions between “we” - groups increase as comprehension of these distinctions grows. However any multicultural state requires institutes which would be capable to establish general rules and to support a cultural exchange keeping at the same time diversification. In other words, the need for general institutes which could provide the integrated diversification becomes acute.

Here, returning to the issue of the identity redefining and difficulties caused by the process, some political leaders, enjoying the understanding from the part of voters, still insist on integration (first of all learning the language) rather than accepting or even celebrating multiculturalism.

In fact, most European cities are multicultural already. And as their population ages, the European countries are going to need more, not fewer, immigrants. Furthermore, taking into consideration (post)modern economic, social, and cultural tendencies, multiculturalism seems to offer the only way to provide economic growth and innovation.

Multiculturalism may be defined as search of ways **of the coordination of cultures**.

Sociologists define culture as a set of values, standards and rules. Hence, the coordination of cultures means, first of all, **the coordination of values**. Values are based on beliefs and have irrational nature, their bases, as a rule, are not realized, but if are realized, it does not cancel their influence on people's behaviour. So, **main principle** of the coordination of cultures should be inclusion, instead of exception.

As values take for the person an imperative character (the culture is a century way of adaptation of the given ethnos to **its** conditions of life) one and only way of such coordination is to recognize importance **of each** value which are included in each of varied cultures.

The recognition of all values puts a problem of the potential conflict of values, and of development **of system of coexistence of cultures**.

Multiculturalism, in effect, means development of rules and norms of coexistence of various cultures and their carriers in one, a homogeneous society, in a homogeneous legal, social, economic space.

In Amsterdam and Rotterdam ethnic minorities make up over one-third of the population, and Mr. Bolkestein observes that, within 15-20 years, the figure will be over half the population of four big cities of the Netherlands⁹.

In St. Petersburg we have the resembling tendencies, especially as the population ages. There are increasing concerns about it on the grass roots. Dutch voters also mention immigration among their most pressing concerns¹⁰. What's dangerous for communication in the multicultural environment is when some politicians use immigration matters as a populist political platform, Mr. Fortuyn for instance.

⁹ A survey of the Netherlands // The Economist May 4th – 10th 2002, p. 15.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 12.

The debate over immigration and crime is now becoming sadly familiar in many European countries. The appeal of particular politicians to voters who feel that their concerns over immigrations and crime have been ignored can translate quickly into a political force. Here we meet with some of the most common stereotypes about immigrants.

If immigrants are doing well there may be concerns over job places occupied by foreigners, etc. If immigrants have low incomes level and, as a consequence, low level of education that may lead to higher level of criminality or rise concerns over immigrants and crime. Here crime level more likely depends not on nationality but on social-economic level. Both situations may be used as basis for populist slogans when it is easier to shift guilt in some unpleasant tendencies on “the other”.

How it joins with the myth of tolerance? Well, the basis of the myth was and is pragmatic. Intercultural communication is fostering by trade, by the quantity of inevitable in the city intercultural contacts developing into the new quality of better understanding across cultural borders, by the synergetic effect of the social networks.

There is a widespread concern on the unification, depersonalization of the cultures, or getting lost of the “title” nation’s culture in (post)modern megapolises. And this is another disturbed myth about immigration consequences.

Nowadays it is more efficient to percept cultural variety in opposite way. Comparing, not opposing, different cultures one can find a way of better knowledge of one’s own culture. Multicultural context may on the one hand show shades of each culture, on the other hand, supranational culture qualitatively different from the simple sum of represented cultures is forming.

What is crucial to realize is that while living in our own world we have to live in the global world. Debating on the necessity of the integration or accepting multiculturalism, it’s crucial to realize that St. Petersburg and Amsterdam, for instance, are multicultural already, - this is one of their great assets. Then, different cultural groups should learn to learn about and from each other.

Taking into consideration (post)modern economic, social, and cultural tendencies, multiculturalism seem to offer the only way to provide economic growth and innovation. In multicultural context interaction of two interdependent dynamics take place: enriching and further development of each culture and forming of the supranational culture qualitatively different from the simple sum of represented cultures.

Multiculturalism in policy and programs

In different cultural environment national minorities adopt to the cultural context that often leads to vanishing of cultural originality.

Since 1996 under the law of the Russian Federation “About a national - cultural autonomy” minorities living in the other cultural context have received the right of realization of national - cultural self-determination by creation of special public formations, national - cultural autonomies, at a regional and federal level.

186 national associations and 7 national cultural autonomies are currently registered in St. Petersburg. The Association of National and Cultural Autonomies was registered. Cultural autonomies and associations jointly co-operate in the "League of Nations", arisen in March, 1999 and "St.-Petersburg's house of national cultures" regional organizations, existing under different titles since 1989.

Except for national focused public associations the interethnic organizations are created, aspiring to integrate cultures or to cooperate on a regional basis (in particular, the organization "The Russian - Byelorussian brotherhood", Union of writers "Multinational Saint Petersburg", regional branch of movement "Associations of small ethnoses of the North, Siberia and the Far East" and a number of others).

It is remarkable that activities of the organizations of the ethnic minorities, focused basically on satisfaction of cultural needs, gradually widen these frameworks and are focusing on social protection of the rights of members of Diasporas in a megapolis. Especially actually is it for natives of unstable regions (Rwandese organization "The Asylum for the traveler ", "The African unity ", "The Uniform Afghani center ", etc.).

The activity of national associations, national cultural autonomies and interethnic organizations develops in two directions: 1) preservation of own cultural uniqueness in the urbanistic environment of Russian megapolis; 2) strengthening of cultural contacts between representatives of various nationalities, including with the majority of the urbanite - Russians.

The National and Cultural Autonomies Council Committee for External Affairs of St. Petersburg Administration was established in 1999. The work of the National and Cultural Autonomies Council of Committee for External Affairs is based on the federal law "On national cultural autonomy" (come into force in 1996). Further realization of the Concept of the state national policy of Russian Federation is one of the Council's tasks.

One of the tasks of Committee for External Affairs of St. Petersburg administration is to facilitate cultural exchange of national associations with patron countries jointly with The Committee for Culture. We should also mention here the role of national Diasporas in St. Petersburg in fostering contacts between St. Petersburg and the patron countries of Diasporas.

Committee for External Affairs participates also in the organization of National Cultural Days. Jointly with Educational Committee it participates in the organization of the system of national primary and elementary education in the city.

We described the main features of programs and policy on inter-group communication in multicultural St. Petersburg. Evidently, what is the most important in fostering cross-cultural communication is maintenance of information on multicultural issues. I find it possible to outline two main aspects how the media influence the situation in cross-cultural communication.

On the one hand the media and other forms of public communication affect the identity of the inhabitants of the city and relation towards other cultures in the city. Here, the correct coverage of inter-cultural and cross-national issues by the media is essential.

Action's plan on the Interdepartmental program the "Tolerance" was authorized on December the 31-th in 1999 by the vice-president of the Government of the Russian Federation Valentine Matvienko. The State program "Tolerance" was launched. The

program includes projects directed on involving of journalistic community to discussion of the problems connected to coexistence of various cultures in Russia.

The urgency of this project is predetermined by covering on a regular basis by some Russian mass-media in a certain key a question about "persons of the Caucasian nationality" that may lead to negative stereotypes and justification of actions of the various structures conducting discrimination.

Multiculturalism represents not simply psychological feature or the ethical doctrine, but also the certain political program, a state policy. And a policy of multiculturalism has a tolerant social culture as a consequence.

As to political correctness of the media, Dutch newspapers were for many years reluctant even to report that a criminal was black, for instance¹¹. But political correctness does not provide the decision of the problem.

There may be a discussion on the limits of political correctness and freedom of expression around intercultural issues in multicultural cities. When promoting political correctness it is worth remembering that it should not become a new form of fundamentalism itself. What is meant here is the situation, when on behalf of the political correctness, taking the words of Umberto Eco¹², the language of everyday communication is canonized to the degree of ritual and the form became more important than the idea.

On the other hand, it is important not only to foster tolerant attitude towards other cultures but also to encourage interest towards different cultures contexts in the city. Here one should enable Diasporas to provide information on their cultures and cover the activity of Diasporas.

Life of ethnic Diasporas is covered in national press. These are Russian-speaking newspapers – three Jewish newspapers, and a number of other Jewish editions; Azerbaijan "Only together" newspaper; bilingual newspapers - Tatar "Nyr" ("Light"), Armenian "Avatamk" ("We believe), Polish "The Petersburg's Newspaper", Estonian "The Petersburg's bulletin", German "St. Peterburgische Zeitung" ("The St.-Petersburg newspaper"), the Finnish magazines and newspapers ("Inkery", "Neighbors", etc.), a number of editions in the Afghani languages. Since June, 2000 the information-analytical magazine "Petersburg national", devoted to life and activity of national Diasporas of city as a whole is edited. The journals "The national St. Petersburg" and "Caravan" are publishing with financial support from Administration.

The important role in cultural life of ethnic minority of city plays confessional activity of Armenian, Catholic and Protestant churches, the Byelorussian and Georgian wards of Orthodox Church, a Muslim mosque, Judaic synagogues and Buddhist temple. According to the Museum of a history of religion on the end of XX century in city were 7 wards of Catholic church (around thousand of parishioners), 2 wards of the Armenian apostolic church (about 40 thousand), 2 - Islamic (about 55 thousand parishioners), 11 - Lutheran (about 10 thousand), 5 Judaic (about 4,5 thousand).

All cult centers conduct the large educational work, Sunday and religious schools operate, the religious press is issued, broadcast Christian radio "Maria" and multi-confessional radio "Teos".

The city authorities are eager to use the symbolic capital related to the historical legacy whilst celebrating the 300th anniversary of the city in 2003. On the eve of the

¹¹ A survey of the Netherlands // The Economist May 4th – 10th 2002, p. 15.

¹² Eco Umberto, Cinque scritti morali, R.C.S. Libri S.p.A. – Milan, Bompani, 1997.

city's anniversary the local authorities have launched a robust campaign aimed at converting the symbolic capital of St. Petersburg into a tangible asset.

Preparing to 300-anniversary of St. Petersburg in 2003, we try to foster intercultural communication. There are many projects initiated not only by authorities, but also by citizens groups, enterprises.

Inclusive networks of interaction in the multicultural city

In this paper I propose the inclusive culture of the city, shaped by the networking interaction, as the most important in influence of the city on multicultural communication.

The policy of multiculturalism and programs, launched by city authorities, NGOs, citizens groups, etc., activity of diasporas described earlier in this paper represent traditional way of cross-cultural communication in multicultural city. Here I will give what I see as the (post)modern view of trans-cultural interaction in multicultural settings.

There is a common logic in tendencies of developments in different spheres of our life. So, I find it possible to show some important features of trans-cultural communication with the help of example of trans-national interaction.

Let us mention some main features of (post)modern trans-national relations. Transnational relations build up over the logic of sovereignty (it doesn't mean denying the logic of sovereignty, but just developing out of this logic). Co-operation is based on networks largely formed by actors "outside sovereignty" (J. Rosenau). One can speak about networking foreign policy.

These networks have blurred notion of center and periphery. Furthermore, and what is most important regarding our issue, these networks are inclusive. Networking blurs the distinction between «insiders» and «outsiders».

The necessary condition for taking part in building and making use of such networks is development of transnational civil society, when for individuals and groups of individuals it is natural to articulate interests in a broader than national context.

Extrapolating the described logic and trend on the trans-cultural interaction in cities, one can simply find there trans-cultural civil society. The individuals and groups of different cultures articulate their interest in the context of the megapolis. The quantity of inevitable in the city intercultural contacts develops into the new quality of better understanding across cultural borders, by the synergetic effect of the social networks. In this network interaction the role of the city and the city's authorities is clear. What is expected from them is providing frameworks for such interaction and enhancing tolerant social culture and multicultural approach, through programs and policy and through the media.

Why I find it possible to extrapolate the tendencies in inter(trans)national relations on the trans-cultural interaction in the multicultural city? Well, first, the trends of development are applicable for all dimensions of our life, as what is transforming is the way of thinking. Second, if one accepts logic of (post)modern developments, mentioned earlier here, than one recognize that network interaction build up not

between the territories, but in the space, where logic of borders overcomes¹³. Thus, here one may easily put side by side developments in a multicultural megapolis and in transnational region, for instance.

Coming to the conclusion, forming of transnational civil society is treated as positive, as it is to a certain degree a precondition of inclusion of any international actor in the (post)modern inter/trans-national system. Trans-cultural interaction in multicultural cities is of the same nature and may help in forming transnational civil society. Here the relationship between cultural diversity, communication, active involvement in modern inter/trans-national system, and economic growth is most obvious.

¹³ The issue of territory versus space is an integral part of European international problem's research. Especially it worth mentioning Copenhagen school.

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