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Transformation of suburbs of Saint-Petersburg in post-Soviet period

Abstract

The collapse of Soviet Union caused the emergency of completely new conditions in city development. Big cities faced many challenges during the transformation and every part of the city space was involved into the process.

Saint-Petersburg was deeply involved into the process of transformation and as provided by the theory of innovation diffusion in absolute majority of cases the transformation was spreading from the core to the suburbs. But for an every suburb this process was quite special.

The transformation of suburbs of the city and their further development were determined by the range of conditions including not only location, infrastructure and economical specialization but also historical background and some other special features in every case. Suburbs of Saint-Petersburg differ dramatically in their historical background. Applied to the process of transformation this differences bring us to the necessity of classifying the suburbs into three groups:

- Group 1: founded and developed before the appearance of the Soviet Union; faced 2 transformations in their history (like Pushkin and Peterhof);
- Group 2: founded and developed after the appearance of the Soviet Union; faced 1 transformation in their history (like Vsevolozhsk);
- Group 3: development started after the collapse of Soviet Union and is in progress right now (like Shushary).

In every group it's possible to find special development features that showed up in post-Soviet period of city development.

The Saint-Petersburg city space is determined by the city core. Suburbs are mostly more connected to the city core than to one another. This tendency can be seen for example in commuting. But with the population increase various projects aimed at creating the alternative to the city center emerge. Many of them include comprehensive development of suburbia and increase of the commuting between the suburbs without entering the center (which is possible after the opening of the encircling highway). So now it becomes even more important to understand the processes that took place in the suburbia and their influence to the city space as a whole.

Introduction

The transformation of the city space is widely studied in urban science. The post-soviet transformation in Saint-Petersburg is observed in articles of K.Axenov whose research is usually focused on the city. The conversion of industrial city into postindustrial is simultaneous to the conversion of economics into market.

The development of the city space is determined by the combination of adopted mostly from Europe and the US and special post-soviet trends.

The transformation of the suburbia in some aspects differ from the transformation of the city center. According to the theory of innovation diffusion the transformation comes to the suburbs from the city center and faces smaller and more homogeneous communities.

At the same time suburbia all around the world faces dramatic changes. For example, suburbia in the US is characterized by the changes in economic and demographic structure. In general, two problems of suburban development are observed: rapid rise of poverty and ageing population. Elizabeth Kneebone and Alan Berube claim that the geography of poverty has changed dramatically in America. According to their research more than one-third of the nation's poor live in the suburbs. The scientists consider this fact as the result of suburbanization of American economics as a whole, but also observe the defects of anti-poverty arrangements, that were targeting urban or rural environment.

What is special about the suburban life

According to Lappo the most important characteristics of the city is diversity. Diversity generates the condition for creativity in the city, but diversity also leads to clashes in the city life. Diversity creates collisions in the everyday life, different groups have different needs and different demands for the city space. But the space is the same for all of them. And there the clash begins. So, the most important characteristic of the city life makes it creative and uncomfortable for living at the same time. Citizens try to minimize the clashes they face in their everyday life. The result of such tries is segregation of the city space and the emergence of gated communities. This processes can be considered as the try of getting the gains of diversity without facing the clashes.

In Soviet Union the collisions and clashes of the city life were rarely visible, but in some cases they became well-known. Like the protests against the demolishing of the Angleter hotel in Saint-Petersburg mentioned by Lev Lurie as an example of the social activity in the city.

Also in Soviet city creating a segregated or gated community is not quite possible. If segregation or gated communities emerged they were purposely or accidentally created by the government. For example, some houses build for workers of the exact organizations or military personnel .

After the collapse of the Soviet Union clashes of the city life came out and the request for segregation emerged. But the city space was not adapted for this request. In this conditions the segregation started from the activity. K.Axenov claims that the everyday routes of rich and poor in post-Soviet Saint-Petersburg differ dramatically.

The transformation of the city development went on and on from the core to the suburbs which also faced challenges of changing space.

Different suburbia.

First of all, suburbs of Saint-Petersburg differ in many ways such as population, infrastructure and historical background and every of the suburbs has its special characteristics. But in this paper we will use the simplified classification into three groups of the suburbs based on their history and specialization in Soviet times, which influenced the process of transformation in the suburbs.

- Group 1: «old suburbs» founded and developed before the appearance of the Soviet Union; faced 2 transformations in their history (like Pushkin and Peterhof);
- Group 2: «modern suburbs» founded and developed after the appearance of the Soviet Union; faced 1 transformation in their history (like Vsevolozhsk);
- Group 3: «new suburbs» development started after the collapse of Soviet Union and is in progress right now (like Shushary).

For the transformation in the group 1 the historical background is extremely important. Here we study the suburbs that existed and functioned as suburbs of Saint-Petersburg before the Revolution. Mostly there were summer houses (dachas) that were used only during the season, but there also was permanent population. In summer loads of commuters used to move from their suburban residences to the city and back by the railways connecting the suburbs and the city core. The elite suburbs were usually characterized by the developed transport infrastructure and nearness to the royal residences. In such suburbs the innovations were used like the first railway line from Saint-Petersburg to Pushkin or the first public telephone in Oranienbaum (Lomonosov). After the Revolution those suburbs lost their elite features (exclusion- Komarovo, that acquired them) but became mostly recreational and residential suburbia. In some cases the Soviet government created there industry using the goals of developed infrastructure.

After the collapse of Soviet Union the history of those places influenced their further development. Considered as a special and elite from one point of view and being quite far from the city those suburbs became the places where expensive and cheap housing could be build at the same time. For every case its special features led to one of those choices but in some of the suburbs the new-build houses might be designed for completely different groups of customers, which demonstrates one of the fundamental collisions of post-Soviet suburban development. The

understanding of elite and common suburbia are lost and all the space is equalized and while customers need it to be re-segregated no one has clear understanding of the place of every single suburb in this re-segregation. The most clear examples are there in Strelna and Peterhof. Here the average prices are quite low, but the development projects include middle-class and cheap housing oriented at the railways and expensive gated communities.

The very special cases are there in military old suburbs like Krasnoe Selo and Kronshtadt. Kronshtadt is extremely special because it used to be gated community on the island since it was founded in 1704 and only after the construction of the highway around Saint-Petersburg it acquired the permanent connection to the city. That's why we may expect the dramatic changes in the city space of Kronshtadt soon. What we can observe now are mostly the changes into patterns of using the space. For example in Kronshtadt the problem of traffic never existed before because no one needed the car. With the mostly young population located on an island walking prevailed over transport. After the town was connected to the city by the highway the citizens faced not only the problem of traffic but also the lack of traffic lights. Because the number of the cars used to be so little, that citizens used to cross the roads where they wanted.

Modern suburbs.

As the group of modern suburbs we consider the suburbs that developed mostly in the Soviet times. Even if they existed before the Revolution they were only villages, not even towns. The planned economics determined their development. The biggest of these suburbs is Kolpino that is the only suburb of Saint-Petersburg having a population of more than 100 000 people. The development of Kolpino may be considered separately but we observe its development in this group because it is determined by the industry like the development of other modern suburbs. Also Sertolovo may be considered as the exclusion because of its military specialization.

Those suburbs suffered most through the collapse of Soviet Union because industry was extremely vulnerable to the fail of market economy. At the same time those suburbs have a significant possibilities for development as the edge cities, as soon as they are close to the industrial zones and usually do have advanced infrastructure. Some of the industrial zones received great attention from the developers like the industrial zone in Vsevolozhsk where the major holders are Ford and Nokian Tyres. But many of those suburbs are located at the border of Saint-Petersburg and Leningradskaya oblast and that is one of the reasons why now the residential specialization prevails.

Borders do matter

The border between Leningradskaya oblast and Saint-Petersburg seems to have just an administrative function but it has a far-reaching impact on city development. Since 1990 Leningradskaya oblast is considered by developers as a cheap and easy-to-manage space for dwelling. That caused the first boom of housing construction in Leningradskaya oblast placed close to the border of Saint-Petersburg and transport infrastructure. This trend causes lots of problems not only in city development but in the development of the suburbs. There are suburbs like Shushary and Devyatkin, situated in the Leningradskaya oblast but in fact being the residential suburbs of the city. And there is a very special example of Kolpino where the border between Saint-Petersburg and Leningradskaya oblast is situated into the town.

In Kolpino the houses build in Leningradskaya oblast are formally situated in poselok imeni Telmana. This fact causes many problems for town administration. For example, sometimes people move out from Kolpino to poselok imeni Telmana, cause flats there are cheaper. But they use the same hospital and the same school as they used to. But administration of the town faces the formal population decay although really there is a population growth.

In the research, that took place in Kolpino last summer, we studied the attitude of citizens to the border. It turned out that the border is well-known and usually used in their everyday life. For example citizens of poselok imeni Telmana order furniture delivery from Ikea to the opposite side of the street, which is formally situated in Kolpino, because it's much cheaper (there are

many young families just moved into their new flats, so it's quite usual situation).

New suburbs

The most significant enlarging of the new suburbs falls to the period after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Those suburbs are mostly the boomers of cheap housing situated at the border of Saint-Petersburg and Leningradskaya oblast. The most significant example is of such development is Shushary. Formally it's not even a town yet with the population of 22 000 people. The lack of employment, the lack of social infrastructure and the lack of opportunities to fix it based on the diffusiveness of the administrative borders.

The first of such suburbs were connected to the opportunities of public transport like Shushary or Devyatkinno that may be considered as the suburb or the part of the city. But after the highway around the city was constructed the building of such suburbs along it started. The main consequences of this process may have a great influence for the city development. First of all, the lack of public transport leads to the growth of the number of cars in the city, which is quite a challenge for the city center. The second consequence includes the transformation process. Many of new housing estates are being build in the villages and the villagers have to face the rapid growth of the city in the neighborhood. This process causes objection of the locals who are not ready to change their way of life but can do nothing about it. The third important consequence concerns the population. The cheaper housing in the suburbs attracts the young people and the young families which leads to the wringing out of the creative population from the center to the suburbs.

It's also important to mention that unlike the old suburbs some of the new ones have their special reputation. In the new suburbs it's hard to find the elite and budget housing situated close to one another. And if the regions of costly housing do not yet have the exact locations (we may consider the north of the city along the shore and may be Pushkin, but not all of it) the budget housing is better localized. The best example of it is Shushary, where the boom of budget housing was not supplied by any development of the town space. So, right now the town has the reputation of the place, where the cheap housing is concentrated. Such situation leads to even worse segregation of the town and creates the lack of diversity, which hampers the process of development of the city way of life.

Conclusion

The transformation process included every part of the city but it influenced differently to different types of the suburbs. We consider the diversity as the main characteristic of the city way of life and we observe the transformation of suburbia from the point of view of its development. Old suburbs that has great historical background and developed infrastructure and town space faced the great value of possibilities for the development and challenges and clashes connected to the growing diversity of the space and population. The modern suburbs have less possibilities but some of them like Vsevolozhsk became the centers of residential and industrial development. The new suburbs face the lack of diversity and the perspectives of segregation from the city space.

It's important to mention that administrative border of Saint-Petersburg has significant impact on city development and the coordination between the administrations here is extremely important. We should say that the project of coordination of the development of Saint-Petersburg and Leningradskaya oblast has been started recently and it may change the city development noticeably.