Post-socialist post-suburbia? Growth machine and the emergence of ‘edge city’ in the metropolitan context of Moscow

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Abstract

To what extent do the ideas of ‘edge city’, ‘post-suburbia’ and associated models of urban growth apply in the transition economy case? The paper considers the politics and practice of urban development and place-making in the periphery of Moscow, based on the case of Khimki, a former off-limits satellite city serving the requirements of the Soviet military-industrial complex and more recently a boosting area featuring many new retail and office developments, as well as housing projects. The forces and ideologies driving the growth of Khimki, the relationship between different actors, and the relevance of the Soviet material and cultural legacies are considered. The paper argues that while the case of Khimki shares many facets and controversies as depicted by the concepts of ‘edge city’ and ‘(suburban) growth machine’, it is still a distinctive mutation of these. Particularly, it is ‘placelessness’ that must be added to the conceptualisation of rapid urban growth in the context of post-Soviet Khimki. The placelessness, or the lack of purposeful place-making strategies by the growth coalitions, arises from a number of factors, including highly speculative development practices, a little interest of local businesses to influence the shape of wider urban development beyond their immediate control, and local government’s retreat to standardised planning requirements and to a capricious allocation of developable land as opposed to visionary urban planning and development strategies. Thus, growth in Khimki is fuelled by a spontaneous variety of opportunistic profit-making initiatives that are characterised by short-termism and are essentially disconnected from ‘local’ city, at the same time as government maintains a passive laissez-faire pro-growth approach. This type of ‘growth machine’, while destroying Khimki’s ‘thick’ Soviet-era industrial identity, makes the city into an increasingly fragmented and ‘thin’ site of rapid capital accumulation. It is yet to be seen whether the cooling-down of the real estate market in Moscow combined with a growing demand for new urban infrastructure and emerging residents’ movements will re-structure the modes of governing urban growth in peripheral places such as Khimki more in line with proactive place-focused post-suburban politics.

Introduction

While the processes of “post-suburban” patterns of urbanisation have been identified in a number of Western contexts (Western Europe and North America), spaces beyond these regions remain fairly absent from associated research. Little is known, for example, how easily the ideas of ‘edge city’ (Garreau, 1991), ‘post-suburbia’ (Kling et al, 1995) and associated models of urban growth may travel to the transition economy case. The interest of this paper is therefore to establish some considerations in this respect specifically focusing on the metropolitan context of Moscow, based on the case study of Khimki.

It has been argued that the logic of socialist urbanization produced a somewhat different type of the city from the Western regimes (French and Hamilton, 1979; Bater, 1980; Andrusz et al, 1996). Indeed, the introduction of the market economy resulted in a flood of new urban processes which have been rapidly changing the function and morphology of post-socialist cities. The intensity of this flood has, however, been asymmetric and asynchronic. Larger cities and inner cities were first and foremost bearing the signs of post-industrial transformation, tertiarization and commercialization (Bater et al., 1998). Moscow, being the largest city in Europe and one of its major economic centres, was particularly well positioned in this respect and especially its central areas were much affected by the rapid deployment of post-industrial economy and the attendant transformation of the built environment. However, eventually – and still in a rather compressed span of time if looked from a historical perspective – the processes of change have fallen upon the
cities further down the urban hierarchy, as well as peripheries of the larger cities, including areas on the edge of Moscow itself.

To what extent this centrifugal momentum of growth and attendant urban change is predetermined by certain “structural” forces and to what extent it is driven by purposeful strategies of economic and political agency can be investigated by looking more closely at local contingency and the local combination of different forces. Seeing how urban processes are unfolding can also reveal whether there are similarities in post-socialist cities to what is also happening on the edge of American or other Western cities, and, if so, whether these similarities are due to certain “meta-processes” characteristic to globalisation and similar approaches and strategies that “glue” dissimilar places together as global copycats, or, if not, whether the dissimilarities are due to the local opposition to the same “meta-processes”, local alternations of these processes, path dependence, or entirely different sets of factors.

In this paper, therefore, we consider the politics and practice of development and place-making of urban areas at the periphery of Moscow, based on the arguably emblematic case of Khimki. What was formerly off-limits “satellite city” near Moscow serving the requirements of the Soviet military-industrial complex, has more recently become a boosting area featuring many new retail and office developments, as well as housing projects. We consider the forces and ideologies driving the growth of Khimki, the relationship between different actors, as well as the relevance of the Soviet material and cultural legacies.

The paper draws on material collected during our intensive fieldwork in summer/autumn 2008. The work involved almost 50 semi-structured interviews conducted with relevant informants at different scales and representing different strata of society. The informants included local officers in Khimki, planning and development supervision bodies at the Moscow Oblast regional level, Federal authorities responsible for urban development, land use and housing, private developers, real estate and other relevant businesses, chambers of commerce, academic experts, as well as representatives of local environmental groups. The interview quotes that we use in this paper are translated by us from Russian into English, unless indicated that they were in English.

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section we discuss to what extent the transition to the market economy actually reorients the functioning of institutions versus the persistence of pre-transition elements. We then introduce the processes of urbanisation and urban change on the periphery of Moscow. We continue with discussing the case of Khimki in light of the edge city and growth machine literature. Firstly, we highlight some similarities between growth in Khimki and the patterns typical to suburban ‘growth machine’. Secondly, we consider the evolution of the post-Soviet institution of urban planning and its actual role in the politics of place and local place-making. Thirdly, we discuss in more details the politico-economic dynamics behind growth in Khimki, its contradictions and limitations. We conclude with some further reassessments of the case of Khimki. We argue in particular that although the case of Khimki has some elements characteristics to ‘edge city’, its growth is largely ‘placeless’, as it is driven by initiatives and institutions that are essentially disconnected from local-centred politics and active place-making.

**Inevitable transition to the western model?**

Urban change is a phenomenon open to ‘external’ influences and impulses and, being such reflects more general societal trends (e.g. Marcuse and van Kempen, 2000). Transition can be viewed as one inescapable compulsion which, originated at the national regulatory level, has transformed the life and circumstance in all cities of post-socialist societies – irrespective of the prior situations or aspirations in these cities. The appropriation of Russian society by capitalism has changed the very raison d’être of the Russian city. Rather than being a socialist machine for the propagation of communist ideology, of purposeful evolution to a fair and egalitarian society, the post-socialist city has become a machine for the celebration of profit-making, of private wealth, of individualism, of the “liberation” of the self from communal responsibilities and of the communal responsibility from both caring for individual selves and the necessity of building a better society of tomorrow.
The appearance and rhythm of Russian cities have changed accordingly, all urban corners being penetrated by the “propetisation”, by mercantile urbanism, and by the capitalist logic of uneven development. From the emergence of CBD districts in the centre to low-density cottage suburbs, the morphology of the Russian city has changed more in line with resembling a “capitalist city”.

However, the arrival of “capitalism” was neither uniform, nor had uniform implications in space, so that the post-socialist world has been characterised by great diversification and fragmentation of urban experiences (Tsenkova and Nedović-Budić, 2006). But it is not only urban experiences that have seen a fragmentation; the very teleological belief in the linear transition to “the western model” has been challenged following the great diversification of transition pathways instead of the expected triumph of the faceless universal capitalism (Pickles and Smith, 1998; Roland, 2001; Klein and Pomer, 2001). This is of course because the wider forces of transition and globalisation interplay not simply with a uniform societal “mass”, but rather with thick and complex local institutional assemblages and material legacies. It is now clear that each post-socialist society is constituted of a complex combination of phenomena, with each of these phenomena representing its very own format and speed of change. This is not simply to mechanically distinguish between “fast-moving” and “slow-moving” institutions as, for example, Roland (2004) does, or between “progress” and “path dependency” as now the neoliberal orthodoxy likes to explain the very many failures of its policies. But if we unpack the local ‘consensuses’ of post-socialist societies for scrutiny, we will find the contentious processes of institutional configurations and reconfigurations with old and new, socialist, pre-socialist, and post-socialist elements coexisting, interplaying and conflicting with each other – where the ‘old’ does not necessarily means ‘regressive’ and where the ‘new’ is not necessarily ‘progressive’.

This complexity notwithstanding, all emerging markets have very substantial ideological imprints of neoliberalism. Transition has been part and parcel of neoliberalism. It is rooted in the neoliberal ideology and is feeding this ideology. Thus, the idiosyncrasies of the post-socialist practices means in no way that these societies have opposed neoliberalism or provided alternatives to it, but rather that they have internalized neoliberalism and transfer themselves into its various ‘mutations’. In Russia, in particular, the new post-Soviet elites seemed to be happily subscribed to neoliberal orthodoxy requiring the market system to be created in a ‘big bang’ rather than incrementally. The prevailing elitist visions were to break the old system as fast and as much as possible, no matter what would follow and what disastrous consequences there might be. Such opinions are still widespread, as reflected in one interview which complains about the “market-perverse legacies” of Soviet planning and development institutions:

Our mainstream strategy of our country is to make a big step from a regulated economy to a market economy. You cannot do this in small steps but you must do it with a big leap forward ... otherwise you end up with the situation as in Moscow which is more or less like the Soviet model of controlling and regulating development (Bandorin').

While the Soviet-era institutions were attempted to be eradicated by neoliberal-minded hardliners and not to be adjusted or “superstructed” based on their utility, ironically, the result has been not a complete marginalization of the “Soviet institutions”, but rather, under the absence of alternative capacities and experiences, the result has been their reincarnation in new forms, which, although now may be used for different ends and bringing quite opposite results than in the past, still do not quite fulfil the neoliberal scripts either.

In short, post-socialist cities need to be viewed as hybrid and contestable juxtapositions of social forms, relationships, and trajectories, emerging from the struggles between their ‘outside’, their ‘inside’, and their histories. Thus, the internalisation of the neoliberal doctrine has been blended with the persistence of socialist elements, which may, however, now play a very different role than in the past (cf. Burawoy and Verdery, 1999). We need to keep this in mind when discussing the urban institutions of governance and planning in the post-Soviet context as well.

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1 Interview with Leonid Bandorin, the Institute for Urban Economics, Moscow, 25 August 2008.
Urbanisation on the edge of Moscow

In Moscow, as in other large post-socialist cities, the processes of urban transformation have been unfolding in a compressed time, as a rapid explosion, thus obliterating the relevance of analytical separation of some stages in relation to the ‘intra-urban’, ‘suburban’ and ‘post-suburban’ elements of urban development. In the US literature, for example, both inner-city regeneration and transformations on metropolitan edges (such as “post-surburbanisation”) are sometimes opposed to suburbanization in the previous decades or at least considered to be a distinctive novelty as opposed to the rapid pace of suburbanization of the 1940s to 1960s. Thus, gentrification is often depicted as a ‘back-to-the-city movement’ by the middle class. In Russia, due to suburbanisation, the ‘built-up’ category of land use had grown twice in the 1990s; and still in parallel central urban areas have been renovated and increasingly colonized by the new rich – a recognizable pattern of gentrification (Badyina and Golubchikov, 2005). Furthermore, what looks familiar, has much local specificity. For example, “suburbanisation” in Moscow has taken a form of second-home developments rather than permanent residences. People continue to reside in their urban multifamily houses, but have second homes of various standards in less urbanised settings. This is better described as “seasonal suburbanisation”, “quasi-suburbanisation” or even “exurbanisation”, although more “permanent” residential or cottage suburbanisation is also increasingly taking place in the nearest areas around the administrative border of Moscow as, for example, discussed by Makhrova et al. (2008).

And yet, some urban processes were not immediately obvious with the start of transition, but took time to mature. As we already noted above, the inner cities in post-socialist cities were first and foremost to bear the signs of large-scale capitalist transformation, however, eventually the peripheries of larger cities such as Moscow have also been affected. Thus, along with quasi-suburbanisation, the fringe of Moscow metropolitan area is now experiencing some patterns of intensified growth. Initially, at least, this was clearly driven by the development of shopping malls along the Moscow Orbital Motorway (which for the most art corresponds to the administrative border between the City of Moscow and Moscow Oblast – a separate administrative region surrounding Moscow), as well the development of warehouses along the major motorways running from Moscow. But, increasingly, more complex forms of development, such as major modern office-based employments, including back-offices, emerge in the nearest cities of Moscow (e.g. Rudolph and Brade, 2005; Makhrova and Molodikova, 2007). These forms of development are also paralleled by much intensified residential constriction in and around the Russian capital. Khimki was one of the first cities in Moscow Oblast to experience the combination of these processes.

Khimki is often seen as having a favourable location. Firstly, it is adjacent to Moscow and is well connected with it. Secondly, there are Russia’s major transport links crossing Khimki, including the Moscow-St Petersburg motorway (known as Leningrad Motorway) and Moscow-St Petersburg railway. Thirdly, Khimki is located near and on the main route from Moscow to Russia’s major international airport Sheremetyevo (opened in 1959, with a second terminal in 1980 for the Olympic Games); the airport also now administratively belong to the territory of Khimki. Fourthly, the city is located in an environmentally favourable zone to the west of Moscow and near the Moscow Canal.

Khimki was traditionally considered as one of ‘satellite cities’ of Moscow in its ‘near belt’, although it administratively belongs to Moscow Oblast, which is a separate ‘subject of the Russian Federation’ (or Russia’s administrative region). Historically, the city of Khimki has been a centre of a larger district with a few other settlements and the countryside. In 1984, the Council of Ministers of Soviet Russia handed over a large part of the territory of the Khimki District to Moscow. This is because Khimki was always an off-limits city, based on defence; hence Moscow grew around the city rather than incorporating it into its borders. As a result, the Khimki District became divided into two parts, separated by the territory under Moscow’s jurisdiction. In January 2006, due to the municipal reform in Russia, the Khimki District changed its status; the whole district area which used to consist of several urban and rural parts became amalgamated as the
unified “Urban District of Khimki” (Gorodskoy Okrug Khimki), with the total population of about 180 thousand.

With the collapse of the Soviet system, various administrative borders, which were previously easily changed by central decisions, became important territorial designation of political and economic jurisdictions. The complex and often ambiguous borders of Khimki became the points of tensions between Moscow Oblast and the City of Moscow. As one of our interviewees noted: “It indeed turns out that it’s a very complicated city as it is all interpenetrated by Moscow territory, Federal transport junctions and motorways – this is the specificity of the city” (Ladygina). Since the borders are uncertain, they remain in flux. Most importantly, some while ago the borders for Sheremetyevo were settled in favour of Khimki. It was through the court system; the initiator of the case was Moscow Oblast’s government, but Khimki administration presented the case in all court hearings. (Toropov)

**Pro-growth impulses governing development in Khimki**

No one who travels to and from Moscow to the Sherymetyvo airport within Khimki district can avoid making superficial comparisons with the edge city environment of the US. By now the heavy congestion on the stretch of road allows one ample time to gaze out onto what is a rather chaotic mix of office and apartment blocks and retail outlets that, until very recently, were being built at very rapid rates indeed.

It is tempting therefore to consider this suburban nodal point of car based accessibility being subject to the sorts of private sector forces apparent in the US. Growth in the peripheries of major cities in post-socialist countries has prompted Kulscar and Domokos (2005) to invoke the term post-socialist growth machine – making use of Molotch’s (1976) classic description of the politics of US urban development. The conjoining of the term growth machine is testimony to the concepts ability to travel but it may also conceal more than it reveals. The appearance of rapid land extensive growth undoubtedly has some similarities but arguably many dissimilarities with the US pattern. The question therefore arises whether the post-socialist context is so different as to warrant the appellation of growth machine at all. As Kulscar and Domokos (2005: 560) go on to acknowledge ‘The nature of the pro growth agenda is primarily political in the post-socialist case. The power core is the local administration and this strongly influences the composition of the growth machine’. Development activity is also almost entirely unimpeded by civil society. Both of which leads Kulcsar and Domokos to suggest that post-socialist constellations of pro-growth interests would exist in the absence of growth, as their motivations centre on the exercise of power and control of the communities.

At the outset we can highlight some similarities to patterns and processes of urban development in the US. These essentially revolve around the speed of development and allied to this the motivation of development in terms of exchange values. Certainly, the initiative, as in the US, does tend to come from the private sector as one interviewee from a commercial property brokerage described:

As for the government, there is no one good well thought-out strategy of developing this or that Moscow Region suburb or district or Moscow Region. It is stimulated by developers. Developers come to the government and ask for permissions. IKEA, for instance, was built without any permission for construction. They just came out on the land and started to build and got the permissions in process. If you imagine this kind of situation now it would be absolutely impossible to proceed you would lose all the money invested in the project. But six or seven years ago it was okay (DTZ).

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2 Interview with Olga Ladygina, Deputy Head of the Project Studio for Suburban Zone of Moscow and Moscow Oblast, Research and Development Institute for the General Plan of the City of Moscow, Moscow, 26 August 2008

3 Interview with Mikhail Toropov, General Director of the Management Company for the Liga Trade Centre, Khimki, 22 August 2008

4 Interview with DTZ property consultants, Moscow, 20 August 2008 (in English)
Here, government and its planning and regulatory systems at all level and especially the municipal level in Russia responds to a newly created market system which was ushered in, albeit in a rather incomplete way, in the early 1990s. Legislation in the early 1990s provided for private property rights, and although incomplete, released a huge suppressed demand for housing from individuals and commercial premises from established and new financial and business services, retail and distribution businesses (including foreign direct investment). This time, until new legislation effectively completing the market system in more recent years, was considered as period of ‘wild capitalism’ by one informed interviewee (Gaige5) as implied in the description of the IKEA development in Khimki above.

In this respect, post-socialist processes of urban development may well be a more exaggerated mutation of the US growth machine. Moreover, this is likely to persist in the Russian case since deficiencies with the new legislation and regulatory systems still promote very rapid urban development and particular types of developer and financing of development in the face of uncertainties over enforceable property rights (Shone6).

However, once we move on to consider how the development process relates to a politics of place (Logan and Molotch, 1987), major dissimilarities appear. In Molotch’s original formulation and in subsequent elaborations (Logan and Molotch, 1987), the mutual interests of municipal politicians and officials and private sector, usually land based business interests, are place-based due to what Cox and Mair (1988) have further elaborated as local dependency on both parties. The joint actions of the private and public sectors coalesce over the profits and revenues that attend the development patterns centred on uplifts in the exchange value of land and property within a particular jurisdiction. As such municipal economic development strategies, and planning policies become a focal point for coalitions of public and private sector interests. And here dissimilarities with the Khimki context become pronounced. In the next section, we will start exploring these dissimilarities by firstly discussing why planning policies play a rather different role in the context of Russia and Khimki.

From plan-led cities to development-led planning

The Soviet model of urban planning was inscribed into a centralized institutional setting and land development was part of social and economic regulation. Urban planning was subservient to the complex hierarchy of economic planning. Since the national priority was production, plans largely focused on servicing industrial enterprises. Social infrastructure, including housing, services and green spaces, was allocated according to some norms based on the needs of production. (e.g. French and Hamilton, 1979; Bater, 1980; Pallot and Shaw, 1981; Andrusz, 1984; French, 1995). The implication of this top-down planning process was that it was largely “sectoral”, while urban plans were to integrate different sectors by the virtue of their location in one place.

With the emergence of market reforms and political and economic liberalization, Russian urban planning fell into a state of crisis – in both theoretical and practical terms. The reason is not only in the economic problems which made former planning works void and not only with the loss of human resources in the planning profession, but also in that the new requirements made many inherited principles of Soviet planning for administrative-led development ineffective (see details in Golubchikov, 2004). A series of reforms in relation to the institution of urban planning have, however, not solved this problem but instead considerably emasculated the institution of planning without providing a really workable alternative. Importantly, the 2004 Urban Development Code of Russia stresses the role of legal zoning, thus re-orientating the accent of the Russian town planning from a more comprehensive concept of planning to that of land use zoning underpinned by narrower development rights interests. The planning instruments, such as General/master city plans

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5 Interview with Gerald Gaige, Partner, Ernst and Young, Moscow, 28 October 2008 (in English)
6 Interview with Steven Shone, C/M/S Cameron McKenna, Moscow, 29 October 2008 (in English)
still exist, but are assumed to be only “supplementary” in the new system and in view of Russian planners are largely marginalised by the law.

This in effect means that planning in modern Russian has increasingly taken development-led and opportunistic forms. Indeed, in contrast to planning, development control has become a persuasive machine. Today, prior to making an application for a building permit, a developer has to obtain numerous technical approvals with the result that the proposed development is organized in much detail. The procedures vary depending on local circumstances and regional legislations but generally entail considerations by numerous local and regional sectoral authorities and ad hoc agencies and require developers to conform with their infrastructural, environmental and social services norms and policies. Even if a plan exists and developers’ proposals are in accordance with it, the developers can be sure about the result only at the end of that administrative process and sectoral negotiations. On the contrary, if authorities are interested in development and forming partnership with developers, or are forced to accept development by other pressures existing plans may be easily violated (Golubchikov, 2004). Apparently, such a system of “opportunity-led” planning is very familiar to many other post-socialist cities in Europe (e.g. Tasan-Kok, 2006).

This combination of the legacy of sector-based planning and pro-development zoning results in a lack of a really comprehensive and purposeful approach to make coherent places. When asked whether there were any visions at local or regional governments how individual cities in Moscow Oblast should look like in 20-30 years, the head of Moscow Oblast Planning Board replied that such “visions” are not according to the market regime: “people who will live in those places in 20 or 30 years time will have their own vision about how they want those places to look like and we don’t have the right to impose our views on their wishes” (Frolov7). It may be seen paradoxical to hear such discourse from a bureaucrat responsible for coordinating all local and regional planning documents, especially given still the extant relevance of city general plans in Russia. However, it reflects well the current state of thoughts, if not established hegemony, prevailing in Russia. Urban plans are now considered not as the instruments of “making places”, but rather as the tools of providing the basic functionality to the places, mostly in terms of transport infrastructure. This is rooted in the tradition of the functional and sectoral approaches in Soviet planning. But, as already noted, the Soviet urban planning was part of the hierarchically-arranged economic and spatial planning for state-led development, which in its totality did provide each places its sense as part of the overall system of the national economic production. It was yet not the task for urban planning to create a local sense of place to individual cities, but rather to reproduce typical built environments which would provide the basic infrastructure for a convenient living and working. The planners might protect whatever they received from the past (such as historic buildings and historic quarters), but in terms of the new, they tended to build functional “communities” based on standard sectoral prescriptions and norms as for social, engineering, transport environmental infrastructure.

That was dictated by the communist ideology and the aspirations and visions about the communist society of tomorrow. The loss of the societal vision about long-term development and the atomisation of the society were, however, not compensated by the bottom-up instruments shaping places. In other words, general plans have maintained their functional-sectoral approach, but have not embraced the “place-making” element. Thus, the centralized sector-based planning of the Soviet era continues to have an important legacy in that there remains little appreciation of the value of territorial planning at the municipal scale among political leaders and local officials. Furthermore, the capacity for municipalities to integrate aspects of planning for their jurisdictions is also significantly compromised by planning responsibilities and financing that remain fragmented between Federal, regional and municipal levels. The situation contrast, for example, with China where the State is seen as a coordinator and promoter of development as part of place building at national, provincial and local level. Russian local state has rather become an unpredictable holder and releaser of developable land.

7 Interview with Alexandr Frolov, Head of the Main Department for Architecture and Urban Planning of Moscow Oblast, Moscow, 29 October 2008
The interplay of interests in urban development practices

Having considered the institutional limitations of post-socialist planning for purposeful place-making, we also need to discuss the balance of interests in the development processes in Khimki between different coalitions, including developers, politicians, planners and local citizenry.

For some, at least, aspirations to improve territorial planning at municipal level do exist. One interviewee, a commercial property developer, argued that all local administrations were indeed interested in planning for places and improving services and infrastructure but that there were different possibilities for this:

Believe me, they all have a detailed plan, but what they don’t have is the money to realise the plan. Apart from that, all these plans are as a rule completely out of touch with reality… There is a planning committee in every local administration. They all have their plans - plans of development, reconstruction… It looks beautiful, but, as a rule, is absolutely unrealisable. Because who is going to pay for that? (Kashlakov).

There is some suggestion that Khimki’s mayor has been resistant to powerful real estate company interests with designs on his municipality (Pozdnev). Nevertheless it seems that these companies are able to realize development opportunities on the vast land banks they have acquired at the outset of liberalization in Russia by capitalising on their political connections at the regional or Federal political levels. The clash between local plans and financial interests, with clear dominance of the latter, is exemplified by the development of a previously vacant prime location at the entrance of Khimki from Moscow by the Leningrad Motorway and next to the municipality’s first class A office development – Country Park. The site was originally earmarked in the general plan for a new commercial and community centre, and there was a desire by the Khimki chief architect to build a conspicuous office, shopping and entertainment complex, which would also contain new premises for the local administration. However, the plot was suddenly granted planning permission for large residential development by the developer PIK. The interviews with both local administration and neighbouring businesses reveal the discontent about this outcome, which is considered to disrupt what could have been a compatible cluster of office and retail land use. But the pressure for development seems to be not only restricted to the lack or availability of money, but with vested interest involving both large development groups with strong backing. As deputy mayor put it:

The problem is related to the investment attractiveness of the city. There are people coming here who we cannot actually turn down. It happens that we are forced to take decisions that contradict with the policy we have. It happens very often (Pozdnev).

One might assume that a municipality like Khimki experiencing such rapid development ought to have a healthy fiscal capacity. In fact, however, due to the tax system in Russia all municipalities are in a relatively weak position relative to the regions in which they sit. As a result, some of the chief possibilities for place making that are evident at the municipal level have come from the planning gain extracted from developers, as one interviewee, a consultant on local government tax affairs described:

When we talk about contributions that are required from the private developers to public welfare, I see it as almost unavoidable and generally speaking as a good thing, if applied conscientiously. Why is it unavoidable? Because of this inverted pyramid of revenues [concentration at higher

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8 Interview with Igor Kashlakov, Marketing Director, REGION Group, Moscow, 21 August 2008.
9 Interview with Dmitriy Pozdnev, Deputy Mayor for Building, Architecture and Land Use, Khimki Administration, 30 October 2008.
10 Interview with Dmitriy Pozdnev, Deputy Mayor for Building, Architecture and Land Use, Khimki Administration, Khimki, 30 October 2008
administrative levels]. ... At the same time if you look at the expenditure pyramid, it is quite the opposite (Bogorov\textsuperscript{11}).

For residential developments, the planning gain extracted has been quite significant with 20% (and up to 25\%) of all units of flats constructed in Khimki being handed over to the municipality in the form of social housing (Pozdnev\textsuperscript{12}). Beyond this, one would have to say that the planning gain extracted so far is modest and far from guaranteed. It has extended so far to the provision or refurbishment of public spaces and parks and the building of kindergartens and schools (Maximov\textsuperscript{13}). Even so, the present financial crisis promises to affect the planning gain extracted from even the largest of developers such as PIK who according to one interviewee are now struggling to finance the amenities and services promised for major residential developments in Khimki (Pozdnev\textsuperscript{14}). Moreover, there is a further problem in that much of the property development boom in Khimki has taken place in a context in which significant deficiencies have only just been addressed in recent legislation. These deficiencies – including non-transparent system of development permits, lack of public participation, monopolization of the construction sector, excessively “bureaucratized” or, on the contrary, “privatized” planning system – create a lot of opportunity for rent seeking behaviour, both by developers and local officials (see Golubchikov, 2004). Until recently many municipalities have not been obliged to have an up to date general plan and associated legally binding land-use zoning instruments. Legislation has been now in place obliging that since 2010 building permits may only be issued once up-to-date rules for land use and building (effectively, land use zoning) exist. But it is still questionable whether these will make the development process any more transparent and not simply further degrade more comprehensive spatial planning.

In some other respects there is evidence to suggest that the wealth of Khimki from development has impacted on the form of urbanization and the scope of planning in the municipality. One interviewee from the Khimki administration indicated that they had greater scope than many other districts to seek ‘comprehensive projects’ rather than planning applications for infilling around existing buildings (Pozdnev\textsuperscript{15}), although the precise implications of comprehensive developments – especially if conceived in suburban morphological terms – for the cohesion of municipal space remain unclear.

For a number of reinforcing reasons, local officials and politicians operate in a context in which as yet there is little understanding or concern for issues such as rising social inequalities and the costs of rapid urban development. The enormous pent up demand for housing that exists in Moscow coupled with a celebration of unbridled economic growth and the personal wealth that it offers mean that there is little or no popular discourse, and hardly any major grass-roots or civic group action, relating to, for instance, issues of rising social and spatial inequalities, or of the costs of growth. Yet, in some respects this coupled with Khimki’s accessibility to Moscow may make politics rather more active in Khimki than many other localities. As one interviewee suggested, ‘Taking into account that Khimki is very near Moscow, it’s a very politicized city.’ (Mikhaylov\textsuperscript{16}). What was being described here was less a genuine conflict of developer and preservationist interests than the fabrication of such conflicts by different development interests, as was highlighted by environmental activists:

\textsuperscript{11} Interview with Valentin Bogorov, Consultant, RB-Centre Consultancy, Moscow, 28 October 2008 (in English)
\textsuperscript{12} Interview with Dmitriy Pozdnev, Deputy Mayor for Building, Architecture and Land Use, Khimki Administration, Khimki, 30 October 2008
\textsuperscript{13} Interview with Yuriy Maximov, Head of the Committee for the Economy, Khimki Administration, 30 October 2008
\textsuperscript{14} Interview with Dmitriy Pozdnev, Deputy Mayor for Building, Architecture and Land Use, Khimki Administration, 30 October 2008.
\textsuperscript{15} Interview with Dmitriy Pozdnev, Deputy Mayor for Building, Architecture and Land Use, Khimki Administration, Khimki, 30 October 2008.
\textsuperscript{16} Interview with Valeriy Mikhaylov, Chief Architect of the Urban District of Khimki, Khimki Administration, Khimki, 30 October 2008.
On the one hand, there are those people who want to live in suburbs and they need a normal environment, normal green areas, as well as transport – ecological, clean and without much infrastructure. On the other hand, there are the interests that want to pump up the economy of these zones and make them means for money-mining. This means maximum destruction to these green zones and maybe at the cost of residents but with some development of the infrastructure that will bring money. So, there are two tendencies that appear in Khimki... (Mikhail17)

There is some evidence to suggest that the comparatively highly educated population of Khimki has exerted some influence on the municipality. One interviewee commented that the population did have rising expectations of the municipality in terms of improvements to, and refurbishments of, the exiting housing stock (Pozdnev18) and another that the public have been vocal at planning meetings (Mikhaylov19). Yet, this is rather limited evidence that business and civic groups are becoming engaged in any political economy of place with any substantial degree of impact.

For example, the very rapidity and haphazard nature of growth in Khimki has created acute transportation problems. Khimki lies at the intersection of major roadways – the north-south Leningrad highway and the MKAD (Moscow Orbital Motorway) but these roads fall under different and multiple jurisdictions and financing arrangements (Federal, Moscow Oblast, and Moscow). The widening of these roads in Khimki is now precluded by the development that has occurred alongside them. As yet there is little sign of business interests having become organized to any significant degree and no real evidence of any such organized business interests lobbying government regarding the need for transport improvements, as would surely be the case in the US and indeed Europe. Indeed, the only organized action regarding transport issues actually relates to environmental and civic group opposition to a by-pass proposed by the Federal government in order to relieve this bottleneck. A small but tenacious group of people have been trying to raise awareness of the potential destruction of a major forest area and part of Moscow’s greenbelt that lies in the eastern part of Khimki which they suspect is driven by the new development opportunities that it would present. In sum, as one government ministry interviewee described,

Here in Russia the developer is in greater dependence on the local authority than on the public. For example, public opinion could stop some development project in Sweden and Germany it is hard to imagine that this could occur in Russia. One more feature is that planning is mostly monopolised by the municipality in western countries. Contrary to this in the Russian Federation there are some levels of planning that are held by Federal ministries or some regional authorities (Bocharov20).

This latter part of this quotation leads us, again, on to the extent to which territorial planning at the municipal level is confounded by the legacy of Soviet sectoral planning.

As Gentile and Sjoberg (2006) describe it, Soviet planning created ‘landscapes of priority’ across the post-socialist city. In the US, Federal and state government expenditure on roads was pivotal to suburban growth machine politics since it systematically distorted the distribution of locational advantage in favour of suburban locations. Some places like Khimki on the periphery of Moscow have similar advantages conferred by road building programmes but also embody further systematic and potentially negative impacts on the land market and development potential. Khimki was originally built as a closed satellite city along with many other “company” towns and cities around Moscow as a location for key state enterprises – notably in Khimki’s case military production related to missiles and aerospace. Being the key functions in the city, these enterprises had large sites in municipal terms and in many instances were charged with catering for the

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17 Interview with Mikhail and Evgeniya Chirikova, Khimki Forest Defence Movement, Moscow, 21 August, 2008
18 Interview with Dmitriy Pozdnev, Deputy Mayor for Building, Architecture and Land Use, Khimki Administration, Khimki, 30 October 2008
19 Interview with Valeriy Mikhaylov, Chief Architect of the Urban District of Khimki, Khimki Administration, Khimki, 30 October 2008.
20 Interview with Mikhail Bocharov, Head of Land Law, the Department of Property and Land Relations, Economics and the Environment; Ministry for Economic Development and Trade of the Russian Federation, Moscow, 28 October 2008
housing and recreational and service needs of workers and their families, who were the majority of Khimki residents at that time. Especially as many of these enterprises are still controlled by the Ministry of Defence, the insertion of these state enterprises into municipalities represent a freezing in time of industry location, with only some urban adjustment to industrial expansion in the post-Socialist era. Enterprises in accessible suburban settlements now appear as constraints on the alternative use of land but also present significant obstacles to the territorial planning. Despite their rationalization over the years there is little prospect of any of the huge site occupied by the three state enterprises–adjacent to the historic centre of Khimki – being released for development. One consequence of this is that the centre of gravity in Khimki is shifting to new Khimki - essentially previously undeveloped western area of Khimki now subject to massive housing and also new offices developments.

Furthermore, as Khimki has a complicated border and is inter-penetrated by the territory of Moscow, this also imposes serious obstacles for urban planning and for consolidating it as a single place. There is still a lack of inter-regional planning in Russia, while Moscow in particular is not keen to cooperate with federal government or its neighbour on such issues, as a number of interviewees indicated (e.g. Vorona21). The new general plan for Khimki, which is expected to come into force in 2009, and related land use zoning documentation leave considerable strips of the territory “in the middle” uncovered. Apart from further erosion of the place as a whole, this negatively affects the infrastructural integrity in Khimki. For example, there is the intent of Inteko, a development company closely affiliated with the Moscow government, to build major residential developments on the Moscow city land which interpenetrates Khimki’s territory. The municipality is powerless to prevent this development despite its impact on the planning of the municipal territory and the implications of using and financing utility networks provided from the municipality (Pozdnev22).

Finally what of the political leadership? Again, as yet there is little indication that municipal level politicians are evolving distinctive agendas across the greater Moscow area. The problem is the system and climate of politics that prevails at present is one in which local political leaders are constrained by patronage relationships with the regional governor. This is true of the manner in which political patronage is dispensed within the region in a context of the inverted pyramid of fiscal revenues noted above. Thus ‘opportunities’ for the building of a sense of place are often allocated by political leadership at a higher tier of government. Whilst Khimki has one of the largest municipal budgets in the Oblast, of more importance in this respect is that Khimki is considered, according to one interviewee, to be the ‘locomotive for Moscow Oblast’ (Maximov23). The close relationship of the Khimki administration and its leadership to the Oblast government and its political leadership has ensured some significant flagship capital investments such as a new basketball and football stadium. However, to one observer from a major company operating in Khimki this relationship between municipal and regional government had provided little in the way of any place-shaping strategy:

Khimki administration work quite closely with the Moscow Oblast and Moscow Oblast need to take a long-term grip but so far they have done little cosmetics for the citizens to see that the parks are greener and nicer and that the football stadium is a bit better and so on. I think they try with the funds they have. But what really will make a difference is the long term strategy (Gewert24)

In sum, Rudolph and Brade’s (2005: 139) argument that ‘the districts of Moscow Oblast have relatively little influence on local economic development, because major economic actors operate

21 Interview with Galina Vorona, Ministry for Regional Development, Russian Federation, Moscow, 1 September 2008
22 Interview with Dmitriy Pozdnev, Deputy Mayor for Building, Architecture and Land Use, Khimki Administration, Khimki, 30 October 2008
23 Interview with Yuriy Maximov, Head of the Committee for the Economy, Khimki Administration, Khimki, 30 October 2008
24 Interview with Herman Gewert, Vice-President, Director of Operations and Marketing, IKEA Real Estate Russia and Ukraine, Khimki, 6 November 2008 (in English)
at the level of the governor’ continues to resonate with the general tenor of observations on the ground in Khimki.

**Conclusion: whither Khimki?**

Patterns of suburbanisation and the development of satellite towns around Moscow embodied something of the ambiguities that were apparent in the planning ideals during much of the early Soviet era (French, 1995). The ambiguous position of suburban and satellite settlements remains and has often been amplified in the post-Soviet era. Rudolph and Brade (2005), while making it clear that contemporary urbanisation at the periphery of Moscow can be described as a new phase, suggest that development at the periphery displays hybrid elements. Notable in this regard is a strengthening of processes of social polarisation that have become visible at the periphery. Perhaps as a corollary to this, as they argue, is that the economies of transition have become less powerful as a defining force in peripheral urbanisation and that ‘Rather, universal economic mechanisms and strategies with global effects are starting to shape the Moscow periphery’ (Rudolph and Brade, 2005:148). What we have described above tends to question the diminishing importance of transition. Moreover, there are other respects in which it would be as well not to overplay some of the universality of processes of urban development.

Although the case of Khimki may share some facets and controversies as depicted by the concepts of ‘edge city’ and ‘(suburban) growth machine’, it is still distinctive from these. Particularly, it is ‘placelessness’ that must be added to the conceptualisation of rapid urban growth in the context of post-Soviet Khimki. The placelessness, or the lack of purposeful place-making strategies by the growth coalitions, arises from a number of reinforcing reasons, including highly speculative development practices, a little interest of local businesses to influence the shape of wider urban development beyond their immediate control, and local government’s retreat to standardised planning requirements and to a capricious allocation of developable land as opposed to visionary urban planning and development strategies. Thus, growth in Khimki is fuelled by a spontaneous variety of opportunistic profit-making initiatives that are characterised by short-termism and are essentially disconnected from ‘local’ city, at the same time as government maintains a passive laissez-faire pro-growth approach.

This model of growth in fact destroys Khimki’s ‘thick’ Soviet-era industrial identity as a self-contained city and makes the city into an increasingly fragmented place which may well be hardly distinguished as one city, but rather as several peripheral dormitory districts of the city of Moscow proper. As Khimki is directly adjacent to the territory of the city of Moscow, most of non-government interviewees consider Khimki as de-facto a district of Moscow. Indeed, Khimki’s peculiar borders and location makes it very much interconnected with Moscow and its development is often considered to be the continuing expansion of Moscow. In this respect, Khimki may be considered as actually reverted from being a self-centred (moreover, “closed”) city to more of a suburb.

However, Khimki does have a separate local government, which complicates the political structuration of development interests in relation to Khimki. There is a much stronger and independent role to play by Khimki government than by any local governments within the territory of the City of Moscow proper, because by law the government system in Moscow is much more centralised than in Moscow Oblast – so, while Moscow has the prefects of local districts appointed directly by Moscow Mayor, the Mayor of Khimki is a political popular-elected post. Thus, if by some historical accident Khimki was part of the city of Moscow, then probably the city would have had a very different configuration of political interests and might have followed very different path of development. The separation of Khimki as individual political unit outside the City of Moscow has indeed created a more distinctive political interest of Khimki government in local development. Rather than being considered a peripheral and (most likely) less well-off district of Moscow, Khimki finds itself in the position of being a “special” district of Moscow Oblast, effectively one of its wealthiest and investment-attractive (due to the different economic might of the two regions). This also results in a lot of interest in Khimki from the regional government and makes it one of the
spatial junctions in the frictions between the regional governments of Moscow and Moscow Oblast. This territorial configuration circumscribes to some degree a place-focused element and creates prerequisites for Khimki remaining a separate place. It remains to be seen, however, whether a growing demand for new urban infrastructure and emerging residents’ movements will further restructure the modes of governing developments in Khimki more in line with what is believed to be proactive place-focused post-suburban politics.

References


