GENTRIFICATION IN PETERSBURG: A NEW CITY FOR A NEW GENTRY

DMITRY VOROBYEV & THOMAS CAMPBELL
The term "gentrification" is a familiar one in the west, where it signifies the capture of poverty-stricken but “charming old” neighborhoods by the “creative classes,” who act as scouts for a subsequent recapture of now-trendy hipster districts by the bourgeoisie. In the former Russian capital of Saint Petersburg, gentrification is practiced differently. Here, the forces of capital have aligned with an authoritarian bureaucratic machine to “redevelop” an entire UNESCO World Heritage Site. Aided by contradictory laws, rampant corruption, impotent but pretentious local architects, the ambitions of international architectural superstars, and a mostly passive populace, the new powers that be in Petersburg won’t let silly things like public squares or “historic” buildings stand in their way. Their aim is nothing less than the total transformation of Petersburg into a “European-class city.” But which Europe do they have in mind? And can the citizens of Petersburg really be so cowed that they would let one of the world’s most beautiful cities be turned into a heap of tawdry high-rises, shopping malls, and parking lots?
When we speak of contemporary Petersburg, we should keep in mind that in fact we are speaking of three cities. The city is divided into three distinct belts or zones.

Когда мы говорим про современный Петербург, мы должны держать в голове три города – ведь он имеет очень логичную структуру из трёх поясов.
The first zone was built entirely during the tsarist regime—that is, over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is the historic core, renowned the world over for its splendid architecture—its palaces, embankments, wide boulevards, and cathedrals. This city was very much a utopian city planning project, the new imperial regime’s demonstration to itself, the world at large, and (most important) its own people, that Russia had moved west.

The second zone borders immediately on the historic core. The industrial districts in this zone began to appear in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This zone is likewise of interest to historians because it was home to the proletariat who made the three Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917: the role in these revolutions, for example, of the workers of the Putilov Factory or the Vyborg Side needs no commentary. This second zone was also the place where the new Soviet power and its fellow travelers in the avant-garde made their first tentative experiments in giving architectural form to the new Soviet way of life. Hence, in the Narvsky Zastava district, for example, we can still find the striking complex of constructivist-style houses for workers on Tractor Street or the hammer-and-sickle-shaped school across the way on Strikes Prospekt. Since Soviet times, it is in this zone that we find concentrated giant machine factories and port facilities.
Development of the city's peripheral districts continues unabated to this day. The third Petersburg continues to grow, encroaching on surrounding Leningrad Oblast (which is a separate federal territory, with its own government). At the same time, the first two Petersburgs are spatially fixed. What is happening in these three cities today? In our talk, we will be moving both in space—from the outskirts back to the historical center—and in time—from the past to the future. Although we will be referring to the “hard” facts of built space and infrastructure, we will use these examples to show exactly what mechanisms are changing both the look of the city and its uses, and the political and social processes that impel and impede these transformations. As architectural theorist John Lobell remarks, “[T]he arrangement of buildings and urban complexes reveals how people [see] themselves and how they relate[ ] to each other.” We would add that the transformation of contemporary Petersburg also reveals how a particular group of people—its businessmen, rulers, and citizens—relates both to the city’s past and to its future. It is our considered opinion (based on long-term participatory observation and empirical case studies) that the processes we observe in the “three Petersburgs,” although they might serve the narrow, short-term interests or capacities of these three classes of rulers and ruled, are in fact destroying the city’s architectural heritage and making a human-friendly, democratically planned future next to impossible.

The third Petersburg (Leningrad) is the authorities’ response to the challenges of the post-war period, which saw the reconstruction of the city after the 900-day Nazi siege. During the post-war period, a massive housing construction boom began. The flats in these new buildings were designated for workers (who arrived in huge numbers to revive the city’s industry), students and scientists (who studied, taught, and researched at the city’s many universities and institutes), and specialists (in the sixties, Leningrad became the Soviet Union’s “laboratory” for technological innovation and the needs of the military-industrial complex). New housing construction was also intended to alleviate the crowded communal flats of the central districts. Leningrad had the largest number of such flats in the Soviet Union, and the city still leads post-Soviet Russia in this category.
The new estates on the city's periphery were built in waves. The visible trace of these waves are the so-called stalinki of the fifties, the khrushchevki of the sixties, and, finally, the so-called korabli ("ships")—prolonged, multi-storey block houses—of the eighties and early nineties.
Housing construction came to a near halt during the national economic and political crisis of the nineties, giving rise to the phenomenon known as *dolgostroi* (“long construction”). Russia entered the new era of its history with a considerable housing deficit. One of the main promises of the late socialist era—“[I]n the year 2000 every Soviet family will have its own apartment” (Gorbachev)—was not fulfilled.

These buildings were the dream of every family who were allotted housing in them (so-called *novoseli*). In the main, they moved there from communal flats and dormitories (*kommunalki* and *obshchagi*). This dream often became a reality insofar as the Soviet regime established a system in which municipally controlled free housing was distributed to the populace. In order to receive this housing, Soviet citizens had to submit an application and then, as a rule, wait for as long as a decade. These so-called *ocheredniki* (“queue waiters”) are still around today because this Soviet-era system has not been entirely dismantled.

Строительство замерло во время российского политического и экономического кризиса 1990-х годов. Многие стройки были на долгое время остановлены (*дольгострой*). В результате, Россия вступала в новое время со значительным дефицитом жилья. Одно из ключевых обещаний построения социалистического общества позднесоветского времени — «к 2000 году у каждой советской семьи будет собственная квартира» — не было выполнено.

Эти дома были мечтой семей, которые получили жильё (*новосёлы*). В основном они пережили из коммуналок и заводских общежитий (*общаги*). Мечты сбывались, так как в советские времена была заложена и сохранялась до сих пор система распределения муниципального, бесплатного жилья, на которое нужно было подать заявку и ждать десятилетие — так называемые “очередники”.
In the post-Soviet era, it became possible to privatize, sell, and buy apartments, both within old and new housing stock. A housing market took shape that was relatively more legal than its illegal Soviet counterpart: in those days, one could hope to improve one's living conditions by exchanging flats, by adding family members, via job promotion and/or connections (blat), or by signing on to the waiting list. After perestroika (a word, by the way, that means “rebuilding”) people began to move house more actively, to exchange rooms and flats, to rent and let them, to buy new flats, and to renovate current or newly purchased flats. During the nineties, the most popular style of renovation acquired the name evroremont (“Euro-renovation”), which involved the generous use of such available materials as plastic-frame windows, fake walls and ceilings (in English, “drywall”; in German, “rigips”), and laminated floors.

The demand for apartments sparked a housing boom. The old Soviet construction trusts became highly profitable private firms, while specialists unable to find work in their chosen professions flooded the ranks of the new real estate agents. Fuelled by oil and gas revenues, new construction really took off in the early years of the present decade. In Petersburg alone, from one to three million square meters of new housing stock have been constructed annually. Architecturally speaking, these new high-rise buildings are mere variations on the mass-produced housing blocks of the last Soviet years and the first post-Soviet decade.
Where exactly have these new high-rises sprung up? Real estate speculators and builders have continued to push the boundaries of the third Petersburg into Leningrad Oblast, acquiring and developing new territories. Simultaneously, however, they have also developed green areas (parks and squares!) and “empty” lots originally set aside for future social infrastructure (kindergartens, schools, administrative buildings, medical clinics, recreation centers) by the previous regime. Curiously, the builders of the new regime argue that these lots were actually meant for future high-rise housing projects.

This practice was made possible by the fact that post-Soviet Petersburg dwelled in a legal vacuum. Builders could make their own rules or maneuver around the often contradictory laws and codes still on the books. More importantly, the city’s last overall development plan (genplan) was passed in 1987, and of course it made no provisions for post-Soviet realities (although it expired only in 2005). Infill construction (uplotnitelnaia zastroika) also made practical sense in that existing lots provided the advantage of infrastructure ready to plug into.
Эта практика стала столь распространённой, что вызывала первые с советских времён массовые протесты в городах. В связи с этим, в начале 2000-х годов, начались первые с перестроенных времён активные протесты против уплотнительной, или точечной застройки. На улицы вышли жители домов, рядом с которыми застраивали пустыри. Для этих местных жителей эти пустыри вовсе не являлись пустыми. С их точки зрения это были скверы, детские и спортивные площадки, дворы и места проведения досуга. Столкнувшись с угрозой ухудшения их образа жизни местные жители яростно защищали свои кварталы и получали свой первый опыт протестной активности и политической самоорганизации.

Массовые и множественные протесты к настоящему времени затихли. Основная причина в том, что активисты и обыкновенные граждане устали от битв с ненасытными застройщиками и коррумпированными чиновниками. Жителям приходилось защищать свои кварталы и физически, и в судах. Кроме того, в 2007 году был принят закон, направленный на защиту скверов – «О зелёных насаждениях общего пользования». Этот закон разрабатывался в течение четырёх лет совместными усилиями негосударственных организаций, активистов и экспертов с поддержкой «зелёных» депутатов вопреки упорному со противлению ряда городских чиновников и строительного лоббизма. Последняя причина в сокращении числа активных конфликтов — подобные пустыри практически исчезли.

Тем не менее, периодически вспыхивают новые конфликты. Не смотря на то, что скверы получили охраняемый статус, на их территории возникают проекты нового строительства. В основном это супермаркеты и автозаправки, и, как ни странно, спортивные комплексы, детсады и школы.

This practice became so virulent that it sparked the first wave of mass protests since the perestroika period. Residents of buildings next to “empty” lots took to the streets when these spaces began to be built up. For local residents, these spaces weren’t empty at all: they were squares, playgrounds, courtyards, a source of fresh air and recreation. Faced with a direct threat to their way of life, locals hotly defended their neighborhoods and acquired what for many of them was their first experience of active protest and political self-organization.

At present, these once-numerous mass protests have become less frequent. One big reason is that activists and ordinary residents have been worn down by their battles with corrupt authorities and rapacious developers. They were forced to defend their neighborhoods both physically and in the law courts.

Another—perhaps, more positive—reason is that a new law designed to protect designated green spaces was passed in 2007. The law was drafted over the course of four years with the intense, stubborn involvement of the activist and NGO communities, with help from “green” city councilors, and despite the just-as-stubborn resistance of city bureaucrats and the construction lobby. The third and final reason that such active conflicts have become fewer is that the supply of such “empty lots” has practically been exhausted.

Nevertheless, new conflicts periodically flare up. Despite the fact that a large number of squares and courtyards now have official status, new construction projects—supermarkets, malls, petrol stations, and, ironically, kindergartens, schools, and sport complexes—are encroaching on these newly protected territories.
As we have already noted, Petersburg is an industrial and port city. Around 450,000 people are employed in production, and the industrial sector supplies around a third (32%) of the region's gross product. The industrial estates form a horseshoe with nails that penetrate both the historic center and jut into the outskirts.

According to official statistics, the city has forty-eight industrial zones. Of these, twelve zones, which house around 200 large and medium-sized enterprises, are in the historic center, occupying nearly half of its total territory (2.4 hectares out of a total area of 5.8 hectares). Historically, these zones were built on the embankments and were surrounded by areas of housing for their workers. So as we describe these districts, we inevitably have to talk about the historic center as well.
These zones are occupied in the main by such well-known giants of machine construction as the Izhora, Kirov, and Leningrad Factories, the LOMO factory (famous for the “lomography” craze its cheap cameras sparked), and the Admiralty Wharfs. They also include the enormous port territories, as well as depots and warehouses situated along the city’s extensive rail network. Another significant portion of this territory houses innumerable industrial research institutes and design bureaus, both state-run and private. Many enterprises did not survive the economic crisis of the early nineties, and small businesses, light manufacturing, and warehouses now occupy their sites.
The industrial estates are not homogeneous in terms of ecological impact. For this reason, and because many of them occupy valuable real estate in the center, the city government plans to rezone these areas by relocating hazardous, toxic, and low-profit production facilities to the outskirts. Many closed factories still stand empty because they are too expensive to renovate and retrofit for other uses. Therefore, new industrial zones have emerged on the edges of the city, in former forests and fields. Nature thus gives way to “technology parks,” “innovation zones,” and western industrial concerns—i.e., auto manufacturing plants (Nissan, Toyota, GM) and such European giants as Bosch and Siemens.

Промзоны часто неоднородны. Предприятия разного профиля и класса экологической опасности размещены вместе. По этой причине и из-за того что многие из них занимают ценные участки в центре, городская администрация планирует переориентировать эти кварталы через вывод опасного, токсичного и нерентабельного производства на окраины города. Многие территории закрытых заводов пустуют по причине высокой цены их переоборудования и перепрофилирования, либо перемещения производства и реновации территории. Поэтому появляются новые индустриальные зоны на периферии города, в основном на бывших лесопарках и полях. Таким образом природа уступает место технопаркам, новым инновационным зонам и промышленным концернам, таким как автомобильные заводы (Нисан, Тойота, Дженерал Моторс) и таким европейским гигантам как Бош и Сименс.
What kinds of buildings are we talking about? Many of them—shipbuilding yards, barracks, warehouses, market buildings, breweries, and factories—were built in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Buildings from the 1920s—avant-garde and constructivist masterpieces—have also survived in large numbers.

The condition of these structures is cause for concern; many are dilapidated. In the historic center, many of these buildings have been demolished to make way for high-end apartments and hotels. Entire blocks are redeveloped as so-called elite districts. The most ambitious projects target enterprises situated on the embankments of the Neva River outside the historic center; precisely because of the “lovely” views they offer on the center, developers have already built or plan to construct high-rise buildings and even skyscrapers in their place.

But this applies only to the most desirable pieces of real estate. Redevelopment of those parts of the industrial zone far from the historic center is only in its initial stages. For example, a couple years ago, a consortium of builders began planning a project dubbed the Ismailov Perspektiva on an enormous territory along one of the major railroad arteries. No one knows whether the project will be realized, but on paper it promises to turn this industrial zone into a maze of new highways, skyscrapers, residential blocks, and business districts.

But the most telling processes are transforming the historic center, the first Petersburg. Let’s examine them in more detail.
To begin with, we should provide you with a few definitions and facts. There are around 20,000 residential buildings in Petersburg. Approximately 5,800 of them are considered dilapidated. This is such a serious problem that municipal administrators and civil engineers have even devised a system by which the level of dilapidation is determined in percentages. A building is considered dilapidated (аварийное) if 40% of its structures are damaged; a 60% damage rating already pushes a building into the category of "ruined" (ветхое) and thereby liable to demolition. The large number of dilapidated residential buildings in Petersburg is no surprise because a fifth of them were constructed before 1917 and half of these buildings have never undergone major renovations.

6. The Center: A World Heritage Site under Permanent Reconstruction
The historical preservation status of any particular building is primarily determined according to the following parameters:

- Whether or not it is located in the Historic Preservation Zone.
- Whether or not it is listed in the official federal or municipal registers of historic buildings.
- Whether or not it has been recommended for inclusion in these registers.

In addition, the Russian Federation is obliged to observe the international conventions on historical preservation to which it is a signatory. Most notably, in 1990 UNESCO declared the historic center of Petersburg a World Heritage Site. All these laws and conventions are meant to conserve not only historic buildings, but also the city’s historic views and panoramas.
Aside from these laws on historic preservation, there is a parallel set of legal (i.e., non-criminal) mechanisms for bypassing these laws—namely, municipal government decrees. These decrees are published and amended with astonishing speed. To understand the logic behind them, we should examine a few of them:

- **The plan for development of hotel infrastructure**, including lists of lots and addresses slated for new hotel construction. Petersburg attracts around three million tourists annually, and so the government naturally wants to ensure all these tourists have somewhere to stay—preferably in the center.

- **The plan for resettling residents from dilapidated buildings and communal flats**, including the lists of such buildings. As we have already mentioned, this is considered a huge problem. As a rule, residents are supposed to be moved into buildings under construction on the periphery. The apartments and buildings freed up in this way are reconstructed as high-end apartments, hotels, and offices.

- **The plan for the relocation of industrial enterprises from the city center**. We have already discussed how this works.

- **Lists of dilapidated buildings**. We know very little about the contents of these lists. Journalists and activists have uncovered some of them.

- **Historic buildings whose preservation status has been downgraded or eliminated**. This is another (non-transparent) mechanism that removes restrictions that might impede a developer’s plans for reconstructing or demolishing a particular building.

- **Applications for development and new construction on the part of investors**. These applications are often
и становятся достоянием экспертов и журналистов.
• постановления, которые понижают или понижают охранный статус исторических зданий. Это ещё один (непрозрачный) механизм, который устраняет препятствия которые могли бы помешать девелоперу или застройщику реконструировать или снести то или иное историческое здание.
• инвесторские заявки на развитие территорий и новое строительство. Эти заявки часто подаются на конкретные участки и здания с охранным статусом. В большей части случаев городское правительство принимает положительное решение, что делает возможным такую алхимию, как реконструкция (исторического охраняемого здания) путём частичного или полного сноса.

В совокупности эти постановления открывают дорогу практически хирургическому вмешательству в городской центр. Возвращаясь к конфликту администрации города и активистов по поводу сотни снесённых зданий, мы можем утверждать, что действительно, обе стороны были правы. Эти здания были снесены, но в каждом конкретном случае администрация города может сослаться на постановления, которые устранили охранный статус, либо дали разрешение на снос в связи с признанием здания аварийным или ветхим. В каких-то случаях администрация ссылается на то, что снос зданий вызван халатностью строителей.

Давайте посмотрим на плоды этих противоречивых практик.

made for lots or buildings with protected status. In each case, a positive ruling on the part of the municipal government—and the majority of these rulings are positive—makes it possible to perform such acts of alchemy as “reconstructing” a historically preserved building by first totally or partially demolishing it.

In aggregate, these decrees make it possible to perform “surgical interventions” in the historic center. Returning to the conflict between the administration and activists over the one hundred demolished historic buildings, we can say that in fact both sides were right. Yes, these buildings were demolished, but in each case the administration is able to point to a decree eliminating its protected status or the issue of a demolition permit warranted by the building’s having been dilapidated or ruined. In some cases, it is claimed that demolition was the result of “negligence” on the part of developers.

Let’s have a look at the results of these contradictory practices.
8. Sightseeing in Petersburg: Post-Imperial Melancholy
Let's continue our excursion by looking at some other things we find on the streets of Petersburg. In our view, these phenomena are byproducts of bureaucratic anarchy and the desire to squeeze profit and “use” of out every square centimeter of “free” space.

But let’s come back to the theme of our presentation. We have taken a visual tour of the effects of rampant demolition. But what is being built on these sites?

All this is happening because of a complete impotence on the part of the local architectural community. Architects try to stress the “contemporariness” of their projects by quoting in their own peculiar way western functionalism and postmodernism, одновременно подыгрывая как неоклас- сицизму и северному модерну, так и кон- структивизму 1920-х годов и сталинско- му ампиру. На выходе получаются некие неосознанные пародии на все эти стили. Чтобы объявить о своей уникальности и превосходстве, эти проекты прибегают к стратегии подавления окружающей архитектурной среды, главным образом за счёт высотности, сплошного и щедрого остекления и яркой окраски. Бросается в глаза сходство новых зданий, которые облицованы местными дешёвыми материалами – полированный карельский гранит и керамогранит, прозрачное и зеркальное стекло - своего рода безликий европеомонт.

Всё это происходит на фоне бессилия архитектурной мысли сообщества архитекторов. Архитекторы пытаются подчеркнуть современность своих «изделий» своеобразным цитированием западного функционализма и постмодернизма, одновременно подыгрывая как неоклассицизму и северному модерну, так и конструктивизму 1920-х годов и сталинскому ампиру. На выходе получаются некие неосознанные пародии на все эти стили. Чтобы объявить о своей уникальности и превосходстве, эти проекты прибегают к стратегии подавления окружающей архитектурной среды, главным образом за счётом высотности, сплошного и щедрого остекления и яркой окраски. Бросается в глаза сходство новых зданий, которые облицованы местными дешёвыми материалами — полированный карельский гранит и керамогранит, прозрачное и зеркальное стекло — своего рода безликий евровеомонт.
As we examine these buildings, we involuntarily recall Adolf Loos's essay "Ornament and Crime" (Ornament und Verbrechen). We see clearly that Petersburg contemporary architects strive to raise their structures to the dignity of "architecture" by heaping together all sorts of superfluous details—spires, rotundas, columns, balconies, grillwork, and preposterous mansard roofs. Moreover, these ornamental elements are conspicuously concentrated on the upper storeys, while the lower floors are left utterly featureless and sterile. The buildings thus consist of three separate, uncoordinated levels—an oversized ground floor, a massive three-to-five-storey torso, and a series of stepped mansard floors. As we have already mentioned, these miracles of modern architectural thought are designed to house high-end flats, hotels, business centers, shopping centers, and (less often) government offices and banks.
What is the meaning of gentrification in this context? Various social classes require housing in the relatively small city center. But this area is overcrowded and already developed. There are no “neglected” or “inexpensive” neighborhoods that can be assimilated whole by bohemian “pioneers” and then later by the middle or upper classes. Of course these classes would like to be able to do this. But how is such segregation possible in the relatively homogeneously populated center? Forcible and economic displacement of residents is practiced, but it yields little in the way of real spatial stratification. And so gentrification takes the form of urban warfare: historic buildings and, sometimes, whole blocks are pinpointed for brutal destruction. The new city acts like a cancer, consuming such vulnerable places as tsarist-era apartment buildings, factories, warehouses, markets, hospitals, and garrisons, as well as parks. New elite districts spring up in their place.

But there is one other factor that is rapidly changing the face of the three Petersburgs—the so-called mega-projects.
Against this backdrop, the city’s most pressing problems—mass transportation, the availability of affordable housing, construction of viable new business districts, development of the hotel sector and new entertainment and recreation areas—are solved via the hot pursuit of mega-projects, each of which will cost several billion dollars. These include a new ring road, a superhighway across the Gulf of Finland, and a tunnel under the Neva; an artificial island in the far west of the city; and the notorious 400-meter Gazprom skyscraper. The newspapers are filled with stories about the projects of renowned western architects (Norman Foster, Dominique Perrault) for the reconstruction of historic architectural ensembles and the construction of new “masterpieces” (New Holland, Apraksin Yard, a second stage for the Mariinsky).
It is odd that, often as not, these western superstars become embroiled in scandal and tear up their contracts. The local authorities are forced to replace them with more compliant, obliging architects. All these grandiose projects are turned into dolgostroi, although they continue to represent the new progressive face of Petersburg at Russian and European architectural biennials and expos.

In reality, the mega-projects, even when they remain mere blueprints, are vehicles for the more minor transformations we observe in the city. The current authorities use them to legitimate their total reconstruction of the city “in [their] image and likeness.” Local bureaucrats have disguised this process in such catchphrases as “attracting western investors,” “transforming Petersburg into a European-class city,” “adapting districts to contemporary uses,” and “developing depressing neighborhoods.”

Странно, что часто эти западные суперзвезды архитектуры со скандалом разрывают контракты. Местные власти вынуждены привлекать более покладистых местных авторитетов архитектуры. Все эти грандиозные проекты превращаются в долгострой, при этом представляя прогрессивный образ Петербурга на российских и европейских архитектурных выставках.

В действительности, мегапроекты, даже не реализованные, а только их планы являются проводниками тех “мелких” изменений, которые мы видим в городе. Через них нынешняя власть легитимирует тотальную переделку города “по своему образу и подобию” (библ.). Уместных бюрократов это называется, привлечение западных инвесторов, превращение Петербурга в город европейских стандартов, приспособление территорий под современные нужды и развитие депрессивных территорий.
Since the local press is controlled by the city administration, we need to examine the rhetoric of city bosses more closely. For example: “We want to attract investors, and these investors are interested in new construction. In this way we’ll be able to provide new housing for our citizens.” Here we detect the real reason behind the city’s construction boom. In reality, apartments in fashionable new buildings are purchased as investment instruments—this is standard practice the world over.

Or take this telling phrase from the city government’s annual report: “During the past year we have brought two million square meters of housing online.” The bureaucrat who says this acts as if there were a central plan, as in Soviet times, and a homogenous human mass in need of housing. Therefore, the more housing “we bring online,” the closer we get to the radiant future.

In reality, this policy has no clear sense of its target group. What kind of housing are we talking about? The thousands of darkened windows in fashionable new apartment blocks speak for themselves. Meanwhile, residents of communal flats and dormitories are condemned to be removed at state expense to the less attractive new estates being constructed on the far edges of the city. That is, if they’re lucky.
Муниципалитеты и локальные сообщества практически бессильны, они уполномочены только озеленять дворы, устанавливать урны и скамейки (хотя, как мы видели в нашей экскурсии даже этот потенциал не реализуется, вспомните облик города который мы показывали ранее). Законодательные реформы путинской эры закрыли доступ в систему принятия решений для обывателей. К примеру, процедуры общественного участия лучше всего описываются фразой одного из вице-губернаторов города: «общественные слушания это когда общественность слушает». Обывателю нужно быть профессионалом чтобы защищать свои интересы (или быть вынужденным стать профессионалом как это происходит при защите от уплотнительной застройки). При этом доступ в перестройку территорий открыт для крупных западных и местных девелоперов и строительных фирм. Тем временем, горстка городских активистов тратит своё время и силы на критику множества мегaproектов, планов застройки скверов и сноса зданий. На всё сил не хватает. В результате, практически нет ни альтернативных планов развития города, ни случаев освоения и захвата пространств для нужд рядовых граждан. Ситуацию отягощает пассивность горожан пятимиллионного мегаполиса – результат фиксации каждой семьи на собственном жилом пространстве. Когда у них появилась возможность улучшить свои жизненные условия, их энергия направилась внутрь – на покупку квартир и ремонт по евростандарту.

District councils and local neighborhoods are practically powerless. At best, they can decide to clean up courtyards and squares or install more park benches and trash urns. As we have already seen, however, even this cosmetic potential is honored mostly in the breach. The legislative reforms of the Putin era have closed the decision-making process to ordinary citizens. For example, the current state of public participation is best characterized by a phrase uttered by one of the city’s vice governors: “Public hearings are when the public comes to listen.” The ordinary citizen has to be a legal expert (or is forced to become one, as happened during the battle against infill construction) in order to defend his interests. However, the decision-making process is more than open to input from major western and local development and construction consortiums. A handful of urban activists expend immense amounts of time and energy battling the innumerable threats posed by mega-projects, redevelopment of squares, and building demolitions. It is impossible for them to react to every such threat. They do not have the time to develop alternative plans for the city's development, and they have no experience in reclaiming spaces for grassroots needs. Moreover, the situation is aggravated by the general passivity of the city’s population of five million. To a large extent this is the result of the fixation of each family in its own dwelling space. When Petersburgers got the chance to improve their living conditions, they directed their energies inwards by buying apartments and subjecting them to evroremont.
Печально, что активисты разного плана становятся на слабые позиции жалобщика и обличителя: "остановите незаконную вырубку сада!", "нас обманули и не дали жилья, за которое мы платили, помогите нам!", "город разрушают, запретите новое строительство!" Вся эта риторика легко обращается властями в популистскую и используется для поддержания образа городских властей как единственного органа, который осуществляет контроль, заботится, и может разрешить конфликты. Это становится возможным пока нет независимого парламента и суда и свободно избираемых и финансово независимых муниципальных советов.

Кроме того, акции протеста и другие формы недовольства общественности стали привычным фоном для девелоперов. Последние вынуждены заранее принимать меры для нейтрализации недовольства — от фиктивных общественных слушаний до сокрытия информации о местонахождении, сроках и масштабах нового строительства. Не смотря на декларированную демократизацию общества и выстраивание прозрачной законодательной системы, и администрация, и инвесторы легко прибегают к незаконным действиям. Например, распространены практики "психологического давления", шантажа, обмана и дезинформации, особенно при расселении зданий в центре.

Тем не менее, городские активисты и рядовые горожане одержали несколько незначительных побед. Некоторые активисты внедрились в законодательную систему, где им удалось пробить законы, которые учитывают общие интересы использования городских пространств. Долгосрочный и оперативный мониторинг реальных изменений городского пространства (где рушится здание, где рубят сад, где строятся с нарушением) с последующим обращением в контролирующие органы привёл к ощутимым результатам. Эффективны совместные кампании местных жителей — ночные DOS-атаки и общественных движений, когда направляют сотни письменных обращений по одной и той же проблеме в парламент и другие ветви власти.

It is a sad fact that a wide variety of activists adopt the stance of denouncers and complainants. Stop the illegal cutting down of trees in our square! We paid for these flats, but we’ve been hoodwinked: help us! Our beautiful city is being destroyed: end all new construction now! City authorities easily turn these claims and complaints into the basis for populist promises. They also serve to maintain the image of the administration as the only actor capable of control, care, and conflict resolution. And this really is the case in the absence of an independent legislative assembly, independent courts, and freely elected, well-funded district councils.

Moreover, protests and other expressions of public dissatisfaction have become a kind of background noise for developers. They are forced to take measures to neutralize discontent in advance—from fictitious public hearings to concealing information about future building projects. Despite Petersburg’s declared commitment to democratization and legal transparency, both the administration and developers can easily resort to illegal methods. For example, psychological pressure tactics, blackmail, and disinformation are widely practiced, especially when developers need to buy out whole apartment buildings in the city center.

Urban activists and ordinary citizens have scored minor victories, however. Some activists have infiltrated the legislative system, where they have had some success in drafting and amending laws that take into account the interests of the city’s common spaces. Long-term and rapid-reaction monitoring of real changes to the cityscape, followed up by written appeals to law enforcement agencies and oversight bodies, have brought tangible results. Likewise, “denial-of-service attacks”—when activists and local residents bombard bureaucrats and legislators with hundreds of letters on single issues—have occasionally proven effective.
We all know about the US invasion and occupation of Iraq: after a first phase of intensive bombing and shelling of key sites and infrastructure, the American army and its allies began a land invasion and eventual occupation. Against the backdrop of these events and the subsequent war with various “terrorist factions,” we pay much less attention to day-to-day decisions about Iraq’s future economic, political, and social structure. If the goal of the invasion was to transform Iraq from a tyranny into a democracy, then what might this democracy consist of if the ordinary Iraqi citizen is unable to go about his affairs and safely walk the streets? Likewise, if the ordinary Petersburger is constantly threatened with the transformation, disappearance, and destruction of his customary urban environment, up to and including the destruction of his own home, then what sense does it make to speak of “development”? In both cases we encounter a strategy that military commanders and political elites call “establishing facts on the ground.” This strategy presupposes that material and symbolic changes should happen so quickly and at such an overbearing pace that “democratization” and “aggressive development” become undeniable and apparent, while the subterranean processes that in fact fuel them become irreversible. In this situation, ordinary residents of Baghdad and Petersburg can adopt one of three behavioral tactics.

Likewise, if the ordinary Petersburger is constantly threatened with the transformation, disappearance, and destruction of his customary urban environment, up to and including the destruction of his own home, then what sense does it make to speak of “development”? In both cases we encounter a strategy that military commanders and political elites call “establishing facts on the ground.” This strategy presupposes that material and symbolic changes should happen so quickly and at such an overbearing pace that “democratization” and “aggressive development” become undeniable and apparent, while the subterranean processes that in fact fuel them become irreversible. In this situation, ordinary residents of Baghdad and Petersburg can adopt one of three behavioral tactics.
The first thing they can do is make their peace with the new state of affairs, adapting to the new regime and focusing on solving their own problems. That is, they can choose to survive and protect their personal space.

The second thing they can do is enter into a quasi-collaborationist relationship with the new powers that be, in certain cases defending themselves from the aggression of the authorities, in other cases tacitly supporting them. Moreover, they can attempt to use the new opportunities offered by the regime to their own ends.

The third tactic is guerrilla warfare. In the case of Petersburg, we are not talking about terrorist acts in the strict sense of the word, but rather about the full spectrum of direct action from pickets to the sabotage of construction site fences, from acts criticizing or mocking the regime to the uncovering and publication of facts of abuse and criminality. They can also create parallel media spaces, as was the case with the well-known Chronicle of Current Events produced by Soviet dissidents.

But all these tactics have serious shortcomings. Immersion in solving personal problems won’t insure the individual from being killed by a roadside bomb or having his house become an “object of strategic investment” when a developer wants to run a superhighway through it or erect a five-star hotel in its place.

If he has enough initiative or knowledge he might seek help from grassroots activists or independent experts. What can they do for him besides give advice? Even if they determine that laws have been violated, “martial law” is still in effect. This means that laws might have to yield to “strategic interests,” whatever that pretty phrase actually conceals.
If he joins forces with “intransigent” activists, then their combined efforts will likely not be ignored. In the best case, when battle is waged on the informational and legal levels, these events might be commented on in the press and noticed by the bureaucratic machine. And this in turn might lead only to a drawn-out court case and a temporary halt to construction or demolition. In the worst case, he will enter an outlaw world and his defense of his home might expose him physical harm, psychological terror or police repression.

Just as in the late Soviet period, the only movements that gain legitimacy feature a conservative rhetoric and ideology, and favor the safe tactics of complaint and petition. Of course, it is also possible to silently ignore the regime. There is even a place for a new dissident movement. As we know, however, the Iraqi journalist who tossed the shoes scored a symbolic victory but then received a three-year prison sentence. Likewise, all that remains to Petersburg activists is to toss shoes at the behemoth of “aggressive development.” There is as yet no clearly articulated grassroots demand for a human-friendly city, much less scenarios for realizing this sort of alternative project.
Dmitry Vorobyev
moxabat@gmail.com
cISR.ru

Wissenschaftler am Zentrum für unabhängige Sozialforschung, St.Petersburg

Thomas Campbell
avvakum@gmail.com
chtodelat.wordpress.com

Freischaffender Autor, Wissenschaftler und Übersetzer, Redakteur von "Chtodelat News"