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*Градо-строительная политика в
СССР 1928–1932 гг (review)*

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и антропологии индивидуально-го восприятия революционного общества.⁴ При этом остаются без ответа простые и предельно конкретные вопросы: Кто были люди, составлявшие костяк советских органов, каков был реально их культурный кругозор, идеологический горизонт? Откуда брались чекисты? Каково происхождение крайне специфической делопроизводственной культуры той же ЧК, отличающейся как от конспиративного примитивного “делопроизводства” партийных кружков, так и от стандартов дореволюционного МВД? Как объяснить чудовищную жестокость террора “обыкновенного большевизма” – по замечанию Новиковой, качественно неотличимого от сталинского террора? Как ни странно, некогда казавшаяся самоочевидной “народность” большевистского режима сегодня представляется крайне проблематичной, а поиск социальных и культурных корней большевизма в позднеимперском обществе – актуальнейшей и весьма непростой исследовательской задачей.

⁴ Примерами последнего подхода являются работы Б. И. Колоницкого (см., напр.: Символы и борьба за власть. К изучению политической культуры Российской революции 1917 года. Санкт-Петербург, 2001) и И. В. Нарского (см.: Жизнь в катастрофе. Будни населения Урала в 1917–1922 гг. Москва, 2001).

Марк Меерович, Евгения Конышева, Дмитрий Хмельницкий. Кладбище соцгородов: Градостроительная политика в СССР 1928–1932 гг. Москва: РОССПЭН, Фонд “Президентский центр Б. Н. Ельцина”, 2011. 270 с. ISBN: 978-5-8243-1518-9.

This book examines one of the most fascinating periods in the history of Soviet city construction, a time of rapid industrialization and urbanization, when dozens of new cities appeared on the map of the USSR, and a time marked by vigorous professional debates on the design of the future socialist city, known in historiography as the discussion on the socialist city (*sotsgorod*) or the debate on the socialist settlement (*sotsrasselenie*).¹

¹ Both terms are widely used in historiography, that is, Khazanova employs the term “discussion of the socialist city” (see V. E. Khazanova. *Sovetskaia Arkhitektura Pervoi Piatiletki: Problema Goroda Budushchego*. Moscow, 1980), whereas Khmel'nitskii prefers the term “discussion of the socialist settlement” (see D. Khmel'nitskii. *Zodchii Stalin*. Moscow, 2007). Russian expert on Soviet avant-garde architecture Khan-Magomedov proposed an alternative title for the debate – the Second Urban Planning Discussion that followed the First, which took place in 1923–1924. Throughout this review I will use the term debate on the socialist city as a broad term to refer to the theoretical debates

For two years architects, engineers, economists, hygienists, and politicians disputed what future socialist settlements should look like and what type of housing could better embody the principles of the new *byt* and new life. Despite the fact that the content of this debate is well-studied by numerous historians of architecture, the authors of the book under review correctly point out that many questions regarding the repercussions of this debate have not been approached.² For instance, there is little known on how the ideas of the socialist city were translated into urban policy and who the authors of the new legislation were. Scholars have often avoided tackling the question of the fate of these ideas and the impact they had on policymakers and practitioners.

Recently, a number of case studies have been devoted to different towns constructed during the First Five-Year Plan.³ However, an overview of Soviet city construction theory and practice of that period is still missing.⁴

The new book by Meerovich, Konyshcheva and Khmel'nikskii seeks to fill this lacuna. It aims at reconstructing the history of the "birth, flourishing, and dying of an Idea, – the idea of a 'new type' of settlement absolutely different from the capitalist city" (P. 9) vis-à-vis the history of the construction of new towns (*goroda-novostroiki*). The authors contend that the debate on socialist city design should be studied in the larger context of the transformation of urban policy in the late 1920s and in relation to city-building practice.

between urbanists and de-urbanists on the form of the future city under socialism of 1929–1931.

² Apart from the works mentioned above, see also: Anatole Kopp. *Town and Revolution: Soviet Architecture and City Planning, 1917–1935*. New York, 1970; Vladimir Paperny. *Kul'tura Dva*. Moscow, 2006; Hugh D. Hudson Jr. *Blueprints and Blood: The Stalinization of Soviet Architecture, 1917–1937*. Princeton, 1994; Milka Bliznakov. *Urban Planning in the USSR: Integrative Theories* // Michael F. Hamm (Ed.). *The City in Russian History*. Lexington, 1976.

³ Lennart Samuelson. *Tankograd: The Formation of a Soviet Company Town: Cheliabinsk, 1900s–1950s*. Houndmills Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, 2011; Paul Stronski. *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930–1966*. Pittsburgh, 2010; T. Budantseva. *Avantgarde Between East and West: Modern Architecture and Town-Planning in the Urals 1920–30* / Ph.D. dissertation; Technische Universiteit Delft, 2008.

⁴ The first attempt to juxtapose the theory and practice of Soviet urbanism in the years 1928–1954 was made in the following dissertation: Andrew Day. *Building Socialism: The Politics of the Soviet Cityscape in the Stalin Era* / Ph.D. dissertation; Columbia University, 1998. Earlier accounts of either the theory or practice of Soviet urbanism can be found in: Richard Anthony French and Frederick Edwin Ian Hamilton. *The Socialist City: Spatial Structure and Urban Policy*. Chichester & New York, 1979; James H. Bater. *The Soviet City: Ideal and Reality, Explorations in Urban Analysis*. Beverly Hills, CA, 1980.

To meet this goal, they utilize a variety of sources that have not been widely used before. They examine not only projects and publications in the professional press but also a range of official documents from major decrees to minutes of the meetings of state committees, along with some personal archives of architects and bureaucrats who participated in the debate and evidence from design and building practice (P. 14). As a result, the book expands the discussion to other areas and topics ranging from the population settlement and migration policy of the epoch to a typology of mass housing in the newly built cities, and from the principles of planning new settlements to the legislative framework of city construction. Several chapters open up a discussion of hitherto barely studied subjects. For example, chapter 3 investigates the question of how the design formula for the population size of new towns changed over time. In chapter 5, the authors explore the guidelines for choosing the territory for city construction and the legislative framework for city planning. These chapters, in particular, as well as chapter 6 on planning the structure of new cities and chapter 7 on the typology of mass housing, present highly original research and are rich

in detail. All of these new subjects are essential for understanding the challenges of urban construction during the first Five-Year Plan. The authors succeed in portraying the multiple difficulties of real construction that had to be in tune with the priorities of rapid industrialization and the gap between visionary planning and building practice of the time.

While the source base and variety of topics researched for the book are truly astonishing, the conceptual framework employed in it prevents the authors from generating a more nuanced argument. For readers acquainted with previous books by Meerovich and Khmel'nitskii, the approach and central arguments of this book will not be new. The authors argue that the projects and theoretical proposals of the architects "turned out to be useless for power." They depict all the efforts of Soviet architects as obstacles to achieving the major political goal of rapid industrialization. One of the authors' underlying assumptions, thus, is that Soviet leadership had a detailed clear plan of how to achieve this goal. In general, it is mainly "power" that preoccupies the authors.⁵ The words *verkh*, Soviet power, Soviet leadership, Party are all used interchangeably and

⁵ See a similar criticism in: Christine Varga-Harris. Review: *Kvadratnye metry, opredeliaushchie soznanie: Gosudarstvennaia zhilishchnaia politika v SSSR, 1921–1941 gg.* By M. G. Meerovich. Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2005 // Slavic Review. 2006. Vol. 65. P. 835.

refer to the Leviathan state with its totalitarian intentions.⁶ The authors fail to problematize this notion of power and ignore dialogue with the rich scholarship on the nature of Soviet power.⁷ Instead, they seek to grasp what the “real” intentions of the authorities were and what “unwritten rules” or “hints from above” (*polunameki svyshe*) (P. 14) guided the process of city construction. One of the authors’ central assumptions is that the major priority of Soviet power was to create a defense establishment at any cost. They conclude that it did not even intend to solve the housing shortage and implement the principles of new life in practice, as proclaimed in decrees and slogans of the time (P. 35). According to the authors, urban policy was tightly linked to the plan of forced industrialization and was envisioned as the means of manipulating the population and managing manpower resources (P. 10).⁸ Hence, “what was tragic about Soviet urbanists and de-urbanists at the end of the 1920s and early 1930s was that, disregarding how highly professional and logically

complete their conceptions were, they were not interesting and necessary for power” (P. 227). Moreover, as Khmel’nitskii has also sought to show in his previous books, the central authorities forced the architectural community into accepting a new urban policy and a new role as state servants. The authors maintain that urban policy was drafted at the top and disregarded the opinion of experts. As a result, it lacked “architectural and city-planning content” (P. 229) and the newly built towns of the first Five-Year Plan did not implement any of the ideas debated by professionals in the late 1920s. While the ideas of communal living and de-urbanization remained on paper, *goroda-novostroiki* happened to represent the totalitarian intentions of the state and were reminiscent of the GULAG camp system (*lager-naia sistema*) in their design and approach to population management.

However, the material of the book hints at the more complex dynamics within both the professional and power structures and less straightforward interaction between them. For instance, the au-

⁶ See a similar commentary on the previous book by Meerovich in: Steven Harris. In Search of “Ordinary” Russia: Everyday Life in the NEP, the Thaw, and the Communal Apartment // *Kritika*. 2005. No. 3. Pp. 583-614.

⁷ It is striking that some well-known works in the field that challenge this notion and offer a view “from below” are absent in the bibliography: Stephen Kotkin. *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*. Berkeley, 1995; Hudson. *Blueprints and Blood*.

⁸ See a similar thesis in the previous book by Meerovich on housing policy as a “means to control (manipulate) people”: Mark G. Meerovich. *Kvadratnye metry, opredeliaushchie soznanie: Gosudarstvennaia zhilishchnaia politika v SSSR, 1921–1941*. Stuttgart, 2005.

thors admit that NKVD instruction no. 184 on city planning contained a set of regulations informed by the garden-city approach that was widely popular in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century and was propagated in the 1920s by the professionals trained before the revolution (Pp. 108–109). As Catherine Cooke has convincingly shown, at the turn of the 1920s, at least three alternatives were debated, and along with the urbanists and de-urbanists discussed in the book under review, there were garden-city apologists. According to Cooke, in the early 1930s, the authorities embraced the modification of the garden-city scheme strengthened by the “Marxist-Leninist” principle that a settlement automatically locates where industry takes it.”⁹ Similarly, Elam Day argued that Vladimir Semenov, one of the major propagators of Sir Ebenezer Howard’s garden city model in prerevolutionary Russia, played an important role in working out the principles for the Moscow plan of 1935, which turned out to be a model city plan widely replicated in the USSR in the 1930s–1950s. Therefore, one can argue that some people in the profession were more successful, at least at times, than urbanists and de-urbanists in translating and adjusting their ideas to new state policies, which were

often formulated in very vague terms and left a lot of room for elaboration. The authors also mention that conflicts occurred between central authorities, local party officials, and factory directorates in managing the city-construction process, as in the case of Magnitogorsk (Pp. 136–137). Paul Stronski, in his illuminating study on the construction of Tashkent, presented evidence that the conflicts between central and local authorities, central planning bureaus and local architects, and the public accompanied the process of city construction throughout the 1930s–1950s. Therefore, one can argue that the process of city building was neither strictly top-down nor bottom-up, but rather a series of negotiations between different groups of professionals with various institutions at both the central and local levels.

Overall, the book reads as a tale of powerless genius professionals and overpowerful and rude *verkh*. Commenting on a similar recurring discourse on the suffering of the intelligentsia and a coercive totalitarian state in a brilliant study of Russian talk during the perestroika years, Nancy Ries writes: “To put it bluntly, this national story of victims, villains, and saviors, performed through litanies, has been a discursive mechanism that facilitated au-

⁹ Catherine Cooke. Russian Responses to the Garden City Idea // Architectural Review. 1978. No. 163. P. 362.

thoritarian interrelations. It did this by essentializing these categories and their interrelations... By essentializing powerlessness, the iteration of litanies had the reflexive, unintended consequence of reproducing powerlessness.”¹⁰ Denying agency to architects and exaggerating the degree of power the authorities had over regulating city construction, the authors leave no space for questioning the degree to which the professionals were responsible for Soviet city design and investigating the more complicated process of negotiating norms and rules. But instead of lamenting the totalitarian intentions of the state, it seems more productive to examine more closely the questions of how and why the architects failed to translate certain ideas into policies and how far they succeeded. Instead of reproducing the myth of powerlessness of Soviet architects, it may be rewarding to show what was within their power and what the limits of that power were.

Another problematic aspect of this book worth mentioning is that it presents urban policy of the late 1920s and early 1930s as a *fait accompli*. The authors believe it was exactly then that the professionals lost the battle with the state and that

afterward they had little authority in shaping the cityscape. In the conclusion they write: “This policy of the 1920s–1930s had long-term consequences and, unfortunately, it largely predetermined the practice of city management and the nature of today’s architectural and city-planning problems of Russian cities” (P. 231). However, recent scholarship demonstrates that architects not only participated in policymaking in the 1930s but also propagated important shifts in urban policy after World War II.¹¹ Moreover, some of the bureaucrats, including Khrushchev, who would launch a mass housing campaign in the 1950s, shared similar views on city design. It is well-known that it was not until Khrushchev that more substantial funding was directed at housing and infrastructure projects. Therefore, the authors would have benefited from looking at the issues of city construction legislation and practice from a long-term perspective. In that respect Khrushchev’s reforms seem to be crucial for understanding “the evolution of Soviet housing and the ‘biography’ of any Soviet city” (P. 17). It would be particularly rewarding to trace whether the approach to city construction from the 1930s to the 1950s had

¹⁰ Nancy Ries. *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation During Perestroika*. Ithaca, 1997. P. 120.

¹¹ Day. *Building Socialism*; Steven Harris. *Moving to the Separate Apartment: Building, Distributing, Furnishing, and Living Urban Housing in Soviet Russia, 1950s–1960s* / Ph.D. dissertation; University of Chicago, 2003.

continuity or Khrushchev's housing policy signified a radical break with Stalinist practice, as is conventionally argued.¹²

To sum up, although the new book by Meerovich, Konyshcheva, and Khmel'nitskii seems to represent a pessimistic take on Soviet history by the Russian intelligentsia, it is a valuable contribution to the discussion on the history of urban policy. It raises a number of important questions on issues such as city construction legislation, norms and regulations for city planning, and city building practice during the First Five-Year Plan. Even more important, it encourages readers to question what the role of the professionals was in making Soviet history.



Brigid O'KEEFFE

E. Thomas Ewing, *Separate Schools: Gender, Policy, and Practice in Postwar Soviet Education* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010). 300 pp., 11 Ill. ISBN: 978-0-87580-434-7.

In May 1954, the United States Supreme Court issued its monumental *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling, declaring the racial segregation of schools unconstitutional. Thereby, it rejected the "separate but equal" rationale affirmed by the Court in 1896 and used to legally justify the racial segregation of all manner of public institutions in the United States. A mere three months later, in July 1954, the Soviet Union repudiated "separate but equal" schooling for boys and girls – that is, the educational norm for millions of Soviet children in as many as 169 cities since 1943. In his valuable, erudite, and unique study, *Separate Schools: Gender, Policy, and Practice in Postwar Soviet Education*, E. Thomas Ewing examines the Soviet Union's eleven-year experiment in gender-segregated schools. He provides new insight into this particular Soviet educational experiment's rationale, implementation, failures, and ultimate repudiation.

¹² Some recent research has challenged this conventional view and underlined certain continuities in housing policy after Stalin's death. See: Mark Smith. *Property of Communists: The Urban Housing Program from Stalin to Khrushchev*. DeKalb, 2010.