

INTRODUCTORY REPORT TRACK 2:

FAST FORWARD FOR SPATIAL PLANNING IN RUSSIA

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Introduction

Track 2 brings together Russian and international scholars whose work focuses on urban planning in the context of profound cultural, economic and structural transition. Examination of historic determinants, new challenges and possible ways of professional evolution as well as the search for new tools and best practices under the condition of flux becomes the common thread throughout the three mornings of presentations and discussions.

The transition from centrally planned to the market driven economy in Russia and parts of Eastern Europe, the emergence of new planning priorities motivated by the call for greater social fairness and higher environmental standards in Central and Western Europe, as well as the move towards greater decentralization and public engagement supported by the EU agenda produce varied place-specific responses, yet create a strong possibility for cross-fertilization of ideas and a great opportunity for learning from each other. Impossible not to mention, economic crisis, affecting planning at its core, brings about constructive responses informative for practitioners everywhere.

And finally, continued globalization, manifested not only in the emergence of stronger economic ties and interdependencies between different parts of the world, but also in the widespread internationalization of planning activities are all reflected in this Track. The latter trend is represented by the example of the Dutch planners doing work in Russia, the analysis of transferability and adaptability of ideas and it raises the issue of universality of planning concepts.

Accepting the condition of flux as its starting point and capitalizing on different experiences captured in the papers, this Track aims to create a discourse that should not only answer the questions of 'where we are and how did we get here?' but also serve as inspiration and intellectual support in the formulation of the plan of action for the future.

A special Forum on Education complements Track 2 in examining the necessary changes in academic and professional training geared towards meeting the new challenges (on Day 1).

Session 1: Creative synthesis Fast Forward: Masterplanning in Perm

The first session paves the road for further discussion introducing the case of strategic planning for Perm. Not coincidentally, Perm is the host city of this congress and the first case where work of a

foreign office was successfully adapted to the real conditions. “How successfully?” is the question that opens the session and serves as a leitmotif throughout the day.

Opening presentation by Andrei Golovin, director of the CPB-office in charge of the Perm General Plan and the key host of the congress, will give strong context for all discussions related to Perm. Didier Vancutsem, practitioner and educator with extensive international experience will give his take on the success of Dutch planning locally.

Special opportunity to highlight the differences between the European and the Russian approaches to planning and perhaps examine their compatibility is afforded by the presentation of the evolution of the Dutch planning tradition by the member of the Dutch Ministry for Infrastructure and Environment. The possibility of comparing not only individual practices but entire institutions will set the stage for an inspiring debate.

The combination of different historic and theoretical frameworks, real experience and an opportunity to compare different cases from St. Petersburg, to Perm, to the Dutch cities, all characterized by the word “transformation” reflects the importance of this session to the main theme of the congress- “Fast Forward”.

Session 2: Way Forward: New methods, tools and opportunities for implementation

The second day of sessions focuses on specific spatial planning practices at the city and regional scales and examines the possibility of transforming context by design. From public spaces, shopping malls, to large-scale infrastructure, case studies and bold proposals demonstrate the potential of place-based interventions to serve as catalysts to stimulate economic growth and change social conditions.

Session 2a: Urban interventions as catalysts for regeneration

This morning session looks at case studies from a wide range of contexts and the examples are relevant to all cities that find themselves in the midst of a transformation. The spreading of shopping malls may have been specific to Poland, yet Russian practitioners and city administrators have been struggling with the same question: How to attract an appropriate amount of quality retail, distribute it appropriately, and create additional benefits in the form of sustainable infrastructure and services?. The case of Poland is instructive both in terms of creating new physical spaces as well as an example of transforming underutilized existing buildings and complexes for new retail.

The emerging focus on public space, examined in the case of medium-size towns, should resonate with practitioners and policy makers struggling to enhance livability of their cities, regardless of size. And finally, the question of how to “kick-start” regeneration in the conditions of increasing scarcity is colorfully answered with many examples from Russia to China that should serve as an inspiration for everyone. In addition to giving specific examples, presentation by a British-Dutch firm effectively demonstrates the potential of small-scale projects, initiated and implemented by a diversity of participants of the city building process to bring fast results and change planning cultures from within.

Session 2b: Mobility and Infrastructure to accelerate regional growth

This session focuses on the essential role of infrastructure in making cities and the potential to enhance livability through redesign of massive railroad infrastructure in Russian cities in particular. The question of mobility is examined together with the critical issue of equal access bringing forward social aspects of planning, universal to all contexts. Specific recommendations based on the analysis of the Russian situation drawing inspirations from global experiences and demonstrating the commitment to sustainable development and to the concept of a compact city in particular. As opposed to the unnecessary expansion, still a prevalent ideology in many places, redevelopment from within the cities is positioned as a positive way forward for Russian cities. Specific design interventions and a required policy geared to enhance both urban infrastructure and the quality of urban life is advocated using concrete examples. This is the most practice-oriented session that offers clear solutions as well as important critical concepts for a debate.

Session 3: New planning culture in Russia: Diversified institutions and public participation

The two morning sessions bring together practitioners from Russia, Europe and China in search of new ways of planning in situations where established administrative, legislative and cultural processes no longer adequately meet current challenges. The papers reveal the condition where old plans designed for long term unwavering implementation must be supplanted by strategic, flexible, framework planning; and where old priorities, such as industry and defense, must be if not entirely replaced, at least balanced with the new focus on people, quality of life and the environment and demonstrate examples of how that is done in different places.

Particularly inspiring, are the cases where the old tradition of top-down planning is confronted by the demand for stakeholder engagement and where the needs of new players entering the planning milieu must be balanced with the needs of the public. The concept of “public good” and the examination of the changing composition of forces shaping the future city are brought forward in the two sessions.

Session 3a: Opportunities for institutional and economic transition

This session examines the institutional framework of planning in Russia and brings forward the significant issue of old and new ideology behind planning decisions affecting creation, expansion and redevelopment of cities. Explanation of the underlying political objectives and the resulting logic of large-scale territorial plans help set the stage for the discussion of planning in the new conditions. Set against the backdrop of changing economic conditions, the change of ideology dictates the need to transform the administrative processes as well as the profession of a planner, adding new specializations, demanding new tools and transferring certain competencies from traditionally centralized institutions to local administrative bodies.

In its turn, the shift in practice necessitates the change in the education and the increasing demand on planners to think in different scales simultaneously. New institutions, designed to reflect the up-to-date reality should follow; their shape and content is one of the questions addressed by this session.

Session 3b: Integration of planning cultures: East-West Dialogue

This session brings the discussion of evolving practices to the critical, contextually new question of how to integrate social, environmental and cultural values into urban planning? The primary issue - that of social equity is addressed by Alexander Antonov in his presentation on the emergent methods of public participation in Russia. Advocating the clear necessity to confront the prevalent culture of top-down planning, Mr. Antonov illuminates difficulties associated with public outreach and social engagement in his own practice and explains the obstacles to grassroots planning in the context of post-socialist cities.

The growing priority of environmental values is highlighted in the presentation on sustainable development in China. This presentation should offer ideas to practitioners worldwide.

While Soviet planning is strongly associated with high degree of standardization clearly manifested in the ubiquitous presence of “Micro Rayon” as the dominant form of post-war urbanism throughout Russia and Eastern Europe, one of the challenges, certainly not unique to this region, is the growing demand for diversity in urban form. Possible answer of how to meet this challenge is presented by the case study of transformation of “Micro Rayon”. This presentation will serve as a starting point for a dialogue about the European mechanisms and examples of transformations presented in this and subsequent sessions.