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Moscow's facelift: Russia's capital as a modern European city or a glorification of the past? A study on the perception of Sobyenin's innovation projects

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Moscow's facelift: Russia's capital as a modern European city or a glorification of the past?

A study on the perception of Sobyenin's innovation projects



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Introduction

Over the past century, the city of Moscow has been reshaped many times. Since the Revolution of 1917, Moscow had to embody the idea of the capital of the socialist world, leading to changes in its appearance. Successive communist leaders continued to overhaul the city: Stalin built his seven giant skyscrapers, Khrushchev completely changed the Arbat district and later Soviet leaders created utilitarian buildings and high rise apartments (Weir 2017). All this time, Moscow was perceived as Russia's historical capital, focussed on traditional Russian values. St Peterburg on the other hand, was seen as a more modern, Western capital in the 19th century (Lotman 1990). In the 1990s however, Moscow's status changed for the first time, as it became the symbol of the new capitalism and started opening up to the West. Under Putin's rule, Russia's capital got another facelift, especially since Sergey Sobyenin became the mayor of Moscow in 2010. According to Sobyenin, Moscow does not aim to compete "with Ryazan or Vologda, but with New York, London and Paris" ¹ (Sardzhveladze 2018). Sobyenin is intending to transform Moscow into a modern, European city with all its conveniences, like parks, pedestrian malls, broad sidewalks and bicycle lanes (Weir 2017). This way, Sobyenin is building Moscow's image as a comfortable, people-oriented city.

However, at the same time, a lot of Muscovites are left unsatisfied because of the ongoing constructions, the relocation of residents and the multiple amount of road accidents. Changes are imposed from above, leaving citizens under consulted (Weir 2017). Also, Moscow is Russia's capital, and therefore should embody Putin's 'thousand-year history' ideal, that is intended to revive Russia's glorious past (Kolesnikov 2017).

In such manner, Moscow's status under Sobyenin becomes ambivalent. At the one hand, the city becomes more conservative, but at the other hand also aspires to be more modern and closer to the West. In this thesis, I will focus on these two contradicting representations of Moscow, by looking to which extent they are reflected in recent architecture and development plans. This research does not only aim to understand the intentions behind Sobyenin's projects, but also explores how these are

¹ Original Russian text: "не с Рязанью и Вологдой, а с Нью-Йорком, Лондоном и Парижем."

interpreted on the receiving end. Because this thesis will not so much focus on city planning itself, but more on the meaning of public space, it therefore intends to answer the following research question: **How is the meaning of Moscow negotiated in terms of tradition and innovation under mayor Sobyenin?**

In order to answer the research question, I will conduct case studies on *Zaryadye Park* and the renovations of the *VDNKh*. The relevance of this research is twofold. First, the case studies correspond to some of Sobyenin's most iconic projects (Büdenbender & Zupan 2019, 130), which means they can give an insight into whether city development under Sobyenin is more innovative or traditional. Hence, this thesis will make a contribution to general discussions (Büdenbender & Zupan 2017) about Moscow's future and urban development. Additionally, renovation projects under Sobyenin and their accompanying issues are not sufficiently researched yet (Argenbright 2022, 121). By focussing on how the projects are interpreted by different groups of people, this thesis will provide a complete picture of the issues and debates that emerge as a result of the innovation projects.

I have selected the city of Moscow in particular for several reasons. First, due to a personal interest for the uniqueness of the city and the many layers of meanings that it consists of, as it has been reshaped many times through history. Second, Moscow is the capital of Russia, and therefore can be seen as a representation of the whole country (Lotman 1990), which means it can give us a clear insight into how Moscow and Russia try to present themselves.

Lastly, it has to be noted that this thesis has been initiated before Russia's war with Ukraine. The case studies will focus on the period from 2014 to 2019, as the specific projects were realised during this time frame. However, the author is aware of possible changes in meaning, appearance or content that could have taken place in respect to the projects or the city of Moscow, because of the ongoing war. However, these case studies are still relevant, as they centre around key projects of Sergey Sobyenin's mayoralty. Therefore, these could be a starting point for further research that does take the latest events into account.

Literature review

Introduction

By the second half of the 20th century, various scholars like Lotman and Greimas started elaborating on the semiotic approach of literary space. They stress the idea that literary space does not only express information about a locus, but also conveys symbolic and non-spatial connotations. People project their own feelings and values onto space, however, this is not entirely an individual process, as their interpretation is to a large extent determined by the collective ideas of the group or culture they belong to (van Baak 1983, 51). This process is not only relevant for literary space, but also for cultural space, as Lotman demonstrates by analysing how semiotic models are incorporated into the geographical and architectural reality of St Petersburg (1990, 202). Similarly, Muscovites interpret the projects by Sobyanin in different ways as well and project their own meanings onto them, while at the same time being influenced by a certain culture or group.

To help us research and understand those meanings and debates around Sobyanin's projects, this literature review will discuss some ideas by Yuri Lotman (1990), Lisa Kirschenbaum (2010), Michel de Certeau (1980/1984) and Vladimir Papery (1985). They all touch on useful concepts and metaphors regarding the meaning of urban space. Lotman and Kirschenbaum look at St Petersburg in particular, however the way they analyse urban space could also be applied to the city of Moscow.

All the sections of this literature review will subsequently serve as a basis for the analytical part of this thesis, in which the case studies about Sobyanin's projects will be analysed, in order to not only investigate the debates around them, but also grasp what those projects actually mean to critics, authorities and citizens of Moscow.

Yuri Lotman & the meaning of space: city symbolism

Concepts like 'chaos' and 'order' are as old as the first creation myths. In the Graeco-Roman tradition various writers started to employ these concepts, for example in the *Metamorphoses*, where Ovid describes chaos as the first state of the universe, defined by confusion, disturbance and disorder. Then, a god creates the earth in the centre of this universe and brings order by introducing peace and harmony (Kelly 2020, 736, 740). Later writers started to use the term chaos in a more general sense, referring to the lower world or a dark place on earth (Crane, n.d.). Yuri Lotman (1990) builds on these concepts of order/chaos and centre/periphery and uses them to describe the symbolism of a city. He specifically elaborates on two different ways a city can relate to its surroundings.

On one hand, there is the concentric situation: a city is seen as the centre of a country, regardless its actual place on earth, while it also becomes the perfect image of the country itself. In

other words, the city can be viewed as the personification of the earth that it surrounds. From a semiotic view this can be understood through the visualisation of a city on a hill, an eternal place, between heaven and earth. Lotman states that Moscow is linked to this concentric view, as it is supposed to be the centre and ideal city of Russia, the order amidst the chaos. Furthermore, he adds that a concentric view is characterised by enclosure and separation from the surrounding lands (191-192). This seems paradoxical, as the city should be the embodiment of the country at one hand, but on the other hand it is also isolated from its surrounding lands, as it is supposed to be autonomous. This 'paradox' also applies to Moscow: it is a city that represents Russia in that it is the capital and the seat of government, but at the same time is not like the rest of Russia at all. The paradox is correlated with the double meaning of 'represent', as the city of Moscow can represent Russia in an official way (as the government resides there) without resembling the rest of Russia. However, because it does not resemble the rest of the country, the city of Moscow does not 'represent' Russia in the sense that it has similar features as the rest of Russia or that it depicts or portrays any other part of the country.

The other situation that Lotman addresses is an eccentric view, which means a city is antagonistic to its surroundings. An eccentric city, is often seen as a city on the edge or periphery, which can either hold a victory over nature or can disrupt the natural order. These cities are often associated with eschatological myths, about the return of chaos and predictions that foresee the perishing of the city as a result of the power of nature and the elements. Eccentric cities are often characterised by openness and going beyond boundaries. Lotman points out that Saint Petersburg is a city that is connected to such mythology, often portraying the theme of a flood, while being described as a 'doomed' city, sometimes referred to by the theme of 'a world turned upside down' (192-193). It has to be noted that St Petersburg has yielded different interpretations over time. For example, St Petersburg had to visualise the new 'enlightened' course of Russia, when Peter the Great made it the capital of the Russian Empire; it was therefore sometimes referred to as the 'New Rome'. The seat of the government was intended as 'anti-Moscow'; hence St Petersburg was thought of as an antithesis with respect to the rest of Russia and remained an eccentric city. Lotman adds that Saint Petersburg contains many semiotic levels, ranging from functioning as an utopia to being regarded as a doomed city, from performing the role of a military and uniform city to the country's commercial and cultural centre. These mythologies often clashed with each other, a struggle that became representative of St Petersburg's semiotic history, which underlines the chaotic nature of the city even more (Lotman 1990, 200-201).

In the end, the concentric view of Moscow and the eccentric view of St Petersburg underline the opposition between the two cities: Moscow is viewed as the cultural-ideological capital and the personification of Russia, situated in the actual centre of the country, while St Petersburg lies at the

periphery and is embodied by contradictions and ambiguity, as St Petersburg can hold a victory over chaos, while it is also subjected by the eternal threat of disruption.

Kirschenbaum on the city as a palimpsest

This section will discuss the ideas of Kirschenbaum on the *perceptions* of urban space. Kirschenbaum (2010, 243-244) writes that urban spaces are not just a collection of buildings, but also contain stories of the present and the past, which locals map into their memory of the city landscape. This makes it possible to view the city as a palimpsest or an accumulation of layers of meanings. Kirschenbaum stresses the tendency of modern authorities to change the urban geography in order to build a certain national memory and leave their ideological mark, for example by changing place and street names. Thus, urban space becomes an expression of the prevailing ideology. Diener and Hagen also touch on the metaphor of a palimpsest (2019, 6). According to Diener and Hagen, a palimpsest refers to something that has been redesigned or reshaped, while still preserving traces of earlier conditions. Successive regimes change and redesign urban space according to their socio-political logic, while they still have to preserve visible traces of the past, inherited from previous polities. As a result, the spatial layout of a city will consist of different layers of meanings that build up over time, which can be compared to the geological layering of rocks. The fact that the metaphor of a palimpsest is used to approach the urban landscape, underlines the impact of successive cultures, societies and authorities in the reshaping of urban settings.

Kirschenbaum illustrates the metaphor of a palimpsest by looking at St Petersburg in particular and notes that especially towards the end of the Soviet Union, Leningraders often disregarded or openly resisted the use of standard Soviet names, imposed by the state. Some places retrieved their pre-revolutionary names in common parlance, which in some cases could be seen as a sign of rejection towards Soviet ideology. However, most of the time the retrieving of pre-revolutionary names was simply a way to recover local names, as people started to develop a certain indifference against Soviet names, which was not necessarily an act of protest against the Soviet discourse. For example, prominent revolutionary names, like 25th October Prospect as a designation for Nevskii prospect, never took root among the locals. Additionally, Kirschenbaum states that by retrieving pre-revolutionary names, lost identities could be recovered that could then serve as a foundation for alternative futures. Paradoxically, the retrieving of street names of the past thus becomes part of a modernization process because their use was no longer taboo.

At the same time, it should be noted that especially elderly people not always wanted to go back to these pre-revolutionary names; the Soviet names were often associated with war times (Blockade of Leningrad) and therefore with strong personal memories.

In the end, still a lot of Soviet names remain, but Kirschenbaum concludes that the efforts of the city authorities to enforce their representation on the urban environment never really dominated. The city remains a multi-layered symbol of tradition and innovation, of imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet times, which can be interpreted differently, depending on someone's life history (244-246, 255).

Michel de Certeau and the creative use of space

After having touched on some concepts by Lotman and Kirschenbaum, who wrote about the *functions* and *perceptions* of urban space by looking at symbolism and metaphors, it is also interesting to look at the actual *use* of space, which ties in with the active role of the 'consumers': the people who make use of urban space. Michel de Certeau addresses this role of the consumer (1980/1984).

One of the terms that is discussed by de Certeau is 'cultural production', which refers to products that are established by a dominant order, such as urban development and television. Traditionally, only the statistical data of such cultural production would be studied and no real attention was paid to the consumer, who was merely seen as a 'receiver'. For example, in case of a television broadcast, normally only the amount of time spent watching television would be analysed, but not what consumers actually do during this time. De Certeau points out that with this traditional one-sided approach, one only looks at *what* is used by the consumers, not at the *ways* in which it is perceived, processed and 'appropriated'. He stresses the importance of the actual 'consumption' and explains that we should also study the *use* of the cultural production and look at what the consumers make of everything what they perceive.

In order to do this, De Certeau distinguishes between *strategy* and *tactics*. *Strategy* means that a subject with power (like a city government, institution or business) imposes certain knowledge by organizing public space and deciding on its characteristics and purpose. The subject of power has its own defined place that serves as a base, from which relations with 'targets' (consumers, countries, enemies etc.) are managed. *Tactics* refer to the actions of these 'targets' who don't have their own space and have to act in a terrain that is dominated by those in power. The targets act in a particular way, adjusting to everything that is imposed onto them. They are like 'poachers', doing their own thing and not necessarily following the rules. De Certeau compares the distinction between *strategy* and *tactics* to Saussure's *langue*, which refers to the system/grammar and *parole*, which is equal to the actual act of speech and concrete expressions of language (xii, xiii, 31-39).

To illustrate the concepts of *strategy* and *tactics*, de Certeau uses the example of 'walking the city'. In this case, the urban planners are those who are in power and they have specific intentions for urban space, they plan a city in a certain way and have their own ideas about the organizations of the urban environment. They designate certain functions to particular areas and objects, so their actions can be referred to as *strategy*. A pedestrian, however, may not use paths and routes in the way they were meant, but take a shortcut. These kind of actions by targets are referred to as *tactics*, the concrete use of the urban environment and the way of appropriating it. De Certeau compares walking through the city to a poem, as the pedestrian manipulates the urban setting, selects specific routes and skips others, while countless encounters come into play: a walk is constantly changed, which makes walking an act of unlimited diversity and individuality. This metaphor underlines that an important attribute of *tactics* is the creative use of space (97-99, 101).

In this thesis I will apply De Certeau's ideas on strategy/ tactics, 'poaching' and the appropriation of public space by individuals (or groups of individuals) on contemporary Moscow and specifically Sobyanin's projects. New parks like Zaryadye are built, but are they really used in the way they were meant? In the end, the concept of *tactics* is about 'targets', individual city dwellers using anything imposed onto them in a way that is not foreseen, in their own creative and individual manner.

Vladimir Paperny: Kultura 1 & Kultura 2

Lastly, the ideas of Vladimir Paperny (1985) on the cultural and architectural transformation of Soviet Russia will be discussed, as they are not only relevant for the case studies, but also for the *historical context* of this thesis. In his two-phase cyclic model, Paperny describes two cultural mechanisms that alternate each other in the course of the twentieth century: 'kultura-odin (1)' and 'kultura-dva (2)'. The first phase of the model, kultura-odin (1), comprises the period of the avant-garde in the 1920s and is experimental and future-oriented. There is also a strong focus on technological innovations. Furthermore, it is a culture of egalitarianism and spreading over the borders (or horizontality). Kultura-dva (2) can be identified with Stalinist times, from the 1930s-50s. It is a phase that is related to enclosure, attachment and individuality, while also being past-oriented and hierarchic (Batchan 1987, 170). The 'immobility' of this period is linked to the controlled movement of citizens and architecture, while in kultura 1 architects experienced a wide variety of freedom. Another important attribute of kultura 2 is 'verticality', not only referring to the closing of the Soviet borders, but also to the appearance of skyscrapers and other vertical structures (Bliznakov 2004, 466). In the end, both cultures attempt to negate and destroy everything that has been accomplished during the preceding period.

It has to be noted that this cyclic model is not only limited to the described periods, but could also be applied to a larger period of time of Russia's history (Batchan 1987, 170), including the

timeframe that is relevant for this thesis. For example, there is a return to *kultura 1* in the 1990s, while the period when Putin came to power can be linked to *kultura 2*. This will be discussed in more detail later in this thesis.

Conclusion

This literature review has aimed to create a theoretical framework, by discussing the ideas of Lotman, Kirschenbaum, de Certeau and Paperny. These scholars respectively touch on concepts which will serve as a lens through which the case studies on the meaning of Sobyanin's projects will be examined. This literature review also serves as a backbone for the historical context, that together with the methodology, will be discussed before turning to the case studies.

Methodology

In order to analyse how Moscow is negotiating tradition and innovation under Sobyanin, I will look at two case studies. This section will discuss how the research in the analytical portion of this thesis will be conducted.

The first case study will focus on *Zaryadye Park* (2017), which is widely viewed as the new symbol of Moscow and Russia. It is also one of Sobyanin's most characteristic and expensive projects (Kishkovsky, 2017-1). The second case study will concentrate on the *VDNKh*, an exhibition centre that was constructed during Stalin's rule and was renovated, after a period of decay in the 1990s, under mayor Sobyanin. This creates an interesting opposition between the case studies, as *Zaryadye* is entirely new and can therefore be seen as Sobyanin's personal pet project, while *VDNKh* already existed and potentially arouses nostalgic sentiments. Analysing these two case studies will show whether this will lead to a difference in meaning for Moscow's citizens, create a general picture of how the renovations under Sobyanin are perceived and how people conduct themselves in these places.

For each of the case studies, I will first present some general information about the project. The historical background will be discussed briefly, but also what the project's distinctive features are. This will create a context of relevant factual information. Then, the *intended functions (strategy)* of the particular case study will be discussed, which will tell us more about the initial intentions of *Zaryadye* and *VDNKh*. Furthermore, I will look at the *perceptions* of the projects by authorities, the press, citizens and critics. For all these four chapters, discussions about the projects will be identified, by looking at various news sites, blogs, social media and websites that are connected to the projects themselves. The goal is to look for patterns and establish links between the different information that is found, in order to examine to which extent the case studies fit the ideas of innovation or tradition, according to

those four different groups. Also, the statements by the authorities, press, citizens and critics will be compared to the intended functions of the project, which will show whether there are any discrepancies between the *strategy* and *tactics*. In each of these sections the theory of the literature review and the observations discussed in the historical context will be linked to the analysis.

Altogether these steps will contribute to the general discussion of how the city of Moscow and Russia are trying to present themselves. They will also show what the new projects by Sobyanin really mean to citizens, authorities and critics and whether they see the renovations more as innovation, tradition, as a mixture of these or perhaps as none of the mentioned variants.

Unfortunately, it has to be mentioned that useful sources like *Ekho Moskvy* and several comment sections were shut down during this research due to the ongoing war. Additionally, websites like *mos.ru* (website of Moscow's city government) were not constantly available, which made it difficult to acquire all the desired information, especially about the authorities' and citizens' opinions. Also, it was not possible to travel to Russia to conduct a research on the concrete *use* of space by visitors of the projects. Because of these unforeseen circumstances, the chapters on the perceptions of authorities and citizens, have turned out less detailed than initially planned, while de Certeau's theory on strategy and tactics could not be sufficiently applied. Therefore, especially in the case study on the VDNKh, I had to confine myself to articles and blogs in which opinions and reactions on topics concerning the project were expressed.

Historical context: city development of Moscow

Introduction

This section will briefly address the historical context of Moscow's city development during Soviet times and particularly discuss the more recent urban renewal of Moscow, under its last two mayors Yury Luzhkov and Sergey Sobyanin. The discussed background regarding Moscow's city planning will be useful in terms of a historical framework to the analytical part of the thesis, as I will not so much focus on the city development itself, but more on the *functions*, *perceptions* and *uses* of Sobyanin's projects. Furthermore, the concepts of the literature review, especially of Kirschenbaum and Paperny, have a significant explanatory value and will therefore be used as a backbone for this historical context.

Moscow's renewal during the Soviet period

Following the October Revolution, Lenin moved the Soviet government from St Petersburg back to Moscow, whereafter it became the capital of Russia in 1918 and the capital of the Soviet Union in 1922. Moscow turned into the political and cultural centre of the country, which had a large impact on the

urban development and ideology of its architecture. The reconstruction of Moscow began in the 1920s, in order for it to become the ideal capital of the victorious Proletariat and the communist world (Korobina 2014, 140). During this period, constructivist architecture² emerged in Moscow, embodying the new Soviet state. This style was simple, functional and included proletarian and industrial elements, of which the Narkomfin building in Moscow is one of the few remaining examples (Malik, 2020). Another important change in Moscow's city landscape was the demolition of churches, as a result of the party's anti-religion campaign, while Lenin's monumental propaganda (the propagating of communist ideas through monumental sculptures and architecture) became the new embodiment of sacredness (Korobina 2014, 140-141). However, besides the demolition of churches and emergence of constructivist structures, there was still a deliberate policy for conservating historical buildings (Kelly 2018, 88).

Other than rebuilding Moscow to give it a new ideal appearance in line with the communist ideology, the Communist Party also believed that a spatial re-ordering would help to reshape society, intending to create an industrious, enlightened and well-organized 'Soviet' man and woman, which was necessary in the process of achieving true communism. To accomplish this, the distinction between different classes and ethnicities should be removed and citizens should have equal access to housing, goods and services. Here we clearly see that this period fits the first cycle of Paperny's cultural model, *kultura 1*, as there is the attempt to create a fully egalitarian society. Therefore the first ideas regarding the so-called *microrayony* emerged, which are large housing districts that were inhabited by around 10.000 residents. Each district would have its own school, while parks and public services would also be nearby. However, these were only widely introduced under Khrushchev in the 1950s (Diener and Hagen 2013, 492,495). Furthermore the 'uplotnenie' (housing compaction) was announced in Moscow from 1918-1920 (Feldman 2011, 22), meaning that private property was nationalized by the authorities, creating a living space for larger working-class families, a project often considered a predecessor of the *kommunalka*. However, this was only meant as a temporary measure (yet, communal apartments still exist up to this day), as constructivist projects had to put an end to the housing shortage for good (Malik, 2020).

While the main goal of reshaping Moscow remained the building of a 'bright future', the way of achieving this changed in the 1930s. The ideal of creating a utopian capital for the Proletariat became less important, as under Stalin totalitarian ideas of might, immortality and imperial prosperity were dominant. Moscow had to be an ideal capital, that would show the world how great the socialist

² It has to be noted that the planners that were working on all the new urban developments plans received no specific guidelines, merely some general instructions, leaving the architectural arena of these times quite ambiguous (Diener and Hagen 2013, 493).

system was and serve as an example for other Soviet cities. In 1935, the 'General Plan for the Reconstruction of the City of Moscow' was introduced, leading to a doubling of the physical size of Moscow (Korobina 2014, 141).

The plan dealt with the reconstruction of the city centre: wide boulevards were constructed in the central districts, while old structures from previous centuries were replaced³ by large, impressive buildings (Gill 2013, 179-180). By this time, the avant-garde architecture of the constructivist was being attacked, as it was labelled as soulless, arid and simply not beautiful enough. The industrial elements would basically deprive architecture of the art itself and therefore this movement was banned (Clark 2009, 192). Here we see a shift to *kultura 2* or the second phase of Vladimir Paperny's model of Russian cultural history. *Kultura 2* attempts to negate and destroy everything that has been accomplished during *kultura 1*, which ties in with the fact that the avant-garde architecture was being attacked and, eventually, banned (Batchan 1987, 170).

The new Stalinist projects, shared a monumental or 'grand' style, which was inspired by (neo-) classical and Renaissance designs. The Palace of the Soviets was also scheduled, which was a skyscraper building meant to become the main building and symbol of the Soviet state. It was never built, however, due to the Second World War. Furthermore, one of the most impressive projects was realised, the construction of VDNKh, an exhibition that was designed to showcase the accomplishments of the Soviet economy. Other important projects of the 1930s included the construction of embankments and the opening of the Moscow metro (Korobina 2014, 141-142). Furthermore, many buildings were adorned with socialist symbols, like the state emblem of the Soviet Union, the hammer and sickle and the red star. Statues of Lenin scattered around Moscow and names that were connected to the Soviet period were given to buildings, Metro stops and streets. The city of Moscow started to possess a sense of socialist monumentalism, which was reinforced by the post-war Stalinist skyscrapers⁴ that were constructed at the main points of the city, dominating the urban landscape (Gill 2013, 180-181). According to Paperny, this verticality is also an important element of *kultura 2*. In the end, the new architecture had to portray the socialist attainments and was now considered the new concept of the sacred (Korobina 2014, 142).

In the course of all this rebuilding, artists were starting to depict the old and the new version of the capital, in order to emphasise the emergence of the new Moscow. Former constructivist artist Varvara Stepanova (the wife of Alexander Rodchenko) created photomontages to depict the new

³ Some major historical structures remained, like St Basil's cathedral, GUM and the Kremlin (Gill 2013, 180).

⁴ These include: the Ukraina Hotel, an apartment building on Kotelnicheskaya Embankment, the Leningradskaya Hotel, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, apartment buildings on Vosstaniya Square and Krasnaya Vorota and the Moscow State University building (Gill 2013, 180).

developments, while this also happened in film, like in Medvedkin's *Novaia Moskva*⁵ (1938) (Clark 2009, 191-192). However, every project was severely monitored by the state, which meant that artists and architects were obliged to produce designs in line with the ideology of socialist-realism (Tavi 2020, 59).

During Khrushchev's Thaw, the urban development was characterised by standardisation and industrialisation, in order to achieve equality in terms of economic goods and services (Korobina 2014, 142-143). However, the post-war emphasis on the arms industry, transport and governmental centres under Stalin, had led to huge housing shortages (Diener and Hagen 2013, 495). In order to solve this problem, the official idea arose to switch to fully prefabricated houses, a project that was led by architect and city planner Dmitry Chechulin. In the course of the 1950s, mass housing started, as the first large districts that were based on standard-type housing were built on the outskirts of Moscow (Korobina 2014, 142-143). These were the so-called five-store 'khrushchevki' apartments, which were simple, yet functional. Khrushchev condemned the Stalinist aesthetic, as he found that true beauty lies not in decoration, but in equal conditions and opportunities for everyone, hence the lack of decorative elements. Even though millions of citizens were provided with such homes, the housing still remained a big problem (Malik, 2020). Here, we see a return to *kultura 1*, not only because of the low buildings and egalitarian ideas that became prevalent, but also because Khrushchev completely denounced Stalin's rule. Also, in the 1950s, we see a second wave of the avant-garde (Kishkovsky 2017-2), for example in Kalatozov's film *Cranes Are Flying* (Shrayer 1997, 426). This also points to a return to *kultura 1*.

Throughout the stagnation period under Leonid Brezhnev, Moscow experienced the construction of the high-rise 'brezhnevki', symbolizing the stability of this era (Malik, 2020). This verticality points to a shift to *kultura 2* again. Furthermore, urban planners started working on an ideal planning layout of Moscow, which would divide the capital into seven zones with independent centres. However, during Brezhnev's rule, the way in which Moscow was being reshaped proved to be very unsustainable. The standardised housing turned out to be of quite poor quality, the development of factories that produced house parts proved to be economically unattainable, while the industrialisation also worsened ecological conditions (Korobina 2014, 143). In the course of the 1980s, the economic situation in Moscow drastically worsened, meaning there weren't as many substantial changes in the urban landscape. However, due to the disappearance of Soviet ideology, the architecture became very

⁵ The movie still ended up being banned, as censors identified subversive elements in the movie that would have criticised the modernisation of the New Moscow (Hannouch 2016, 21).

extravagant in the 1990s (Malik, 2020). The urban development of Moscow after the collapse of the Soviet Union will be discussed in more detail in the next two sections.

Yury Luzhkov: 1992-2010

After the fall of the Soviet Union, socialist ideology disappeared together with the emphasis on equality, labour and the proletariat, leading to a period of ideological void. Now, the world revolved around property, profit and individualism and therefore had to be rebuilt. This was the start of a period of intensive development in terms of Moscow's city planning and architecture (Paramonova 2020, 73-74).

A major force in the rebuilding of Moscow was Yury Luzhkov, who became the mayor of the Russian capital in 1992. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Luzhkov took advantage of Moscow's central position (economic and political wise), which led to a much quicker recovery from the collapse in comparison to other Russian cities (Büdenbender and Zupan 2017, 299). He had full control over the capital's urban planning while his wife, Elena Baturina, owned the biggest construction company of Moscow (Gill 2013, 182). During his terms, he presented himself as a *khozyain*⁶, that governed the city of Moscow like it was his own business (Büdenbender and Zupan 2017, 300, 308). He ruled the city as an autocratic, but benevolent leader, constantly trying to find a balance between the interests of himself, the state, elite and the well-being of the public (Tavi 2020, 64).

A period of architectural pluralism was characteristic for Luzhkov's terms, which had to do with the fact that it wasn't necessary anymore to make use of standardised constructions or follow centralized institutes, meaning architects could be far more creative in comparison to Soviet times. This phenomenon led to a huge amount of different styles in the city centre of Moscow. So in the 1990s, there is a change to *kultura 1*, as we see the appearance of architectural freedom again.

The reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was one of Luzhkov's first and most symbolic projects (Büdenbender and Zupan 2017, 300). The Bolsheviks had demolished this church, intending to replace it with the Palace of the Soviets, which was never completed. By rebuilding the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, the Luzhkov administration showed its recognition for the Orthodox Church. From this point, many other churches and sacral structures would be rebuild and renovated (Korobina 2014, 145).

Another important element that characterised urban space during Luzhkov, is the appearance of commercial structures, primarily in the central part of Moscow. Since ideological restraints were gone and due to the foreign capital that entered the market, any property could be used for profit

⁶ A leader of a home, business, village or any other social sphere (Büdenbender and Zupan 2017, 308).

now. Moscow underwent a huge transformation, as there was a rapid increase in advertising on the streets, while kiosks, vast markets and private businesses were built as a result of commercial activity in the 1990s. There was an emergence of shopping centres, like the Manezh shopping centre and Western fast food chains proliferated the streets. This horizontality (due to the appearance of many international businesses) and entering the market economy and the accompanying democratic experiments, are also characteristics of the 1990s that fit in Paperny's *kultura* 1. Eventually, there was a huge change of Moscow's streetscape: before, the state shaped and defined the city space, which was characterised by propaganda, while now this was done by the commercial imperatives (Gill 2013, 191-194).

This whole urban planning was favoured by a patronage system, which meant that private businesses invested hundreds of millions of dollars in big reconstructions or buildings projects. This was the way business was done in Moscow and businesses that cooperated, were rewarded with several benefits, like real estate, political access and contracts for various new projects (Büdenbender and Zupan 2017, 300- 301). From the Muscovites it was expected that they would not take issue with this semi-authoritarian (Soviet) way of governing Moscow. In return, Luzhkov granted them improved living standards, which included housing provision at the outskirts of the city. This relation between the city administration and the Muscovites was known as the 'Luzhkov compromise' (Büdenbender and Zupan 2017, 295, 301, 302).

Besides the patronage of big businesses, several economic developments contributed to Luzhkov's growing success over the decade. In the early 2000s, oil and gas prices rose (Russia's primary export) and Moscow started to attract more foreign capital, leading to an even bigger 'building bonanza' of skyscrapers, modern office spaces and new shopping centres⁷, contributing to Moscow's ambitions to become a global, capitalist mega city (Büdenbender and Zupan 2017, 302). In the period of 2000-2008, Moscow's growth in terms of urban planning was bigger than of any other Eastern European city (Tavi 2020, 67). Besides, Putin's coming to power also contributed to even more modern high-rise towers in Moscow. This had to do with Putin's obsession for the *vertical of power*⁸, which was a growing tendency to expand Moscow upwards or vertically, instead of horizontally. Due to this hierarchic system and vertical dimensions, we see a return of *kultura dva* in the early 2000s.

Additionally, Soviet-style prefabricated homes have enjoyed a revival in the 1990s, although more beautified and redecorated in more modern styles, as they were used for those new districts on the outer parts of Moscow. They were fast-to-build, hence fast-to-sell, which made them an attractive

⁷ However, only the elite could take part in this new life with hyper modern offices and shopping centres: the lives of the average Muscovite did not become much better (Büdenbender and Zupan 2017, 302).

⁸ The vertical of power describes hierarchal authority as a vertical chain. The term is borrowed from the movie *Vertikal* (1967), directed by Stanislav Govorukhin and Boris Durov, which was one of Putin's favourite movies (Tavi 2020, 65).

investment in the new system of private property and suitable for the constantly growing middle class (Paramonova 2020, 74). Furthermore, at the end of the 1990s the demolishing of the existing *khrushchyovki* was initiated and only a few were eventually rebuilt with private capital, commonly known as *khrushchyoby*⁹ (Tavi 2020, 62).

Besides the *khrushchyovki*, the authorities removed more Soviet architecture and symbols from the city (Gill 2013, 211), since in Moscow as a global, capitalist mega city, everything anti-Soviet was considered to be a sign of progressiveness (Paramonova 2020, 74). This tendency is another attribute of *kultura 1* in the 1990s, as everything of the preceding period sought to be destroyed. Especially In the beginning of the 1990s, many Soviet street names were changed back to their pre-revolutionary designation or were given new names. So, it has to be noted that despite the efforts of the city authorities to remove Soviet space, a lot of Soviet Moscow was still there (Gill 2013, 184, 187, 189, 211). This clearly illustrates Kirschenbaum's concept of a palimpsest, as new layers of meaning were added, while at the same time, old (Soviet) layers were preserved. Moscow became a city with many faces, as no single style dominated the streetscape

Additionally, during Luzhkov there was a common practice to replace (pre)Soviet buildings by near-replicas, which happened for example to the *Moskva hotel* and *Voentorg department store* in order to create more profitable space. These projects outraged many people, leading to a whole new generation of activists that united into organisations and civil-society groups, trying to preserve Moscow's cultural heritage (Argenbright 2016, 63, 64, 72).

While Luzhkov's strategy was highly successful at the beginning, his construction-centred model of city development broke down in the mid-2000s, due to several processes. First, Luzhkov's projects left the city of Moscow more and more chaotic as a result of the building bonanza, contributing to traffic problems and air pollution, which led to huge dissatisfaction among the democratic oriented middle class. The economic crisis of 2008 and clashes between the Luzhkov clan and the Putin-led elite because of the omnipresent corruption, further undermined Luzhkov's rule, but also the image of Moscow and the federal power. In the end, Luzhkov was replaced with the Putin-loyal Sergey Sobyenin in 2010 (Büdenbender and Zupan 2017, 296, 302, 303).

Moscow under Sobyenin: 2010-2019

Having previously served as the Head of the presidential Administration (2005-2008) and as Deputy Prime Minister (2008-2010), Sergey Sobyenin was appointed as the mayor of Moscow (Filitis and Wilson, 2017). One of his main goals was to make Russia's capital an international trade centre again. Due to the financial crisis of 2008 and the chaotic city image that Luzhkov had left behind, Moscow

⁹ A combination of *khrushchyovki* and *trushcheby* (slums) (Tavi 2020, 62).

became much less attractive for foreign capital. High-quality urban space had to be created, in order to attract expats, international investments and tourists, which would help to realise Moscow's aspiration of becoming a global city and lift it out of the economic crisis. Therefore, Sobyanin had to tackle Luzhkov's unregulated construction and create a convenient city that is comfortable to live in (Büdenbender and Zupan 2019, 129, 130).

In order to achieve this, the first step was to reorganise Moscow's urban space. The chaotic building bonanza and commercialisation of the city centre during Luzhkov created huge traffic jams in Moscow, which was one of the key problems the capital was dealing with. Therefore, Sobyanin launched 'Moscow: a city comfortable for life', a 5 year programme that started in 2013. In the course of this programme, Sobyanin highly promoted public transport by extending the metro network and building new bus terminals, while he also prohibited further commercialisation of the city centre (Büdenbender and Zupan 2017, 303, 304).

The programme was followed by Sobyanin's 'Moya Ulica' ('My street project', 2015-2018, extended to 2020) considered one of his largest campaigns, which aimed at making Moscow more pedestrian friendly. Sobyanin put effort in improving the transportation network even more, by the construction of dozens of new metro stations, more than 200 brand new routes and specifically dedicated lanes for public transportation. Furthermore, Sobyanin started to renovate Moscow's streets and sidewalks, but also constructed many new bicycle lanes and expanded the pedestrian zones. The campaign is often linked to the term 'blagoustroistvo' (improvement), but it certainly did not improve life for everyone. Sobyanin's campaign partly lost its reformist goals, as it led to private enrichment and to other benefits for elites (particularly due to embezzlement), including decision makers, investors and architects. Furthermore, due to the huge amount of money that was dedicated to this project, an uneven economic development was taking place, not only in the city of Moscow itself, but in Russia in general. Only in 2017, 190 billion roubles were reserved for the project, which is 12 percent of the whole annual budget of the city (most regions get an annual budget less than this). Lastly, the renovating of sidewalks is often of poor quality, leading to many injured pedestrians, especially in winter. Ironically, citizens complain the most about the fact that it's not 'comfortable' to live in a city, with constant reconstruction in the city centre, making this 'blagoustroistvo' of the whole project an ambiguous designation (Trubina 2020, 1-2, 5-8).

In addition, Sobyanin wanted to undo the damage done by Luzhkov, by removing these commercial structures that were built during the 1990s and 'polluted' the city. Not only did this symbolize the demolishing of the 1990s itself and the end of the Luzhkov era, but this decision could also be linked to a shift to Paperny's *kultura* 1, as Sobyanin intended to destroy what was accomplished before him.

The removal of these structures actually took place in one night, called 'the night of the long grabs'. More than 100 buildings like kiosks and malls were demolished because the city administration considered them to be 'illegally built' in the 1990s. After this event, that occurred on 9 February 2016, a big discussion arose, as many Russians started to defend these commercial structures. Some Muscovites started to appreciate them, but most of them discussed their status in terms of private property and saw this as abuse of power by the Russian authorities (Paramonova 2020, 75-76). Something similar happened in 2017, when the massive project *Renovatsiya* (renovation) was launched, partly to ensure votes for the 2018 elections. Soviet residencies were demolished, in order to create space for even more capital, violating the right of private property. Although there were waves of protests, the project still continued (Trubina 2020, 3)

Besides the efforts of tackling the problems of Moscow's chaotic city centre, another way Sobyenin is reorganising the urban development is by implementing the 'European bloc city model'. This model clearly separates private yards and public green spaces, which results into less public space that has to be maintained by the city authorities, in comparison to Soviet and post-Soviet housing. Under Luzhkov, there were the luxurious homes in the city centre for the very wealthy people, while micro-districts on the outskirts of the city were meant for the masses. By introducing the European block model, more differentiated housing is facilitated for the middle and upper-class (Büdenbender and Zupan 2017, 303- 305).

Furthermore, information technology has become an important part of Sobyenin's policies in order to make Moscow a 'smart city'. He is improving citizens every day lives and creating more transparency. Some examples are the expanded free Wi-Fi network, (which was awarded the most successful infrastructure project in Russia), the highly efficient electronic public services and the computerization of Moscow's education system, which even surpasses New York and London (Ruzina 2019, 419,421, 426, 428).

Other than reshaping the urban development, Sobyenin and his city administration have been upgrading several of Moscow's public spaces, in order to accommodate the dissatisfied middle class. The city administration set up a special programme, of which the goal was to upgrade more than 100 green infrastructures, including parks, sport areas, green belts and boulevards, which became an important feature of the campaign: 'Moscow: a city comfortable for life'. Parks in particular became a key element in Sobyenin's urban development strategy. He gave parks a facelift, by reshaping them into fancy places, with tons of cafés and activities, of which the Gorky park, Zaryadye park and VDNKh are some of his most famous projects. Various commercial spaces and free Wi-Fi were introduced in the parks, while their designs were made by famous (western) artists. The underlying motive is to impress tourists and to make these parks Moscow's pride, while Sobyenin also wants to keep up with Moscow's global competitiveness. The ultimate goal was to create parks that were comparable to

those of London and New York. Gorky park for example, was a neglected public area, that has been transformed in a meeting place for expats and the youth, part of the creative middle class. However, 'uncultured' citizens (or citizens that were not part of this creative middle class) were not welcome in those parks anymore, which means this upgrading is contributing to socio-spatial segregation (Büdenbender and Zupan 2019, 129,130, 132, 134). The activities after the renovation were focussed on the specific interests of the middle-class hipsters, as for example contemporary music, specific sports and art exhibitions to their taste part. Former park visitors, primarily low-income families, were put off as they did not feel included anymore. Additionally, security guards interfered when they noticed behaviour that did not fit the 'cultured' and 'Europeanized' standards of the park (Kalyukin et al. 2015, 686-687, 690).

However, socio-spatial segregation is not the only reason for tensions, some other matters of debate are the lack of openness regarding the projects and the possible illegal profits for the elite. Most importantly, several of Sobyanin's projects were even suspected of 'Stalinesque' intentions, for example the VDNKh, which had to become a playground for the creative middle class, but in the end was redecorated in its condition of the 1950s and heavily promoting Russian patriotism (Büdenbender and Zupan 2019, 133, 135), which is certainly not in line with making Moscow a modern, European hipster city. Many scholars draw a parallel between Sobyanin's renovations and those of Stalin in the 1930s. Under Stalin's rule, huge parts of the city were demolished, clearing the way for imposing architecture. Stalin's main motivation was to rebuild Moscow as an 'imperial capital', embodying the Soviet ideology, a tendency that in a way also characterises Sobyanin's renovations (Amos 2016, 55-56). Considering the earlier described tendencies of making Moscow a comfortable hipster city, eclecticism seems to have reached a peak under Sobyanin, as anything is acceptable now.

Another important feature of Sobyanin's mayoralty is the fact that he wanted to break with the authoritative way Luzhkov governed Moscow by creating a city that is more suitable for the Western-oriented middle class. Therefore, western-educated experts acquired high positions at the planning department of the city. Additionally, Sobyanin held architecture competitions¹⁰ and introduced participative platforms and tools for Muscovites to create more openness and transparency. However, at the same time the administration appropriated several non-governmental initiatives, making it easier to promote its own goals and giving it access to critical debates. *Strelka* , which was an independent research institute for urban development and design, played an important role in the renovation of the Gorky Park in 2011, and because of this was noticed by the city administration. From this point, *Strelka* became a key player in Sobyanin's urban planning. For

¹⁰ For example, the Moscow Architectural Biennale and the Moscow Urban Forum (Tavi 2020, 71).

example, they launched an online initiative 'Chego khochet Moskva' (What Moscow wants), which made it possible for citizens to express their criticism and ideas for improvement of the city landscape, giving them the opportunity to participate in the process of making Moscow a comfortable city. However, critical feedback was often deleted from their Facebook page. In the end, it has to be noted that organisations like this gained political influence, but in exchange of the sort of freedom they had before, as the city administration was monitoring every initiative, which makes one question whether they really moved on from Luzhkov's authoritarian rule of Moscow (Büdenbender and Zupan 2017, 304-307). So there are there urbanist participation activities, but in the end only a few authorised actors have a say in Moscow's urban development, meaning those are merely distraction (Büdenbender and Zupan 2019, 134, 135).

Conclusion

By discussing the most important features of Moscow's urban development, this section has intended to create a historical framework, in order to better understand the meaning of mayor Sobyenin's recent projects to citizens, critics and authorities and the debates around them. On the one hand, Sobyenin breaks with Luzhkov's construction driven urban development, and focusses more on the quality of life. He gave Moscow a 'facelift' by aiming to create a comfortable, European and eco-friendly city with the help of western urban development models. On the other hand, it becomes clear that the city administration is still continuing an authoritative way of ruling the city and showing a resemblance with the Soviet past, because of all the rigorous rebuilding, promotion of patriotism and the constant need to compete with other cities in order to leave a great impression. These tendencies all clash with the democratic and orderly city that Sobyenin claims to be creating. The following case studies aim to provide some insights into different parties look at Sobyenin's projects and to which extent they see them as innovation and an addition to the process of creating a comfortable and innovative city, or as an repetition of traditions and a return to the past.

Case study 1 : Zaryadye Park “A democratic initiative in the centre of Moscow?”



Figure 1. View of Zaryadye Park.

From Baan (n.d.). Copyright by Iwan Baan.

Introduction

In September 2017, on Moscow City Day, one of Sobyenin's most famous projects *Zaryadye Park* opened its doors. The park is located in Moscow's city centre, adjacent to the Red Square and between the Moskva river and Varvarka street. The history of the site traces back to the twelfth-thirteenth century, when it was mainly inhabited by merchants (Antsiperova 2017). At the end of the 15th century, the name Zaryadye was put into use, which comes from *za ryadami*¹¹ 'behind the rows', referring to the surrounding market rows. Throughout history, the Zaryadye territory was constantly changing: from serving as a wealthy neighbourhood, to turning into slums by the end of the 19th century. Eventually, during the 1940s it was decided to build Stalin's eight skyscraper on this territory, but the plan was cancelled after the first foundations were laid. Khrushchev had the Rossiya Hotel built on these grounds in 1967, a brutalist style building that was eventually demolished in 2006. Immediately, discussions started on what to do with this part of Moscow's historical centre.

¹¹ Russian: за рядами

Luzhkov and his city administration came up with the idea to create a commercial centre on the historically charged Zaryadye territory, a project designed by architect Norman Foster, which was deemed a welcome addition to the ongoing commercialization of the city (González 2017). However, this plan was abandoned on Sobyanin's initiative, which is not surprising as Sobyanin wanted to break with Luzhkov's way of governing Moscow. Together with Vladimir Putin, the city government decided that there should be a park on the abandoned construction site. The park would contribute to the capital's high-quality urban environment, which was in line with Sobyanin's ongoing campaign 'Moscow, a city comfortable for life' (Walliss and Baan 2020, 50). A competition to design the architecture and landscape of Zaryadye park was held and an international consortium led by the American design studio *Diller Scofidio and Renfro* became the winner in 2013. The studio, known for designing the High Line in New York, used 'Wild Urbanism' as their key concept, meaning that green space and high-tech buildings would come together in Zaryadye. Construction started in 2014 and the project was in collaboration with, among others, the landscape architectural firm Hargreaves Associates, the Russian development company Citymakers and of course Moscow's chief architect Sergey Kuznetsov (Antsiperova 2017).

In the end, Zaryadye became the first park that was built in Moscow in the last 50 years, costing between \$390 million and \$480 million dollars, making it Sobyanin's most expensive project (Ulam 2017). The park has won numerous awards over the years, including a spot on *Time's* listing of 'World's Greatest Places' in 2018 (Walliss and Baan 2020, 53). Zaryadye Park makes an interesting case study, not only because it received significant attention from both Russian and western media, but also because it is the crown jewel of Sobyanin's beautification campaign (Ulam 2017). Therefore, the project can give us a better insight into how Sobyanin's city government is negotiating innovation and tradition in the city of Moscow.

The competition: background and requirements

The competition to compose a suitable concept for the park was set up in 2013 by the Strelka institute and chief architect Sergey Kuznetsov, who were supported by Sobyanin himself and other organs of the executive power of the Moscow administration. The contestants had to meet certain requirements. First, the new park had to be comfortable and modern, where the greenery of the park, historical monuments and architecture near the site would come together (Genplan Institute of

Moscow 2013). Second, the park should embody the ideas of “openness, environmental awareness, new technologies and tolerance”¹² (Archsovet 2013).

The competition was eventually won by one of the leading American design compagnies, Diller Scofidio and Renfro, a decision that was quite contentious as US-Russia relations were at a low point at that moment. Kuznetsov was even accused of being an enemy of Russia. However, it was of no avail and the project continued like planned (Sulcas 2018).

Inside Zaryadye: a Wild Urbanism

‘Wild Urbanism’ turned out to be the winning approach for the new Zaryadye Park. According to the official website of Diller Scofidio + Renfro (DS+R), an important attribute of this concept is that the natural and the artificial both coexist and intertwine. The 10-hectare park combines all four of Russia’s ecological zones: steppe, tundra, wetland and forest (Diller Scofidio + Renfro, n.d.). Daylight, wind and temperature are regulated by the use of sustainable technologies and changes in topography in order to artificially simulate those climatological variations. As a result, visitors can enjoy the park all year round (Ulam 2017). Over a million plants from all over Russia are scattered across the area, which differ for each ecological zone (Volkova 2017-1).

Most importantly, visitors are not forced to choose a certain path and can freely meander through the park, due to a merging of paved pathways and plant-covered areas. This is quite an innovative concept in terms of parks, as Russian parks are traditionally very symmetrical and formal. In traditional parks, there is no sitting on the grass and plants and people are separated by strict borders. In Zaryadye Park, people and green space are on the same level (Sulcas 2018).

Various buildings are incorporated into the landscape due to topographical variations (Ulam 2017). The park is characterized by modern architecture, like the unique V-shaped ‘Soaring bridge’ above the Moskva river, media centre and a concert hall with an innovative crystalline roof, that is able to create a pleasant micro climate all year long¹³ (Volkova 2017-1). Additionally, Zaryadye Park consists of more highly modern features, for example interactable walls, screens, the newest audio systems and a Wi-Fi network all across the park (Chernyshov 2018). Nevertheless, Zaryadye’s historical buildings, like the chambers of the Romanov boyars, the old English Court Museum and multiple churches have been preserved and blend with the innovative concept of the park (Volkova 2017-1).

¹² Quotes are translated by the author, unless stated otherwise. Russian text: “«Зарядье» станет символом ценностей XXI века — открытости, экологического мышления, новых технологий и толерантности.”

¹³ Valery Gergiev, a personal favourite of Putin, was appointed as the direction of the concert hall (Murawski & Shevchenko, 2017).

The last attribute of Wild Urbanism is the integration of the green and the urban. “That’s the notion that you can lose yourself in the park and the city disappears, and then also have moments when you can emerge out of the green and see the city all around you” (Ulam 2017), says Charles Renfro, partner at DS+R. Throughout the park, the topography changes in order to create unique views and make visitors discover the city of Moscow anew (Volkova 2017-2).

Zaryadye as a pars pro toto

While the general layout of the park and architectural solutions discussed above are primarily created by Diller+ Scofidio and Renfro, they did not have any influence on the actual cultural and educational content of the park. The Russian park management is in charge of the attractions, lectures and seminars that are held (Archsovet 2017). In general, those attractions are focussed on educating visitors about a whole scale of Russia-related themes (Volkova 2017-2) and come off as quite patriotic. For example, there is the Scientific centre *Zapovednoe Posolstvo*, which offers education programmes for all ages. Visitors can attend masterclasses, seminars and conferences in the field of science and technology, while they can also participate in experiments in the high tech lab. The centre includes a labyrinth ice cave, where guests can experience the cold and history of the arctic (Volkova 2017-1). One of the first expositions that opened here, was about Russia’s primary role in exploring the arctic and its achievements there (Tass 2017). Therefore, the ice cave does not only portray Russia’s natural diversity, but also underlines Russia’s involvement in conquering the arctic.

Then, the media centre hosts a big part of the expositions, mostly focused on themes like nature and art. This also features the ‘Flight over Russia’ and ‘Flight over Moscow’ attractions, where visitors can watch a 5D movie and experience as if they are in the flight themselves (Volkova 2017-1), which also come across as quite nationalistic. For the flight over Russia attraction, the most beautiful regions are selected, from the Lena Pillars in Yakutia to ‘The Motherlands Calls’ monument in Volgograd, in order to show off how fascinating and immense the country is. The flight over Moscow attraction uses the same approach and shows the city of Moscow from different angles, focussing on the most famous sights (Titko 2018). Another similarly patriotic 4D experience, is the ‘Time Machine’ attraction, that puts an emphasis on how victorious Russia’s history has been. However, when covering the French invasion of 1812, nothing is said about Russia’s major setbacks (Kabanova 2017). This actually fits into a wider trend, concerning the efforts of the Russian government to create a single version of its history, which is focussed on glorifying Russia’s imperial past, resulting into an oversimplified historical narrative (Kolesnikov 2017).

Furthermore, the park consists of several restaurants: *Voschod*, which offers food from former Soviet republics and the *Zaryadye Gastronomic Centre*, where dishes from all of Russia’s regions

feature on the menu (Zaryadye Park, n.d.). Although we live in a different geopolitical reality right now, the cuisine of the former republics of the USSR is still associated and united with Russia's culinary traditions. This, specifically shows Russia's struggle to let go of its colonial past.

As a result, the whole of Russia and former Soviet Union seem to come together on different levels, not only in the restaurants, but also in the nature and attractions. This way, Zaryadye Park becomes a thumb nail of Russia itself. By building a park like this in Moscow, that is the centre and ideal city of the country, Zaryadye is only strengthening the already existing concentric status of the city that Lotman commented on.

In the next section, the intended functions of the park will be examined.

Intended functions of Zaryadye

When looking into the statements of Elizabeth Diller and Charles Renfro, Zaryadye's main architects and partners at Diller Scofidio + Renfro, it becomes evident that they have quite a strong opinion on how the park should function and what the overarching idea is.

In an interview with a+u magazine (Architecture and Urbanism Magazine), Charles Renfro underlines that the democratisation of space is one of the main features of their approach to public space. The Zaryadye project is no exception, as Renfro stresses that they highly value openness, accessibility and freedom. Everyone is welcome in Zaryadye Park regarding race or social status, while they made the park accessible due to the free entrance (a+u magazine 2019). And most importantly, the park should have a liberating effect, not only because the absence of predetermined routes, but also due to being a site where civic expression will be possible (Diller 2020). So with the help of Zaryadye Park, DS+R wanted to make a contribution to democratic spaces in Moscow and in a way, make a statement against the ongoing repressive regime.

Furthermore, Diller says the following in an interview with *Bloomberg News*: "We are not naïve to think that we are totally in a democratic perfect environment, but we think that this is going to contribute to a positive change" and "We want to empower people to enjoy their city and to take it over" (Ulam 2017). So the actual *intended function* of Zaryadye Park is contributing to a change, in terms of improving the life of Moscow's citizens (Ulam 2017). Not only by offering them a unique landmark based on the principles of Wild Urbanism which they can 'just enjoy', but also by manifesting a new, democratic open space for the people of Moscow. Therefore, in the opinion of the American architects of the consortium, Zaryadye Park can really be seen as innovation. As Charles Renfro says:

“Besides, the park can't be compared to anything, it is a new type of open space not only for Moscow, but also for the whole of Russia¹⁴” (Mamaeva 2017).

One specific aspect of the park that is highlighted on the official website of Diller Scofidio + Renfro is the ‘free’ meandering through the park, which apparently, is deemed important by the architects. Although the website mentions that Zaryadye: “It is at once park, urban plaza, social space, cultural amenity, and recreational armature” (Diller Scofidio + Renfro, n.d.), DS+R does stress that there is no prescribed way of enjoying the park and these functions are presented more as suggestions. So according to the architects, a visit to Zaryadye Park is *unscripted*. Visitors are encouraged to create their individual journey: pick one of the many paths to follow or engage with all the greenery as there are no strict borders. They can gather together, repose, engage with the cultural pavilions scattered across the park or completely make up their own plan (Diller Scofidio + Renfro, n.d.). It is almost like de Certeau’s strategy and tactics coincide: the strategy of DS+R is that there is no strategy and that visitors can experience the park in their own creative way, with their own tactics.

However, it is really up to discussion how unscripted the park really is. As mentioned before, the cultural pavilions of the park are quite patriotic, and therefore very scripted, in my opinion. Although DS+R did not have any control over their content, they are still a very important part of the park and do very much affect a person’s visit to Zaryadye. Also, everything in the park is positioned in a certain way. For example the hills are shaped in a specific manner to create certain views of the surroundings, which also scripts someone’s visit to the park.

In the end, the cooperation between DS+R and Moscow’s city authorities appears to be somewhat contradictory. On the one side, the city administration completely supports the ideas of the American architects. Charles Renfro even confirmed that everything they thought of in 2013, was implemented into the park by the Russian architects, developers and team led by Kuznetsov (Archsovet 2017). Diller adds to this: “There was a fabulous city architect, Sergey Kuznetsov, who is there today and is bringing Moscow into being a kind of cosmopolitan city. He was a great defender of the project, and I think, together, we did something very good for the residents of the city” (Riba 2022). On the other side, when it comes to the content of the pavilions and attractions, the part where DS+R does not have a say in, it does not seem to be in line with what DS+R envisioned. From this, it appears questionable whether the intentions of the city administration and the American firm were really the same. Therefore, the next chapter will elaborate more on how Sobyenin and his city administration perceive Zaryadye Park.

¹⁴ Original Russian text: “Кроме того, сам парк не с чем сравнить — абсолютно новая история не только для Москвы, но и для всей России.”

City authorities and Sergey Kuznetsov

When looking at Sobyanin's personal website <https://www.sobyanin.ru/>, it becomes very clear how he wants to portray Moscow since his administration came into office. Most of the posts and his blog focus on innovation, new projects and ways to make Moscow a more comfortable city. According to Sobyanin, Zaryadye Park is "the symbol of these transformations" (Moscow Urban Forum 2018, 14:00), as it has become a comfortable pedestrian zone, connecting Moscow's most important monuments in the city centre. So in the opinion of the city administration, Zaryadye Park is really about *change*. Chief architect Sergey Kuznetsov, who not only organised the competition, but also took part in the international consortium led by DS+R after they were announced as the winners, confirms this in an interview with GQ Russia (2017). According to Kuznetsov, Zaryadye Park is something of a whole other level, it is not like anything Moscow has ever had. He even underlines that there are no 'bad intentions' behind the project and that Russia has stopped focussing on showcasing world stage achievements (that had always been deemed important) like sports or the space race. Now, the city government's interests shifted towards ordinary people and their basic needs and joys (GQ Russia 2017, 4:15). It is however, quite ironic that one of the main restaurants of the park, the earlier mentioned *Voschod*, is named after a Soviet space program and is decorated in a neo-Cosmic style, including levitating plant pots (Murawski 2022). In my opinion the restaurant resembles another case of Soviet nostalgia, this time specifically for Russia's major role in space, and therefore it is questionable whether Russia's is really planning to let go of focussing on these achievements.

Furthermore, on their official website *mos.ru*, the city authorities continue stressing Zaryadye's democratic and open character, primarily by pointing out that it will fulfil a major touristic function for visitors all over the world, while they also emphasise their collaboration with the American architects. The fact that American architects could realise on a project of this scale at such a historically charged site, really contributes to the unique character of the park in their eyes (Mos.ru 2017-2). Of course, the fact that international architects design something in the centre of Moscow is not necessarily new. The fact that they designed the idea a visual landmark of this scale is quite unique, however. So the authorities and DS+R seem to have a very similar view of Zaryadye Park: they both see it as democratic and modern landmark, focusing on the people's interests.

However, when further looking into the authorities' statements, it becomes evident that this social and democratic function is not their only objective, and it becomes questionable whether it is an objective at all. On the official website of the Moscow administration (Mos.ru 2017-1) all the educational centres of the park are extensively described, clearly putting a focus on the educational purpose of Zaryadye Park and teaching patriotism (as mentioned before, the Americans were not

responsible for the content of the pavilions, this was done by the park management). The director of the park, Pavel Trekhleb, confirms this in an interview with *BFM.ru*, saying that the park has “a prominent educational function”¹⁵ (Mozganova 2018). Chief architect Sergey Kuznetsov (who, at this point can be seen as the voice of the city authorities), goes even further with his statements. He says that “projects like Zaryadye can become the best in the world and that only like this, Moscow can turn into one of the top capitals in terms of architecture”¹⁶ (Archsovet 2013). Additionally, on the website of the Union of Architects of Russia, Kuznetsov (2019) states the following : “[Zaryadye Park] is a reminder of the vastness and at the same time the greatness of the country, its rich culture and glorious history.”¹⁷ Apparently, the authorities also see Zaryadye as a patriotic landmark that should show off Russia’s glorious past and potentially would make Moscow one of the greatest capitals in the world. In this sense, Zaryadye Park becomes strongly similar to the Soviet parks for culture and leisure, which were also multifunctional and focussed on the educating and upbringing of the people (according to the communist ideology), patriotism, technology and the flaunting of communist achievements (Shaigardanova 2014, 83- 85). Kuznetsov’s statements do not only contradict the earlier statements by the authorities and himself, of promoting Zaryadye as an democratic open space, but are also in stark contrast with the ideas of DS+R. From the previous chapter it became clear that DS+R never put an emphasis on the patriotic aspect, nor did they see the project as a tool to educate Moscow’s citizens. In this way, the authorities’ statements of presenting Zaryadye as a democratic and people-oriented open space, become very implausible.

Press reception of Zaryadye Park

After the opening of Zaryadye Park, the media has extensively been reporting on the project. For this chapter, a selection of a few news websites is made as it is beyond the scope of this research to use a wider variety of sources. The news sites that are chosen are: *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Kommersant* and *Vedomosti*, because most of the relevant information could be found through these sources. Different types of news outlets are chosen, to capture as much different views on the projects as possible: *Komsomolskaya Pravda* is a pro-government news outlet and one of Russia’s most popular newspapers. *Kommersant* is less pro-government, but is still owned by the oligarch Alisher Usmanov, who has close ties to the Kremlin (Vartanova et al. 2016). *Vedomosti* is the most critical out of the these newspapers, however, after 2014 the foreign ownership was reduced to 20 %, meaning the

¹⁵ Russian text: “(...) у нас очень активная просветительская функция (...)”

¹⁶ Russian text: “(...) могут стать одними из лучших в мире. Только так можно вывести Москву в число мировых архитектурных столиц.”

¹⁷ Russian text: “ (...) напоминание о величине, а тем самым и о величии страны, ее культурном богатстве и славной истории.”

newspaper lost its foreign partners and therefore had to hand in freedom and independence (Yablokov 2020).

When analysing the news coverage by the pro-Kremlin tabloid, *Komsomolskaya Pravda (KP)*, it stands out that the newspaper constantly underlines how great and innovative Zaryadye has turned out. KP is extolling the park by stressing how beautiful the views are, how unique the park is for the city of Moscow and that almost every corner is suitable for taking 'nice selfies'. The coverage is mostly without any critical note, which is expected from a pro-government newspaper. Additionally, under the heading 'KP's choice' (which discusses the best parts of Zaryadye according to KP) the patriotic flight over Russia and flight over Moscow attractions are mentioned (Volkova 2017-1). From this, it becomes clear that KP and the authorities speak with one voice: on one side they stress how modern the park is, but at the same time the patriotic aspect and leaving a great impression seem a priority.

Other newspapers like *Kommersant* are opting for a more neutral report on the park. The newspaper does not praise every aspect like KP, but is not very critical of it either. It stands out that *Kommersant* is frequently reporting on one specific topic, which is the vandalism that took place in Zaryadye. Stolen plants, crushed glass domes and dug out greenery : the first week after Zaryadye's opening wasn't necessarily smooth. The reason why this happened exactly, is not entirely clear and *Kommersant* gives multiple possible explanations. In one of the articles it is stated by Victor Vakhshayn, head of Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, that the vandalism has to do with dissatisfaction with the city administration (Lyapin 2017).

However, from another article it appears that, according to the park administration, no plants had actually been stolen. The large amount of people resulted into trampled vegetation, as visitors were not watching their feet. Deputy major, Anastasiya Rakova, even states that the greenery was destroyed out of excitement for the park (Nikitina 2017). So according to the park management and authorities, one can not speak of vandalism after Zaryadye opened its doors, as the damage was unintentional. However, *Kommersant* mentions that some of the missing plants suddenly appeared on the internet for sale (*Kommersant* 2017). Therefore, the explanations by the authorities are not so plausible after all: it seems that the stealing of plants did actually occur and people were trying to make money out of Zaryadye's expensive greenery.

Whatever the actual intentions behind the events were, facts are that the park management decided to take measures. They prohibited the access to some areas of the park by implementing signs and fencing. Also, more patrolling guards started to appear in the park and reduced opening hours were temporarily introduced (Nikitina 2017). By doing so, the park management is immediately affecting DS+R's *strategy* of a free meandering through the park. In this sense, Zaryadye becomes more

comparable to a tighter controlled, traditional Russian park, than to DS+R's original concept of a free and unscripted Zaryadye.

The newspaper *Vedomosti* is the most critical out of the consulted press. The newspaper addresses the costs of Zaryadye park, stating that it is very expensive, which fits in the wider trend of Sobyanin's costly renovation projects. At the opening, the costs of were estimated at 14 billion roubles (242.7 million dollars). However, as the newspaper exposes, it soon became clear that the expenses would eventually be much higher, ranging from 22–25 billion roubles (390- 480 million dollars), mainly due to unfinished constructions and the vandalism of the first week (Vinogradova & Vasiliev 2017). Considering Russia was in a two-year recession when the park was built (Balmforth 2017), a time when incomes were falling, the criticism *Vedomosti* offers on the hefty price tag is quite justified in my opinion.

Other than the financial aspect and the little regard for the historical context of the Zaryadye territory (a topic which will be discussed later this thesis) , other criticisms on Zaryadye Park remain somewhat underexposed in the consulted newspapers. Therefore, it is also valuable to look at the opinions of visitors of the park, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Experiences by visitors

In this section I will have a look at how visitors perceive Zaryadye park. Unfortunately, due to the war it was not possible to travel to Russia in order to conduct a proper research on this part. Also, the site of Zaryadye lacked a section with reviews of visitors, while the above discussed newspapers did not have comments sections, which made it more difficult to capture the reactions of visitors (this actually, also shows how undemocratic the project really is) . Therefore, I will confine myself to blogs that reflect the opinion of visitors. The material is derived from the website *livejournal.com*, where users can upload blogs or keep a diary. The website is very popular in Russia, being one of the main platforms of the Russian blogosphere (LiveJournal n.d.). When looking at blogs, it is not always exactly clear who the author is and basic information about age and the place of residence are often absent, which makes it difficult to link the collected information to a certain group of people. Nevertheless, blogs can definitely give a better insight into the general opinion of the public. Additionally, the blogposts will probably provide a more 'honest' opinion on Zaryadye than the newspapers discussed in the previous chapter, as they are still (or to some degree) controlled or influenced by the government. The selection of the blogs in this section was based on their popularity on the website *livejournal.com*. Also, blogs

that were published shortly after the opening of Zaryadye Park were chosen, in order to capture visitors' initial ideas and visions.

When looking through the different blogs on *livejournal.com*, it becomes clear that the general opinion on Zaryadye is very divided. Some absolutely love the park, like Olga and Dmitry, who write their blogs together. The title of their blog, "Farewell Russia, hello Zaryadye!"¹⁸ (Grushenka 2017-1), gives away that they definitely perceive the park as something new, and a place that symbolises the change of the capital and the country. In their eyes, the stunning views and the mix of older architecture and futuristic constructions, like the soaring bridge and crystalline crust, make the park unique (DS+R's concept of Wild Urbanism appears to be to their taste). They mention how people listen to music, relax on the lawns and make a visit to the various attractions. So according to Olga and Dmitry, the park consists of a whole range of activities that will meet the visitors' joys and needs.

However, at the same time, it appears that Olga and Dmitry are perfectly aware that the place is certainly not only about the people, but also about Russia as a whole. They underline that Zaryadye will become the main centre of attraction in Moscow and, therefore, how big the significance is for the country. Furthermore, they end their blog with the following quote:

"This is truly a park for the people (...). Come to Zaryadye, to relax, to see Russia and Moscow. This is our common park, our country. This is Zaryadye!"¹⁹ (Grushenka 2017-1).

This sounds quite patriotic, seeming that the authors are encouraging others to visit the park and to see how great Zaryadye (and therefore Moscow and Russia) are. Interestingly, they still conclude the blog by saying it is a park for the people. In DS+R's (western) vision, a park for the people was about relaxation and civil expression, but definitely not about the world stage achievements of one country. However, in the vision of Olga and Dmitry, a park can be for the people, but can at the same time also be about Russia's greatness, meaning these two thoughts are not mutually exclusive in the perception of some Russians. Lastly, it also becomes questionable to which extent the 'change' they write about is an actual change, and not just a 'change back to', as the park still seems to resemble the ideas of a Soviet park.

On the other hand, not everyone has the same positive thoughts, which becomes clear from Polina's blog (Afinyanka 2017). She is furious, as the project was far from finished when she made a visit shortly after its opening. Closed entrances, undeveloped or withered vegetation, construction waste that was

¹⁸ Russian text: "Прощай Россия, здравствуй Зарядье!"

¹⁹ Russian text: "Это по настоящему народный парк! (...) Приходите в Зарядье, чтобы отдохнуть, увидеть Россию и Москву. Это наш общий парк, наша страна. Это- Зарядье! "

lying around and attractions that were still inaccessible, led to a huge disappointment. This situation actually fits into a wider trend that is characteristic for Moscow. The city administration would rather fulfil contracts of reconstructions and projects in time, than finishing them properly (Trubina 2020, 6). In this regard, nothing has really changed and the implementation of the park is certainly 'the Russian way'. The fact that it happened to a project of this scale, that is meant to be the perfect image of the country, shows that Zaryadye is not so perfect after all.

Also, from this blog it becomes clear that DS+R's *strategy* of the park completely falls through for some people, when looking at the *use* of public space that de Certeau elaborated on. DS+R came up with the idea to create a park where a free meandering was allowed. However, Polina points out that it was not clear at all in which areas of the park it was allowed to walk, while it was also very difficult to get from one point to another. This made the free meandering almost impossible. The blog was written after the vandalism took place, so there was already some extra fencing, but it turned out to be of no avail. Also, DS+R were a big advocate of bringing plants and people close to each other, but when Polina wanted to touch some trees and grass, it turned out to be impossible as it was prohibited to enter the specific area. Lastly, an unscripted experience was highly valued by DS+R and people should make up their own plan in the park, but Polina was completely clueless on what to do during her whole visit (Afinyanka 2017). So in the end, the park was meant to have a liberating effect on its visitors, but when actually looking at the appropriation of the park, it appears that some users are left angry and in complete confusion.

In the end, it is also questionable whether the park is really accessible to anyone. From the above, it appears that the park was already difficult to cross by foot, and likely is not suitable for people in a wheelchair or with other physical disabilities. Therefore, the accessibility that DS+R deemed important, is another feature of their initial plan that does not seem to be realised in Zaryadye Park.

Critics' opinions on Zaryadye

Lastly, it is also interesting to look at how critics perceive Zaryadye Park, as due to their expertise they will probably see the park in a different way than the previously discussed groups.

It turns out that Zaryadye faced much criticism, mainly due to the important place that the park takes in Moscow. Besides being situated in the very centre of the city, within the reach of the Kremlin, Zaryadye is also positioned on a very historically charged site. This is exactly the reasoning for many Russian experts to have issues with the park. If it was build on the outskirts of Moscow, the park would probably be not as criticised (Grozovsky et al. 2017, 94).

There are of course, also many advocates of the park, like Russia's famous architecture critic Grigory Revzin (2017). He is very passionate about Zaryadye, as he commented that the park would be

one of the best in the world. Also, Revzin is a great defender of the soaring bridge, and underlines that it is not just a 'selfie bridge' (as many like to call it), but a gesture that makes people appreciate and experience the vastness of the city of Moscow. This again, points to the fact that Zaryadye is not only about the park itself, but also about the city as a whole. Similar to the previous chapter, the opinions are still very divided among the critics. After consulting various sources like YouTube videos, blogs and articles, I have selected the main debates around the park which will be discussed in this section. Topics that were already discussed in the above sections, were disregarded.

Yearning for the past

One of the bigger discussions among Russian experts focussed on Zaryadye's historical past. Some, are remembering hotel Rossiya, like the architecture critic Nikolay Malinin. Many found the hotel a hideous construction, waiting on its demolition. To Malinin, hotel Rossiya was a good addition to the city centre, as it was cheap and could host many guests, while also being a symbol of Soviet times (Grozovsky et al. 2017, 96, 98). This illustrates Kirschenbaum's idea of a palimpsest: Malinin has memories and nostalgic feelings towards a specific layer of meaning of the Zaryadye territory, which in this case, is the hotel and its symbolism. Therefore, he defends the hotel and regrets that it has been demolished.

The metaphor of a palimpsest however, is not only linked to personal memories of city space, but also, as Diener and Hagen (2019) commented, to authorities' duty to preserve traces of the past. This is exactly what Sobyatin's city administration is failing at in the process of constructing Zaryadye Park, says Aleksander Mozhaev (2017), a historian specialised in the history of Moscow. Mozhaev is more concerned with the earlier historical context of the park, which is very much ignored by the city authorities. He specifically addresses that the concept of Zaryadye does not match the preserved churches, that the soaring bridge crosses out certain views and that there was no concern for the old relief of the site, as it has been artificially changed. Also, archaeological remains that were found at the site, are presented in a tiny museum, which according to Mozhaev, is unacceptable for a project constructed at such an important site. Although I would not argue that the situation described by Mozhaev is not true, it is however, questionable to which extent the park itself is to blame for neglecting the historical context of the site. The biggest damage to the old Zaryadye district was already done in the 1930s and 1940s. The site had to be cleared for the construction of Stalin's eight skyscraper, hence the neighbourhood was almost completely demolished (Grozovsky et al. 2017, 97). Furthermore, hotel Rossiya also crossed out (and created) certain views of the city, this is not solemnly related to Zaryadye Park. The same goes for the old churches, and Zaryadye being out of place in the architectural context of its surroundings, as some might argue the same for the Rossiya Hotel. In the

end, it is debatable whether Zaryadye Park can really be blamed for neglecting its historical past, as most damage had already been done before its construction.

Zaryadye: internal colonisation?

Sergei Medvedev, journalist and professor at the HSE, brings up the issue of internal colonialism. As mentioned at the beginning of this case study, some features of the park remind us that Russia is not ready to let go of its colonial past, which is portrayed in the restaurants for example. Medvedev's criticism ties in with this observation, as according to him, bringing all the different landscapes of Russia into one park is a form of internal colonialism. He states that those landscapes don't belong in Moscow and therefore look ridiculous next to Kremlin. According to him, Zaryadye Park resembles an amusement park, hence he would rather see a normal park on these grounds (Grozovsky et al. 2017, 95).

Olga Vendina, leading researcher in social geography, does not agree with Medvedev at all. She mentions that Moscow is such a melting pot of different people from all over Russia. Therefore, Zaryadye is a very nice gesture, as all those different people would not only feel represented in Zaryadye, but also in the city of Moscow itself. According to her, that's exactly the main function of a capital (Grozovsky et al. 2017, 100).

From this discussion the paradox on the meaning of 'represent' in Moscow's function as a concentric city, earlier discussed in the literature review, becomes evident. On the one side, Vendina stresses Moscow's function as a capital and wants it to represent everyone in the country, and therefore likes the idea of different climate zones. On the other hand, Medvedev addresses that Moscow does not look like the rest of Russia at all, so doesn't 'represent' the rest in country in that sense, and therefore does not like the idea of a park that is supposed to be a thumbnail of Russia.

Culture t(h)ree

Lastly, worth mentioning are the observations by Michal Murawski, researcher in the Slavic department of UCL (University College London), who specifically focusses on Zaryadye Park and Sobyannin's Moscow. Murawski continues to build on the principles of Kultura 1 and 2, but also on Paperny's later elaborations on whether this cyclical model will be interrupted by another phase. Paperny discusses that there could be a Kultura 3 in the post Luzhkov reality, however, he leaves the questions open. Michal Murawski, thinks that Kultura 3 might actually be the case for Zaryadye Park. According to him, Zaryadye fits both the ideas of Kultura 1 and Kultura 2, making it a hybrid of the two phases. He refers to this situation by the term Kultura t(h)ree, a wordplay referring to the word 'tree'

since Moscow under Sobyenin is characterised by improving parks in particular (Murawski 2020, 2-3). On the one hand, I agree that both Kultura 1 and 2 are present in the story of creating Zaryadye Park. The ideas by DS+R of a free park, do definitely resemble Kultura 1, while the authorities' ideas on showcasing achievements and grandeur fit the characteristics of Kultura 2. However, as has become clear from the earlier chapters of this thesis, it is disputable how much of Kultura 1 has actually been preserved in Zaryadye Park after the authorities took matter into their own hands. In my opinion, it is therefore questionable whether the *final result* of Zaryadye Park could be called a 'hybrid' of the two phases.

Conclusion

In the process of constructing Zaryadye Park, the American company Diller Scofidio +Renfro had clearly intended to create a landmark that corresponds to Western, progressive standards. Accessibility, freedom of expression and an unscripted experience were supposed to be the main pillars of DS+R's democratic Zaryadye Park. These ideas, in combination with the most modern architecture and sustainable technologies, would bring the citizens of Moscow an innovative open space based on the principles of Wild Urbanism, unique not only for Moscow, but for Russia as well. On the one hand, it appears that the Moscow city administration is willing to follow this urbanist approach. They organised a competition based on openness and tolerance, subsequently chose one of the most progressive architecture companies in the world as the winner and realised all of DS+R's plans.

On the other hand, however, it looks like the city authorities, in cooperation with the park management, are simultaneously doing the exact opposite of what DS+R had in mind. While the park management was working on the content of the park, where DS+R did not have a say in, the pavilions became focussed on State achievements, extolling patriotism and Russia's colonial past. Also, the authorities are deliberately opposing some of DS+R's key principles, like a free meandering through the park, by installing patrolling guards. In this sense, Zaryadye park becomes similar to a Soviet park of Culture and Leisure, and therefore can be seen as a recurrence of a tradition.

From this, it becomes evident that the authorities were not necessarily cooperating with DS+R in order to actually implement their key ideas into the city of Moscow, but made use of DS+R's status and ability to create world-class architecture. They used DS+R as a tool in order to make Zaryadye one of the best parks in the world. Still, the authorities are actively portraying Zaryadye as comfortable, people-oriented space on their own website, which means they do want the park to be perceived this way, and not necessarily as a park that centres around Russia's greatness.

On the receiving end, some *users* experience the park as both people-focussed and Russia-focussed, showing that apparently these two representations are not mutually exclusive in the perception of visitors (and authorities as well). However, it appears that *users* do not feel the intended

‘liberating effect’ at all. It was either overruled by feelings of patriotism and fascination for the city of Moscow or not experienced due to confusion and misunderstanding of the unique concept of the park. Neither of the *users* even touches on the presumable ‘democratisation’ that DS+R envisioned. This is partly a result of authorities actively not (or poorly) incorporating DS+R’s concept into Zaryadye. However, *users* still did not even question why DS+R’s key values including civic expression and a focus on the people *instead* of the State, were not implemented in the park. The same seems to happen with respect to discussions by experts, who were not focussed on whether the intended democratic values by DS+R were realised in any case, but were more concerned with preserving historical heritage. In the end, the concept of Zaryadye as a democratic landmark seems not only poorly realised by authorities, but is absent at the receiving end as well.

Case study 2 : VDNKh “Repurposing or reincarnation of the past?”



Figure 2. VDNKh. From Moskultura (n.d.)

Introduction

The Exhibition of the Achievements of the National Economy or VDNKh²⁰ can be found on a 325 hectare territory in the Ostankino district, in northeast part of Moscow. VDNKh is a leisure park, that consists of exhibitions, fairs, museums, while it also hosts many festivals, holidays and congresses. Besides being one of the most visited public spaces in Moscow, it is also the biggest exposition and recreational

²⁰ Russian: Выставка достижений народного хозяйства

complex in the world. In 2019, when the VDNKh celebrated its 80th anniversary, the park had more than 33 million visitors.

Founded in 1939, the exhibition was meant to showcase the economic achievements of the Soviet Union (VDNKh, n.d.). Throughout the 20th century, VDNKh was constantly portraying the changes of the Soviet Union itself: from displaying agricultural achievements during Stalinist times, to showcasing Soviet technology under Khrushchev and eventually its collapse in the 1990s. Since 2014, Sobyenin's city administration obtained custody of the exhibition and has started a wholesale renovation programme, which is in line with the efforts of making Moscow a more comfortable and liveable city (Schönle 2020, 44,46). Eventually, 3 billion roubles (\$46 million) were invested in the new chapter of the VDNKh. However, many started to accuse the exhibition of 'hipster Stalinism', questioning the actual intentions of the renovations (Filippova 2015).

VDNKh makes an interesting case study, as through history it has mimicked every period of the Soviet Union, which means it could tell us more about the direction in which the city government of Moscow is heading and what the meaning is behind their renovations. Additionally, unlike Zaryadye Park, VDNKh is a renovation instead of an entirely new project and could possibly be interpreted differently by citizens and critics, which makes an interesting opposition between the two case studies. Yet, the two projects also share similarities: they both represent a 'miniature' Russia/ Soviet Union and are situated in Moscow, that is supposed to be a thumbnail of the country itself.

Historical context and functions through the years

In 1935, the Second All-Union Congress of Collective Farmers was encouraged by the government to establish a temporary exhibition, in order to show the world that the collectivization was a big success. The exhibition, back then called 'The All-Union Agricultural Exhibition' or *VSKhV*²¹, was planned to open in 1937 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Soviet Union (Lobodanov & Zinovieva 2016, 38-39).

Vyacheslav Oltarzhevsky was appointed as the architect of the project. His assignment was to create a "wonderland full of miracles" (Lobodanov & Zinovieva 2016, 39), after which he came up with the idea to design wooden pavilions, that would demonstrate the reorganization of agriculture. Stalin however, labelled the exhibition too modest, after which it was postponed by one year. In 1938 the State Commission still did not think the designs of Oltarzhevsky suited the ideological demands, as they were not in line with the monumental style and grandeur of those times. Eventually, Oltarzhevsky

²¹ Russian: Всесоюзная сельскохозяйственная выставка

was sent to the Siberian Vorkuta (one of the most notorious forced labour camps) and his pavilions were torn down.

Sergey Chernyshev, who was one of the main architects at the time, was appointed as Oltarzhevsky's successor. Chernyshev generally followed the original plan, but made the architecture way more spectacular, incorporating art-deco designs (Lobodanov & Zinovieva 2016, 38-39). This way, the designs became more to the taste of Kultura 2. Moreover, the park became adorned with many sculptures, most famously the Worker and Kolkhoz Woman by Vera Mukhina. At the time, the exhibition consisted of 52 temple-like structures that represented the Soviet Republics, Russia's regions and various agricultural products like grain, beetroot and vegetables. The exhibition started to look like a miniature Soviet Union and in 1939, the VSKhV finally opened its doors (VDNKh, n.d.).

Visitors were often stunned when arriving at the site, immediately convinced of the prosperity of the Soviet Union and the hard labour of its citizens. However, the reality of the time was not so promising. The Stalinist terror and collectivization, which led to a nearly collapsed economy and starvation, were in stark contrast with the pavilions that had to portray a bright, communist future. The State intended to convince visitors that the hardships of these times were temporary and that an utopian reality was on its way. This incorporation of joy and cheerfulness, even in lesser times, was also characteristic for Kultura 2 (Lobodanov & Zinovieva 2016, 39-40).

Around the same time, Ivan Pyryev's cult classic *Svinarka i pastukh* (Swine-herd and Stableman, 1941) was released. The movie, which portrays a love story of two kolkhoz workers that met at the VDNKh, served as an important tool to introduce the exhibition to the masses (Vyazemtseva 2021, 72).

The park was closed during the Second World War and re-opened in 1954 after a period of reconstructions (VDNKh, n.d.). Although the VSKhV kept its former functions, the glorious victory over Nazi Germany had to be incorporated into the exhibition. Therefore, the architecture had to become even more imposing.

Vertical structures in the line of Kultura 2 started to appear. The main pavilion for example, that portrayed the victory of socialism, was completely rebuilt with a high spire (Dzhandzhugazova 2012, 94-95). The VSKhV became decorated with heroic statues, laurel garlands and Soviet emblems. Also, an entirely new entrance gate was added, resembling a classical triumph arc, which was surmounted by the tractor driver and kolkhoz woman sculpture. Most importantly, the pompous Friendship of Peoples Fountain was built, which would become an important symbol of the VSKhV. It was decorated with the statues of 16 girls, that represented the Soviet Republics, who danced around a wheat sheaf that symbolized an endless food supply. Other famous fountains include the 'Stone Flower' and the 'Golden Spike', which also served to impress visitors. In the end, controlled leisure and the manipulation of the masses, completely in accordance with the prevailing Kultura 2, remained the

main objectives of the VSKhV during the Stalinist post-war period (Lobodanov & Zinovieva 2016, 40-44).

When Khrushchev came to power, Stalin's traces were completely removed from the exhibition, pointing to a shift to *Kultura 1*. His statues were taken down and pavilions in Stalinist style were covered in concrete, while the exhibition adapted more of a modernist style (Vyazemtseva 2021, 70-73). Also, showrooms for international fairs spread around the park. This can be related to the 'spreading over borders', another attribute of *Paperny's Kultura 1*.

In 1959 the exhibition changed its name to 'The Exhibition of the Achievements of the National Economy' or *VDNKh*. Also, the pavilions were not devoted to Republics and agriculture anymore, as their focus shifted to the Soviet Union's major industries. The new pavilions focussed on, for example, physics, the oil industry, metallurgy and radio electronics (Lobodanov & Zinovieva 2016, 38, 41-42). From 1966, the Kosmos pavilion was the showpiece of the exhibition, displaying the Vostok space rocket and other achievements of the Soviet space programme (Stephenson & Danilova 2010, 33).

Post-Perestroika, the state stopped financing the exhibition, after which an uneasy adaptation to the new world started. Also, Yeltsin renamed the exhibition to 'All Russian Exhibition Centre' or *VVC*²². The park management struggled with the upkeep of various pavilions and the territory fell into decline. Therefore, they started renting out the pavilions to traders, turning the exhibition into a ramshackle flea market full of uncontrolled commercial activity. This way, the park's *strategy* changed completely, as it obtained very different functions than originally envisioned. At *VVC*, Muscovites could buy anything, ranging from cars to electronics from countries all over the world (Forest & Johnson 2002, 535). Shuttle traders, who brought their goods from China and Poland, were seen all over the exhibition (Lobodanov & Zinovieva 2016, 42-43). The horizontality and freedom of *Kultura 1* were omnipresent. In the course of the 1990s, the Soviet names of the pavilions were removed and replaced by numbers, while they acquired new functions (Forest & Johnson 2002, 535). The Space pavilion for example, turned into a shop for garden equipment, while the central Stalinist pavilion was refurbished into a museum for the gifts for Leonid Yakubovich, that had been gifted to him in the programme *Field of Fortune* (Stephenson & Danilova 2010, 34). Now, the park was dedicated to shopping and eating. The exhibition was no longer aspiring to portray a bright future, while the pavilions completely lost their economic and ideological purposes.

Repurposing under Sobyanin

After a period of decay, the exhibition became the undertaking of Moscow's city authorities in 2013. From then, mayor Sobyanin took the lead and initiated a wholesale renovation programme, in line

²² Russian: Всероссийский выставочный центр

with his ongoing *blagoustroistvo* campaigns. The exhibition's designation was changed back to VDNKh and according to its official website, the decision was supported by 90% of the voters in an online poll (VDNKh, n.d.) As stated by the city administration, the renovations were aimed to transform the VDNKh territory into a comfortable space. Additionally, they were meant to make the exhibition one of the most prominent tourist attractions in the city of Moscow (Mos.ru 2014-1). However, communist propaganda, monumental architecture and other Stalinist traces were still omnipresent across the VDNKh territory (Schönle 2016). It therefore remained disputable to which extent it was possible to repurpose an exhibition, that used to be one of the most patriotic landmarks of the Soviet Union.

In an interview, Moscow's chief architect Sergey Kuznetsov, elaborates on this topic and says the following:

"For me, the architectural identity of the Stalinist period is not the same thing as the ideology associated with that period. (...) Our architecture is part of our story and we need to preserve it. (...) The basic ideology of this development is for it to be a scientific place and an interesting public space with entertainment features. The development is very peaceful and useful for society, and has nothing to do with imperialistic expansion and other such unpleasant things" (House 2015).

Anna Kovalevskaya, the Director of the Department of Territorial Development, adds that the park management envisions the new VDNKh as a "demonstration of the individual and collective achievements of human beings" (Schönle 2016). And lastly, according to Ilya Oskolkov-Tsentsiper, who was one of the main architects during the regeneration programme, the Stalinist layer of the park should not be hidden, as it is part of Russia's history, but shouldn't be aestheticized either (Schönle 2016).

So, from the above quotations it appears that according to the city administration and architects related to the project, the new meaning of VDNKh will have nothing to do with Stalin's ideology. The Stalinist pavilions will indeed remain a part of the park, for the purpose of conserving the architectural heritage, but their content will be re-branded. Also, it becomes clear that the VDNKh will preserve some former functions, as providing leisure and education, but in its new form will also focus on comfort and the people's interests.

Interestingly, the director of Moscow's cultural department, Sergey Kapkov, declared the following about the park:

"We have chosen to return the historical designation of the VDNKh, because we are planning to create a park dedicated to certain industrial achievements of the Russian Federation. The ideas of the

previous architects will be carried on”²³ (Vedomosti 2014). Additionally, at a meeting with the city council, Sobyenin stated the following: “The historical function of the VDNKh will be preserved”²⁴ (Mos.ru 2014-2). From this, it appears that the city authorities are not planning to *repurpose* the VDNKh, but more likely to *revive* the Stalinist version of the exhibition. A historical VDNKh would mean a focus on exuding might, propagating State achievements and extolling pride and patriotism, which would be very contradictory to the above mentioned statements by Kuznetsov and Kovalevskaya, who claimed the VDNKh would not be related to Stalinist ideology in any way. Kapkov’s words also contradict earlier statements by the authorities, that claimed a repurposing of VDNKh would imply a creation of a more comfortable space (Mos.ru 2014-1). In order to determine to which extent the meaning of Sobyenin’s VDNKh can be linked to its Stalinist predecessor, the park’s further developments will be analysed in the next two chapters.

First round of renovations

The first round of VDNKh’s overhaul, concerned cleaning up the post-Perestroika legacy. Lawns were improved, asphalt and new footpaths were added and a huge amount of waste was disposed of. The botanical garden that borders the VDNKh territory, was rehabilitated and the park was redecorated with new flower beds and curbs. Also, sport facilities and bicycle lanes were installed. Due to safety reasons, most of the pavilions were immediately renovated, as they were in a state of near collapse. Illegal kiosks and cafes from the 1990s were removed and replaced by glitzy food courts and cafés (Mos.ru 2014-1). This way, the VDNKh was definitely starting to live up to its potential of becoming one of the most popular and comfortable destinations of Sobyenin’s Moscow.

Also, some major attractions started to appear. In 2014 for example, Europe’s largest ice rink opened at the territory. However, it was very much criticized for its budget of 784.5 million roubles (\$12 million) (Fillippova 2015). Also, the *Moskvarium* was established in 2015, replacing the ‘Shipbuilding’ pavilion. The enormous aquarium, that is also a research centre on marine biology, is immensely popular among families due to its aquatic shows. However, it was also heavily criticised for the improper treatment of animals (Lobodanov & Zinovieva 2016, 45). In any way, the park management decided to start the overhaul with some major attractions, certainly to leave a great impressions on visitors of the park.

²³ Original Russian text: “Выставка достижений народного хозяйства” (ВДНХ), потому что мы планируем сделать парк, посвященный успехам Российской Федерации в определенных промышленных отраслях, и это продолжение той истории, которую планировали архитекторы прошлого.”

²⁴ Original Russian text: “будет сохранён исторический функционал ВДНХ.”

VDNKh after 2015: reviving the past

After the initial refurbishment of the VDNKh territory, the city government started to focus on the content of the pavilions, while also adding other new sights to the park. From the previous chapter, it became evident that the VDNKh has definitely become a more comfortable, pedestrian-friendly open space. However, this chapter aims to show that at the same time, the VDNKh started to show more and more resemblances with its Stalinist predecessor over the years. As the VDNKh is the biggest expository centre in the world, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss all the renovations that have taken place, hence a selection has been made based on the relevance for this thesis. This section will focus on the period of 2015-2019, as most of the renovations have occurred within this timeframe.

First of all, the patriotic feeling is still very much present in the re-branded VDNKh. For example, in 2015 the 'My History Park' opened at the exhibition, and as the name implies, it reflects a contradictory character. The museum consists of several multimedia exhibitions, focussing on the rise and unification of the Russian state. It covers the span of Russia's whole history with a very slanted approach, focussing on its rulers and the primary role of the Orthodox church. This is all supported by various quotations of politicians, historians and Russia's greatest poet Alexander Pushkin (Schönle 2016). It even comprises of a section where Stalin's achievements are praised (Kishkovsky 2016). This attraction is completely focussed on glorifying Russia's history, and is therefore very patriotic. Ilya Tsentsiper, the earlier mentioned architect that had worked on VDNKh's renovations plans, even said that he despised the ideological character of this particular exhibition and that it does not reflect the visions of the Moscow government (Schönle 2016). However, it remains questionable why this exhibition was incorporated into the VDNKh at all, if apparently it does not fit the 'non-ideological' character of the park. The My History Park ties in with a wider trend of creating a specific, one-sided narrative of Russian history by the Russian Government, that has been prevalent under Putin (Kolesnikov 2017). In this way, this exhibition also resembles the earlier mentioned 'Time Machine' attraction in Zaryadye Park, to which a similar situation applies.

A further remarkable development concerns Russia's relation to its colonial past. The pavilion of Kazakhstan for example, had been functioning as a high tech building before Sobyenin's reconstructions. However, from 2014 a process to restore the historical function of the pavilion has been initiated. Now, it shows the economic achievements of Kazakhstan and includes a restaurant featuring national dishes, and therefore it strongly resembles its Stalinist predecessor. More pavilions, like those of Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, experienced the same fate (Mos.ru 2014-2). Similarly, a whole separate restaurant opened in VDNKh, focussing on the cuisine of the former Soviet Republics, while being completely decorated in a Stalinist retro-chic setting (Schönle 2020, 54). Additionally, in 2019,

when the VDNKh solemnly celebrated its 80-year anniversary, the People's fountain was proudly presented, now restored to its former glory. This fountain, described earlier, was a symbol of the Friendship of the Soviet Republics (VDNKh, n.d.). So apparently, Russia is not ready to let go of its colonial past at all, a tendency that had been proven to exist in Zaryadye Park as well. VDNKh is still emphasising the friendship of the brotherly nations of the Soviet Union, which was also one of the main characteristics of the Stalinist version of the park.

Not only the Republic's pavilions have made a return to the 're-branded' VDNKh, also pavilions that focussed on Soviet achievements have made their way back. In 2018, the 'Kosmos' pavilion was rebranded into 'the centre of Cosmonautics and Aviation'. According to the pavilion's own website, an enormous exposition of Russia's achievements in space can be found here. However, a substantial part of the achievements concerns the 20th century, meaning the pavilion is still very much focused on Soviet achievements as well. Although the pavilion has been upgraded, now making use of new technologies, including a whole 5D experience of the Cosmic sphere, the actual purpose of the pavilion has not changed at all (Cosmos, n.d.). Additionally, an exhibit of the shuttle 'Buran' has been transported to the VDNKh territory from the Gorky park. This was one of the most famous Soviet space shuttles, another achievement in the history of Soviet space (Mos.ru 2014-2). Furthermore, the Soviet 'Oil' pavilion has been complemented by an additional educational centre, focussed on more recent Russian achievements in the oil industry, which is one of its leading economic sectors (VDNKh, n.d.). So the statements of the Moscow official Anna Kovalevskaya, that the new content of the exhibitions will focus exclusively on the achievements of the people, and certainly not on the achievements of the State, do not seem to be true at all.

Lastly, the park management is also restoring the exterior of the historical pavilions. According to the official website of the VDNKh: "All the renovations were being conducted in strict accordance with the 1954 project"²⁵ (VDNKh, n.d.). This means, the pavilions are restored back to their monumental grandeur of the 1950s. The park management could have opted for other periods of the VDNKh, as Krushchev's modernist period, but they specifically chose the year of 1954. This however, is exactly the year of the glorious re-opening after the Second World War, which was followed by the most extravagant period of VDNKh's history.

All in all, it appears that the new VDNKh shows characteristics of an urbanist initiative, but at the same time is certainly not ready to let go of its glorious past (and present). It is therefore, interesting to look at how the park is perceived by different groups of people and whether one of these features is more prevalent according to them. Hence, the next chapter will focus on the press reception of the park.

²⁵ Original Russian text: "Все работы проводились в строгом соответствии с проектом 1954 года."

VDNKh & press reception

When looking at the coverage by the pro-Kremlin *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, it becomes clear that the newspaper and the city authorities speak exactly with one voice, which also applied to the newspaper's coverage of Zaryadye Park. On the one hand, the newspaper refers to the VDNKh as a symbol of Sobyenin's renovations and underlines its prominent touristic function. The newspaper is extolling the park, by stressing how beautiful it has turned out and how pleased visitors are with all the new features. On the other hand, KP also very much emphasises the exhibition's successful past and states the following:

"Today, the renewed VDNKh revives the best traditions of its glorious past. This does not only mean being in line with the times, but also concerns creating relevant cultural and educational content, while also following entertainment and exposition trends. Therefore, the VDNKh is rightfully called one of the largest world-class destinations"²⁶ (Mikhailova 2019).

From this, it appears that KP certainly sees the VDNKh as a landmark with many contemporary elements, such as expositions on the newest trends, pavilions that have to do with the newest technological advancements and other features that are relevant for the present times, which have nothing to do with the VDNKh's Stalinist past. Paradoxically, this is exactly why the park becomes even more comparable to its Stalinist predecessor, as appears from the above quotation. VDNKh may move on from its past by adapting the most modern features, but by keeping up with trends, extolling the newest technological advancements and focussing on a bright future, the re-branded VDNKh will do exactly what its Soviet version has been doing. If the re-branded VDNKh would not do any of this, it would just comprise of some Stalinist-looking pavilions, that were linked to the past, but had nothing to do with the present world and would not be able to transform the new VDNKh into a world class destination. So apparently, VDNKh comprises not only of elements that could be directly linked to its Stalinist past, which were discussed in the previous chapter, but its desire to follow modern trends and being relevant on the world stage, are also linked to traditions of the past.

Other newspapers, like *Kommersant*, are primarily concerned with the countless number of new attractions at the VDNKh. An attraction that was frequently featured in its reports, is a Ferris wheel

²⁶ Original Russian text: "Обновленная ВДНХ сегодня возрождает лучшие традиции своего славного прошлого. Это значит не просто всегда быть созвучной времени, но и формировать актуальные культурные, образовательные, развлекательные и выставочные тренды, по праву называться одной из крупнейших городских площадок мирового уровня."

intended to be the tallest of Europe. This is yet another attraction with great ambitions, along the lines of the earlier mentioned ice skating rink and Moskvarium. Yet, the attraction was planned to open in the middle of the park, resulting into many citizens protesting against the construction, as it would appear right in front of their homes. According to the article, Ferris wheels are never constructed in such vicinity of residential buildings (Rozhkova 2019). Still, the city authorities decided to realise the plan, which is quite contradictory for a park that should focus on the 'comfort' of Moscow's citizens. Apparently, delivering world class attractions is a higher priority.

Similarly to the coverage of Zaryadye Park, other criticisms or actual experiences of the VDNKh are underexposed in the Russian media. Therefore, I will elaborate more on citizens' experiences and the opinion of critics in the next chapters.

Experiences by visitors: a case of nostalgia

For this chapter, the same methodological considerations are taken into accounts as for the case study on Zaryadye Park, therefore the material is also derived from <https://www.livejournal.com/>. Blogs were selected from 2019, as most of the renovations were carried out by then, while visitors had sufficient time to form an overall opinion on the re-branded VDNKh.

When looking through the various blogs on the website, it becomes evident that almost every blogger is positive about the renovations of the VDNKh. For example, Anna writes about how comfortable the renovated VDNKh has become. Free parking, new information boards, plenty of places to eat and new children's activities. In this sense, the authorities *strategy* of creating a comfortable park has certainly succeeded, as it is very appreciated by *users* like Anna (Annastorm 2019-1).

A few months later, Anna visits the VDNKh with a friend during the park's 80th anniversary festivities. She describes how she heard other visitors exchange stories about the Soviet VDNKh, but underlines that she only remembers the VDNKh of the 1990s, which she visited as a child. So apparently, she has no (active) memories of the preceding Soviet period, as she was probably very young. Then, Anna mentions that due to the renovations of the Stalinist pavilions and fountains, the refurbished VDNKh makes her feel "proud and excited" (Annastorm 2019-2). This seems like a case of 'phantom nostalgia' (Narinskaya 2014), which means Anna is feeling proud of a country she has never actively experienced.

In another blog, Olga writes about her happy memories of the VDNKh during the Soviet period, while she despises the ramshackle market it had become in the 1990s. About her visit after Sobyannin's renovations, she writes: " At VDNKh, you feel the urge to straighten your shoulders, lift up your head ,

and feel the spirit of a great country, that is no longer there ”²⁷ (grushenka 2019-2). Here, Kirschenbaum’s metaphor of a palimpsest is clearly illustrated, as Olga has memories of an earlier layer of meaning of the VDNKh. Although she definitely experiences the greatness and patriotism of the park, due to her memories of the Soviet VDNKh, she links the re-branded VDNKh to her old impressions. Therefore, the park feels more like a time machine or memorial of Soviet times , as she does not project this patriotism to the present day Russia. Apparently, the Soviet elements of the park are so omnipresent, that users of the park are feeling patriotic for the Soviet Union, but not so much for Russia itself. In this sense, the authorities *strategy* may not have worked out entirely: Moscow official Kapkov had stated that the park should focus on Russia’s achievements in its re-branded form, however this does not seem to resonate with some *users* that have earlier memories of the park, but also not with users who don’t have these recollections.

Critics’ opinions: preserving and remembering the past

Although visitors don’t seem to be dissatisfied with the park at all, the VDNKh faced quite some criticism concerning architectural preservation. Especially, the restoring of the Stalinist exterior of the pavilions was questioned by experts. According to Archnadzor, a Russian organisation that is concerned with the historical preservation of Moscow, the renovations are carried out without any consideration for the historical past.

As mentioned at the beginning of this case study, during the Thaw the pompous Stalinist pavilions were covered in concrete in order to conceal their monumental exterior. This happened for example, to the ‘Volga Region’ and the ‘Azerbaijan’ pavilions, that were dedicated to ‘Radio electronics’ and ‘Computing’ under Khrushchev, while they acquired new modernist exteriors.

During Sobyenin’s renovations, these modernist facades were removed, in order to retain the Stalinist layers that had been preserved underneath the concrete. By doing this, the city government is removing heritage of the 1960s, in order to retain the more beautiful and glorious architecture of the 1950s. According to Archnadzor, the 1960s belong to an important layer of the exhibition’s history, for example due to its achievements in space, and therefore should not be ignored. Hence, Archandzor is criticizing the city administration for not listening to preservationists and destroying historical sites, and compares the situation to the rigorous rebuilding of Moscow under Stalin. The scale of these processes is not comparable, however, according to the organisation this could only be the beginning

²⁷ Original Russian text: “Здесь хочется расправить плечи, поднять повыше голову и почувствовать дух великой страны, которой больше нет.”

(Mikhailov 2014). So in the end, the re-branded VDNKh does not only seem to be comparable to its Stalinist predecessor in terms of attractions, exterior and overall goals, but also the *way of reconstructing* seems to resemble Soviet times according to critics.

Another criticism is related to the remembrance of the Stalinist past. Architecture historian Marina Khrustaleva stresses that the renovated VDNKh is only focussed on its glorious history. However, some people may be remembering the state terror of Stalinist times, the collectivization or even the imprisoning of the original architect of the project (Matseiko 2016). According to Ilya Oskolkov-Tsentsiper, one of the architects of the recent renovations, the new VDNKh should become a place for dialogue, which would make it possible to also discuss the hardships of Stalinist times (Schönle 2016). It turns out however, that the less promising side of this period is not represented in the park at all. Despite some intentions to do otherwise, the city government has decided to selectively preserve the most glorious and imperial layers of the VDNKh history.

Conclusion

Since obtaining custody over the VDNKh, the city government has intended to completely clear out the legacy of the 1990s, while striving to make the park a comfortable tourist attraction, in line with Sobyanin's ongoing campaigns. The VDNKh is also marketed as such a project, as multiple officials and architects stress that the park would have nothing to do with its past ideologies, and Stalinist pavilions would only be restored for the sake of architectural preservation. However, at the same time the city authorities are actively re-establishing the initial functions of the VDNKh and by this, reviving the past.

This becomes apparent from the content of pavilions and attractions, that focus on showcasing achievements, embracing the friendship of peoples and arousing patriotic feelings. Also, the authorities are doing everything to transform the VDNKh into a world-class destination, which is also a traditional goal of the Stalinist exposition. It seems that in terms of new attractions, *the bigger the better*, has been the motto of the city authorities. At the same time, attractions like the Ferris wheel and Moskvarium are not only prioritised over the comfort of residents, but of animals as well. In combination with the demolishing of the post-Perestroika legacy, the 're-branded' VDNKh does fit the characteristics of Kultura 2 in many respects.

Furthermore, the authorities seem to be selective in terms of which Western, urbanist trends to follow. They choose to construct bicycle lanes and to transform the territory into a pedestrian-friendly area, resulting into a comfortable destination. However, according to critics there is no place for open discussions about the Stalinist past, while there is also a lack of consultation regarding the preservation of different layers of meaning of the VDNKh. In this sense, the park does not fit the concept of a democratic open space at all. Even though initially, architects like Ilya Tsentsiper openly

advocated for more civic expression, these initiatives appeared to be ignored by the city authorities, proving that openness and consultation do not fit the definition of the re-branded VDNKh.

On the receiving end, *users* seem to appreciate the comfortable side of the park and that the ramshackle flea market is gone for good. Yet, VDNKh is arousing feelings of pride and/or nostalgic sentiments, which seem to be so prevalent, that even visitors who have no active memories of the Soviet Union, instantly become patriotic. This is mainly how visitors indulge themselves in the park, it seems they don't really bother whether an 'actual' repurposing has taken place or whether the exhibition has become a site of civil expression.

In the end, it seems that it is questionable whether the changes the VDNKh is going through could be referred to as a 're-branding' or a 'repurposing'. First, it appears that the 'repurposing' is with respect to the 1990s, but the place still shares many similarities with an earlier, Stalinist version, which means it could not really be called an actual repurposing. Second, the authorities stress that the repurposing also refers to the focus on Russian achievements, instead of Soviet achievements. However, it appears that there are not enough 'Russian achievements' yet, which means the park is still centred around Soviet achievements and is therefore not repurposed. In the end, the 'repurposing' of the VDNKh remains a very questionable designation for the ongoing events.

Conclusions/Research findings

All in all, Zaryadye Park and the VDNKh appear to be very similar, despite the fact that Zaryadye is an entirely new project and VDNKh, a renovation. Both intent to contribute to a convenient, European city that Sobyanin is creating and are framed by the authorities as a symbol of these changes. The projects are not only meant to become major tourist attractions in Russia, but also intent to make Moscow compete with global cities like London and New York. Both Zaryadye and the VDNKh were initiated as very innovative projects, Zaryadye even more because of cooperating with some of the most progressive American architects. In this sense, Moscow under Sobyanin is showing characteristics of an *eccentric* city.

However, in the course of time, the projects appear to resonate more with past traditions. Both parks consist of pavilions and attractions that are focused on Russia's or Soviet achievements, the country's colonial past and patriotism. Additionally, it appears that during both projects, the authorities were deliberately opposing or ignoring the architects that advocated for less patriotic or ideological elements. Therefore, the case studies show that Moscow under Sobyanin is certainly not ready to let go of its imperial past. Like this, the initial framing of Zaryadye and VDNKh as comfortable, people-focussed spaces seems a distraction from the actual goals of the authorities.

Also, Zaryadye Park and VDNKh are strongly similar in the sense that they portray a miniature Russia, which is supposed to be a representation of the whole country. Also, Zaryadye is situated in the actual centre of Moscow, while the VDNKh seems to create a new centre. The two projects become in a way, concentric entities in the city of Moscow and therefore very much strengthen the *concentric* status of the capital itself. However, the paradox on the meaning of 'represent' becomes evident from this situation. Huge amounts of money were invested in these projects, while at the same time other Russian cities get nearly not as much. Additionally, due to the contribution of the projects in making Moscow a global city, the capital is becoming more and more distinct from other Russian cities. So the VDNKh and Zaryadye Park represent miniature Russia's, which would also potentially make Moscow more representative of Russia, but paradoxically they are making Moscow look less representative of the country.

From the case studies it becomes evident what the status of Moscow is under mayor Sobyenin. Sobyenin's Moscow, as has been shown, does share characteristics with both an *eccentric* and *concentric city*, but selectively chooses which features to adapt. Therefore, contemporary Moscow can not exclusively be linked to one of these representations (although it leans more to a concentric city), which means urban development under Sobyenin acquires a unique form.

In Sobyenin's Moscow, Zaryadye Park and the VDNKh do still resemble features of Western urban development trends. They are both hip, green spaces, which are definitely enjoyed by citizens and make an addition to the city of Moscow. In this sense, the projects can certainly be seen as people-oriented and innovative. However, in Sobyenin's Moscow, the city government is selectively choosing which characteristics and elements of Western urban developments trends to adapt, while ignoring other key concepts, that include the freedom of expression, a focus on citizen's achievements instead of state achievements, and an unscripted experience. Authorities are framing urban development projects in a way they think will be good for the citizens of Moscow, which is by including patriotic sentiments or links to Russia's colonial past. In the interpretation of the city authorities, this is how a modern, people-focussed urban development is realised. Therefore, they also frame these initiatives as people-oriented in their narratives, while this is actually a misleading sugar coating according to Western urban development standards. It becomes apparent that *users* of both the VDNKh and Zaryadye either do not seem to realise that the projects are actually state-focused or do even very much like the patriotic sentiments and the expressions of a glorious Russia. The nostalgic element of the VDNKh proved to be a positive contribution and therefore it seemed more appreciated by visitors than Zaryadye Park.

In the end, when it comes to the authorities, it seems like there will be a continuation of incorporating Russia's past in Moscow's future development, however, from the way the projects are appropriated by users, this specific tradition-focussed approach does not seem to be a big issue for now.

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