Revolution, Counterrevolution, Urban Redevelopment – 'New Moscow 2'. The Masterplan of 1935

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The Russian approach to urban planning has always differed radically from the European. In Russia, the idea of urban development has usually been identified with a quest for ideal forms of organisation of urban space and has accordingly tended to express clear and decisive planning intentions. This is especially evident in the history of the development of Moscow in the 20th century. Urban planning in Moscow constantly turns to the idea of foreseeing the future and designing the ideal city. And there is good reason for this. History has predetermined the ideology that has shaped Moscow's development.

Following the October Revolution of 1917, Moscow became the capital of the young Soviet State, taking upon itself the role of ideological centre and laboratory for experiments in the formation of a new society and the quest for new forms of housing. It was this period that defined the ideal goal of building the 'bright future', which in turn determined the direction to be taken by urban planning over this entire period. The 20th century saw a succession of concepts for building 'New Moscow' – whether they were ideas by individual architects or plans developed over years by planning institutions.

This involved designing radically new socialist forms of settlement as counterbalance to the bourgeois city. Such forms were the garden city, the satellite city, the commune city, the linear city, and the capital city, consisting of an agglomeration of satellite cities and so on. Radical ideas dreamt up by avant-garde thinkers in the Soviet Union and the West were not realised, but nevertheless had a strong influence on the international movement in architecture.

The technical and scientific revolution and the social shocks at the beginning of the 20th century led to a radical transformation of all aspects of life in Russia. The Revolution of 1917 conjured up social-economic and political utopias affecting all fields of life, resulting in the banning of private ownership of land and real estate, of manufacturing plants, natural resources, etc, and in the establishment of a new communist society and the world's first Soviet state.

The urban-planning utopias of this time were the result of social, economic, and political ideals and expectations. Lenin had moved the Soviet government to Moscow; in 1918 the city became the capital of Russia and in 1922 of the USSR – the country's political, industrial, and cultural centre. This had implications for the way in which Moscow changed and developed, but also for the ideological content of its architecture.

The 1920s saw the appearance of a whole series of projects aimed at totally reconstructing Moscow in order to turn it into the ideal communist city. Ideas for communist forms of settlement were based on a faith in the power of technical science and rational organisation of space. Their aim was to radically change the existing situation and thus transform Moscow into the 'capital city of the victorious proletariat'. As early as 1918, this policy had produced an example of a qualitatively new approach to urban development. B. Sakkulin's enfluentogram was Russia's first regional urban-planning project based on group socialist settlement. The 'Large Moscow' project developed by a team led by Sergey Shestakov in 1926 proposed enlarging the capital and surrounding it with two rings of satellite cities.

The rapid development of transport, the beginning of mass construction of housing, and the use of new constructions and materials opened up endless opportunities for urban planners. The 1932 competition for proposals for the General Plan for Moscow was a response to a profound public need in the country of the Soviets, and it gave rise to some extremely radical ideas. Architect Nikolay Ladovsky proposed interrupting the annular structure in one spot and giving Moscow the freedom to grow, thus turning the city into a parabola. The project by the VOPRA team was an attempt to fit a radial/annular city into a rectangular grid of main roads. Le Corbusier proposed building a new Moscow with an orthogonal layout instead of the existing irregular city. Hans Meyer (Germany) designed a system of ten specialised satellite cities arranged around Moscow as their nucleus. His compatriot, architect Kurt Meyer, proposed turning Moscow into a stellar city that would symbolise democracy. The competition intensified the debate developing during the first Five-Year-Plan between urbanists and disurbanists.

The housing problem was so urgent that it had to be prioritised. In 1918 private ownership of real estate was annulled. Workers and soldiers and their families were given rooms in large apartments that had previously been owned by the bourgeoisie. This came to be known as 'communal apartments'. In the 1920s a start was made on a state programme for the construction of housing; apartments were given to those in need on a rental basis. Residential districts for workers began to appear, usually in the vicinity of factories. At the same time, new and experimental types of housing and construction technology were developed. The best architects designed 'commune houses'. These were idealistic ways of organising the lives of workers with an emphasis on communal living and collective recrea-

tion. Construction costs were to be reduced by minimising the amount of space allocated to each member of the house. Considerable effort went into designing residential units that would make optimum use of minimal amounts of space. Subsequently, these experiments shaped the development of housing all over the world.

One of the tools used in organising people's lives was the construction of public housing and provision of services that allowed workers more time for work and self-education. This was the age that saw the appearance of kindergartens, crèches, and a new type of catering service, the kitchen factory, which could serve up to 1500 people simultaneously. At the same time, architects tackled the task of organising workers' recreation. The country switched to a seven-hour working day and passive leisure became increasingly unpopular. Theatres and concert halls were now seen as remnants of the old bourgeois way of life. For all-round development of people's personalities, a new type of building, the workers' club, was invented. This was intended to provide a full range of diverse types of cultural activity capable of comprehensively developing the personality. The 'new type of club' became a subject for extensive public debate. A radical expression of this discussion was the project of Ivan Leonidov, who proposed a 'system for organising cultural activities for workers' as a new lifestyle. Sport had always been an activity for the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie; now a state programme for bringing it to the Soviet masses was announced. The first Soviet sports stadiums were built.

In architecture, Constructivism came to the fore. This style's victory in a fierce battle with traditional architecture was marked by the competition to design the Palace of Labour in Moscow. A project by the Vesnin brothers won this competition. Pride in the revolutionary transformation of society required the construction of prestigious buildings that would be seen as symbolically affirming the new socialist values. Avant-garde experiments of this time were aimed not only at resolving social problems, but also at providing symbols of the construction of a new world. Tatlin's Tower, a design inspired by the First Congress of the Third Communist International (held in Moscow in 1919) became a symbol of the age, while Shabolov's Radio Tower symbolised Soviet progress in science and technology (due to the difficult economic situation following the Revolution, it was built to only half its planned height). The Soviet authorities were intent on displaying to both their own citizens and the rest of the world the first successes and achievements of their rule. The mid-1920s saw the construction of the National Agricultural and Craft/Industrial Exhibition on the site of an old rubbish tip (the grounds of the exhibition later became the Park of Culture and Recreation). Russia's first planetarium, crowned by the largest dome in Europe, displayed the achievements of Soviet science and 'the expansion of the world revolution into the cosmos'.

As Soviet rule gathered strength and the political situation changed, the hyper-project 'New Moscow' – aimed at creating an ideal capital city for the world's proletariat and involving many innovations and much successful experimentation in approaches to social, economic, and architectural aspects of urban development – began to change its shape. The ideology remained the same – i.e. to 'build the bright future' – but it now had a different image and different means of implementation.

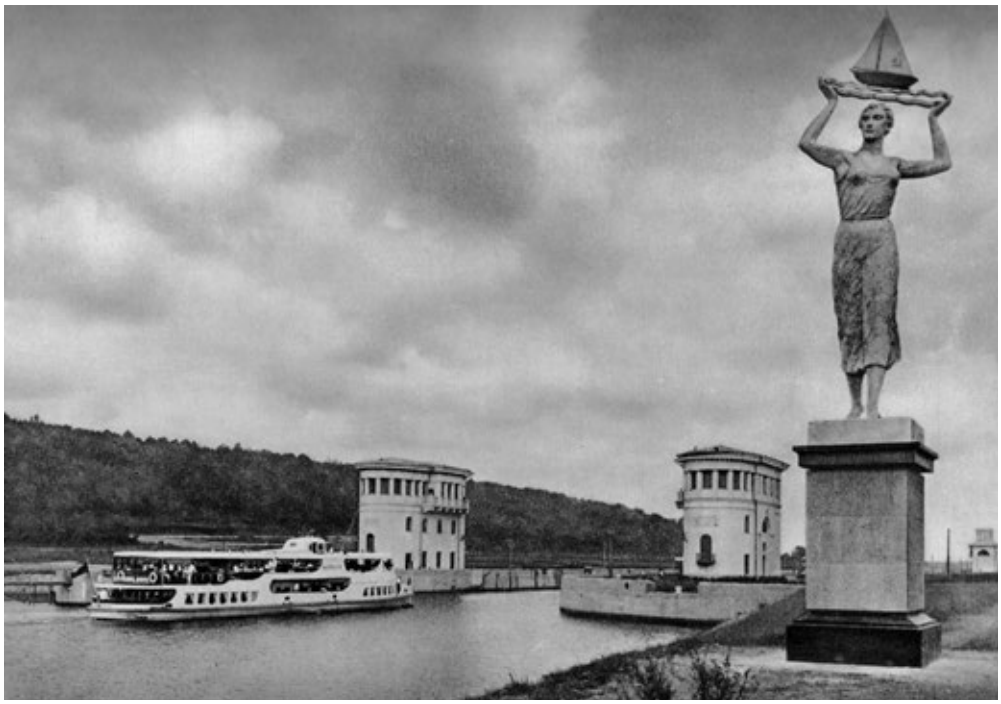
The totalitarian idea of the 'Capital of the Empire of Victorious Socialism' which accompanied the severe centralisation of power that had taken place by the mid-1930s, was affirmed in the process of Moscow's transformation into a monumental art project, a collection of ensembles in a grand style. If 'New Moscow' involved the creation of a new reality, 'New Moscow 2' was intended to depict and convey through artistic means the ideas of imperial prosperity and the strength of the Soviet state.

During this period, the USSR demonstrated to the rest of the world its aspiration to take the lead in all spheres of life. Chelyuskin made his expedition to the North Pole. Chkalov flew over the Arctic from Russia to America. Korolev developed a theory for conquering the cosmos. These achievements were intended to serve as proof of the power of the young Soviet state.

The New General Plan for the Redevelopment of Moscow adopted in 1935 called for a more than 100 percent increase in the city's physical size and for considerable growth in the number of its inhabitants. The plan was based on the idea of 'correcting' the city's original layout and turning it into an ideal radial/annular structure. Unlike the radical ideas of the 1920s, the Stalinist concept of the city did not deny the Moscow that actually existed at the time. However, it was embodied in specific monumental projects that shared a 'grand style'. The construction of the Palace of Soviets and of the Moscow metro; the creation of a new system of main streets to serve as the city's façade; and the construction of embankments and new bridges, a central park, and district parks: all this was intended to turn Moscow into an ideal city that would show the world the advantages of the socialist system and the prosperity and strength of the USSR. 'New Moscow 2' began with the pursuit of a strict state policy that called for supervision of all fields of life, including art and architecture. As the Party and the Soviet Government set course for a revival of classical heritage, the advances made by the avant-garde were depicted as a wrong turning.

In spite of the lack of a developed construction industry and the limited funding available, the New General Plan was implemented with success. Moscow acquired a new face and the grandeur of a capital city. There was a very rapid improvement in the country's infrastructure: the construction of the Moskva-Volga Canal made Moscow a port with links to five seas and solved the problems of the city's water supply (Figs. 1 – 4). Ten new bridges were built over the River Moskva, and a river port was constructed. The city's railway system was at the time one of the best in Europe in terms of passenger and freight capacity. By the end of the 1930s, Moscow was second only to New

Figs. 1–4: The Moskva-Volga Canal made Moscow a port with links to five seas



York for the power of its heating systems. Air transport was also developing fast. The first airport in the Moscow region was built before World War II. In 1935, the first line of the Moscow metro, the city's main transport system, came into operation. Considerable effort was put into developing the road network. Ulitsa Gor'kogo and the Sadovoe Kol'tso in the city centre were widened (Figs. 5 – 6); new main roads and thoroughfares were built; the tramline network was expanded; and trolleybus routes were constructed.

Pre-World-War-II housing was directly linked with the construction of main roads and the creation of new embankments along the river. Residential buildings served as facades that gave the city a beautiful 'face'. And even when housing was in short supply during the post-war crisis, the construction of smart residential complexes continued. The inconvenient interior layouts of these houses were compensated for by their well-designed architectural form and the rich décor on their facades. Apartments in such buildings were given to citizens who had performed services to the state, while the bulk of the population continued to jostle each other in communal apartments and basements.

Social services for the ordinary populace started to fall behind. A consequence of the Statute on the Elimination of Private Trade (1931) was the construction of large state grocery shops, supermarkets, and farmer's markets. Moscow acquired its first smart hotels with fine restaurants. At

Figs. 5–6: The road network was developed: Ulitsa Gor'kogo and the Sadovoe kol'tso were widened

the same time, though, there was a clear deficit of educational and children's institutions and small retail outlets.

The emphasis switched once more to classic varieties of recreation. Theatres and concert halls, libraries and museums were built as 'temples to culture'. The clubs of the 1920s gave way to Palaces of Culture with large auditoria for holding shows and meetings. Physical education and sport were given state backing. Parades of fitness enthusiasts were held on Red Square.

The Party decided to pursue industrialisation. As the development of industry intensified, there was a large increase in the total area of land used for manufacturing, especially in eastern and south-eastern districts of the city. Factories built at this time included a car factory, Kalibr, and Frezer. Extensive industrial zones took shape in the Moscow region. In terms of architecture and art, 'New Moscow 2' stood for a grand style based on the assimilation of the classical heritage. The unique public buildings of the time may be read as symbols. Their purpose was to broadcast to the entire world images of imperial power, world leadership, everlastingness, and immortality. The University was built as a 'temple of science' (Fig. 7); the Lenin Library as a sanctuary of world knowledge; and the Moskva Hotel as a symbol of hospitality on a capital scale. Here the emphasis was on form; functionality and economics took a back seat. The Red Army Theatre is stellar in shape; its theatrical functions are 'squeezed' into a magical mould. Detsky Mir is a children's shop writ large in monumental forms. And the ring of high-rise buildings erected at this time had the sole purpose of forming a silhouette fit for a capital city. The function of these skyscrapers was determined during the final stages of design and 'bundled' into a prepared form. Architecture served to illustrate a myth about the advantages and attainments of socialism, and to form a new state version of the sacred.

The most impressive supersize projects of the time were: the VDNKh (Exhibition of the Attainments of the People's Economy), an exhibition designed as a utopian city of the future (Figs. 8 – 9); the Moscow metro, an ideal city located underground; and the design for the Palace of the Soviets (Fig. 10), which was to be a 'Temple to Communism' of all ages and nations. The latter project was never implemented due to the war, but it nevertheless served as a symbol of Moscow and the USSR over the course of many years. The country's totalitarian government believed that monumental projects of this kind would serve as material proof of the attainability of the utopian ideal. 'New Moscow 2' is a rare example of the actual realisation of an ideal city.

Fig. 7: Iconic architecture: Moscow University

Figs. 8–9: Iconic architecture: Exhibition of the Attainment of the People's Economy, the ideal city

When Stalin's personality cult was debunked, the falsity of this concept was revealed. It had helped to spread the imperial image of a superpower, but at the same time had accelerated the USSR's housing crisis and exacerbated the country's social and economic problems.

Revolution, Konterrevolution, Stadtumbau – ‚Neues Moskau 2'. Der Masterplan von 1935

Abstract

Nach der Oktoberrevolution von 1917 wurde Moskau zur Hauptstadt des jungen Sowjetstaates und übernahm die Rolle des ideologischen Zentrums und Labors für Experimente, um eine neue Gesellschaft zu bilden und nach neuen Wohnformen zu suchen. Diese Zeit verfolgte das Ideal, eine „strahlende Zukunft" aufzubauen, was sich wiederum auf die Ausrichtung der Stadtplanung in dem gesamten Zeitraum auswirkte. Im 20. Jahrhundert gab es eine Reihe von Konzepten für den Bau des „Neuen Moskau" – seien es Ideen einzelner Architekten oder aber über Jahre hinweg von Planungsinstitutionen entwickelte Pläne.

10: Design for the Palace of the Soviets