Faculty of Urban and
Regional Development

Local identities and place images as the means to construct attractive places in the urban periphery of Moscow, Russia

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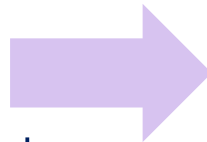HSE University

Placelessness of Urban Periphery

The periphery of Moscow –

the most populated part of the city,

but

- it **lacks** symbolic capital and **place attachment**;
- it is considered **not favorable** for living and **not interesting** for visiting;
- it **lacks** sustainable cohesive local **communities** with settled local **identities**;
- it has a very **limited** number of local **centers** with **unique** place images and functions.

The purpose of the research –

to reveal **the drivers of attractivity** of Moscow urban periphery for the residents, visitors and tourists,

including:

1. The estimates of **tourist** attractivity and **residents'** place attachments of Moscow periphery according to big data **social media** analysis;

2. The **unique place images** as the drivers of attractivity and the identifiers of **local identities** of **5 key** peripheric **districts** of Moscow according to semi-structured in-depth **interviews** with the experts and the residents;

3. The **integral drivers of attractivity** of Moscow urban periphery interconnected with social **cohesion** of local communities and the level of **rootedness** of local identities and unique place images.

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Moscow Urban Periphery
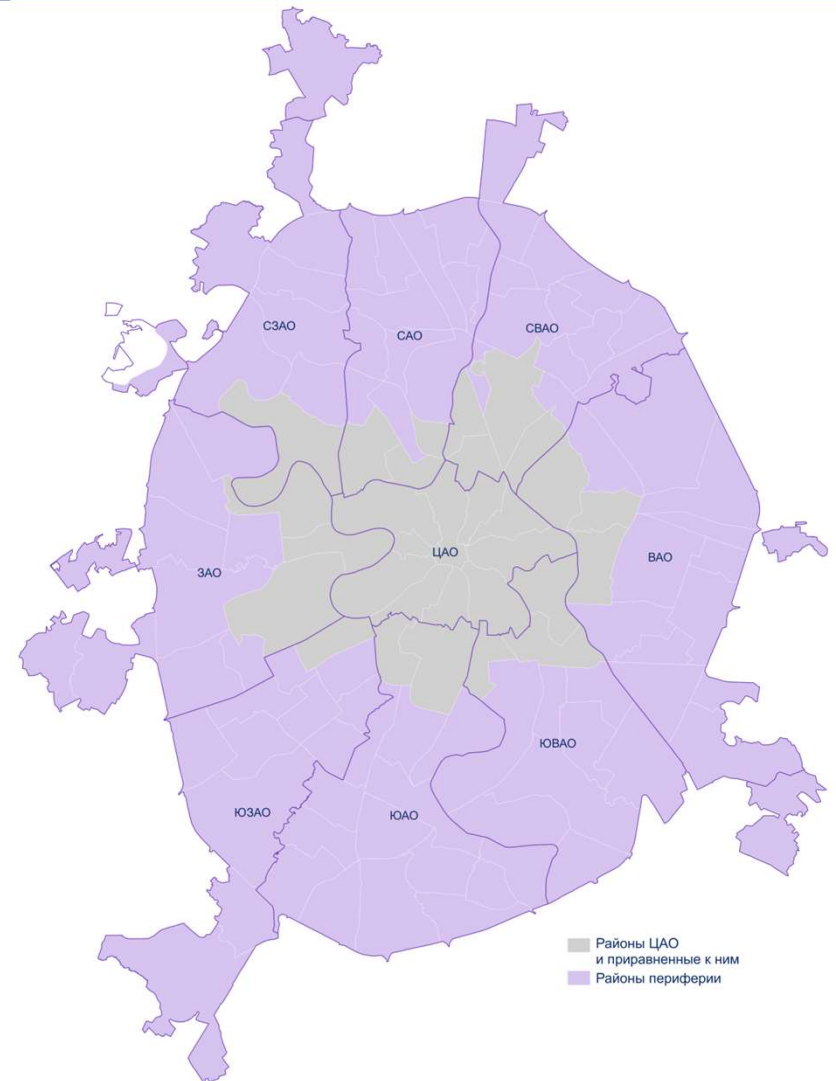
Periphery is NOT the Center.

The **center** holds the symbolic capital of the entire city, it **represents** Moscow as a city, while the **periphery** is **meaningless, insensible, invisible, and unimportant**.

The periphery is **stigmatized** as **insignificant placelessness** while:

- semi-periphery is turning into a part of the center,

- the new parts of Moscow outside the Moscow Ring Road continue being imagined as 'non-Moscow',

- no local sub-centres and no self-cufficient local communities are formed in the periphery.

> As some of my acquaintances say, **there is not already Moscow outside the Third Ring Road**. They may be partly correct, as very often the local residents themselves don't understand where they live, and consider their district as a distant 'sleeping' suburb... This is may be one of the main criteria if the periphery: **people don't value the place they live in** (Interview Э3)

Районы ЦАО
и приравненные к ним
Районы периферии

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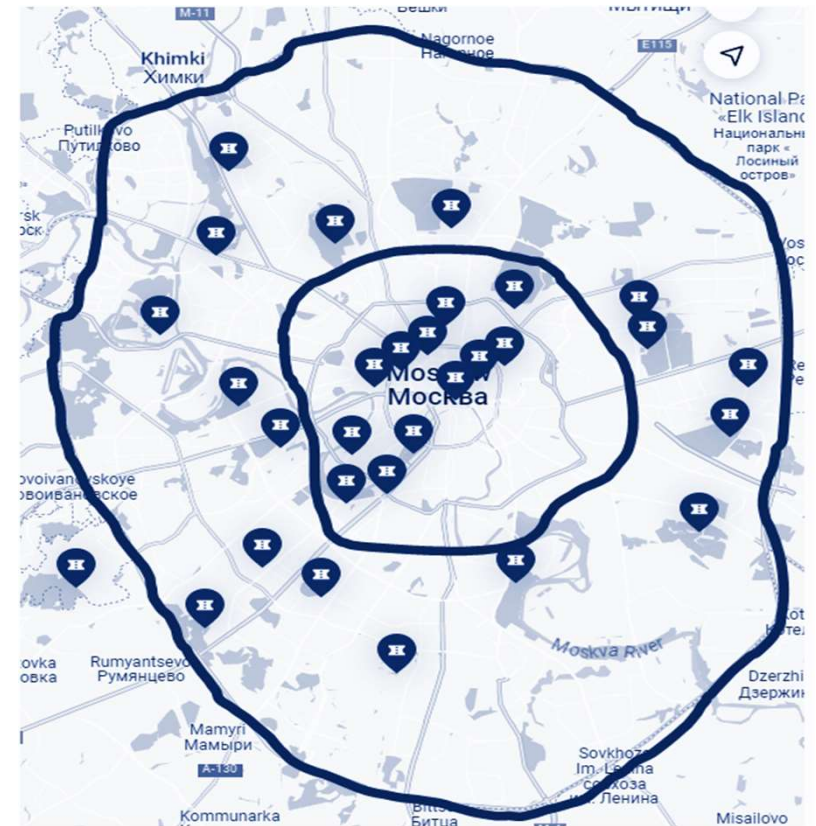
(No) Tourism in Moscow Urban Periphery

The excursions in the peripheral districts make only **10%** from the entire number of city excursions.

Only **30%** of peripheral districts are the **destinations** of regular excursions.

Only **25%** of peripheral districts have **pedestrian** tourist trails.

International tourists, according to the reviews data, **don't visit the periphery at all**, while **only 4 destinations** (Tsaritsyno, Kolomenskoye, Izmaylovo, Kuskovo) are **known** and appreciated as much as the central ones among the Russian **internal** tourists.

There are a few most transit-oriented, most known locations with good transport availability that are present at tourist websites (Interview Э5)

The peripheral destinations are a part of **visitor demand** only for the residents of **neighboring** districts; **only 1 destination** in each of 8 geographic sectors (North, Northwest, West, etc.) is known **city-wide**

Source: tourists reviews (tripadvisor, 30 000+ units).

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Moscow Urban Periphery for the Residents

The analysis of reviews of "Yandex.Maps" locations demonstrate that there's a discussion about the **outdoors facilities** (restaurants and cafes, services, office buildings, etc.) in the **center** while there is much more buzz about the home and family facilities, **indoors environment**, the yards, children' facilities and **home delivery** of meals and goods in the **periphery**.

Social media analysis demonstrate that the **center** serves as **symbolic representation of Moscow and even Russia** as a whole, with the functions of Moscow as the **capital** city. There are **many and many certain sights**, fashionable locations and well-known places in the focus of discussions.

The more we move to the **periphery**, the more the discussions are shifted towards the **everyday lives of the residents**. The yards an houses and their **maintenance**, the quality of **municipal services** become the main essence of social media discussions. There is **no more than 1 object intensely discussed** in each district.

The level of social **cohesion** of local communities in the periphery is **medium**. The local identity is **activated** by serious **threatening** events like a **new construction** project. Only **a few** peripheral districts have **rooted local identities** based on collective **memories** and **unique attractive local sights** or popular urban legends (Timiryazevsky, Nagatinsky Zaton).

Center

Dorogomilovo

from the outdoors public entertainment towards home delivery and services

Periphery

Pechatniki

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Source: Yandex.Datasets reviews of places and objects, 2023, 60 000+ units

The Attractivity of a Place as a Spatial Representation

Attractivity of a place – **well-rooted positive spatial representation**

← **The attractivity of a place** is a **spatial representation** about the capability of a place to **satisfy the demands** of individuals (Mayo, Jarvis, 1981), to meet the expectations, to **form place attachment** (Vengesayi, et al., 2009) and **unique positive place images**. →

The attractivity of a place is neither a feature, nor an attribute of a place; it is likely to form an **image** for the residents in the manner of how the **attractions of tourist destinations** do.

It is **socially constructed** in the **minds** of people and/or by means of **place branding** and other **urban policies**.

The rootedness of local residents – the measure of presence, representativity and vividness of local identity. ←

Local identity – a means of **self-identification** with a certain place (Strelnikova, 2018), the feeling of **belonging**, forming **place attachment** (Van'ke, Polukhina, 2018), and at the same time the constructed **unique meanings of places**, making each place **different** from the others in the eyes of the residents (Mitin, Alarushkina, et al., 2019). →

Geographical images (place images) represent the unique meanings of places and thus serve as the basics of local identities and at the same time as the identifiers of organic identity-based place branding in tourism marketing.

Local identity as a part of self-identification of an individual or a group (Proshansky, 1978)

Local identity as a constructed meaning of a place, or a place image (Relph, 1976)

The drivers of attractivity of urban periphery (1)

1. Awareness, popularity, the very presence of any rooted unique place images and local identities in the media discourse and/or in the public opinion

Unattractiveness as placelessness

- The **presence of any spatial representations** is a **minimum** factor of attractivity of a place.
- If a place isn't **signified, discussed, and imagined** in the public opinion, this is a case of **placelessness**.

If a district is unknown in the public, it can't be considered attractive.

Attractivity as self-sufficiency

The districts with a well-rooted and **developed semiotic systems** of place images and other spatial representations seem **self-sufficient** for the residents.

Self-sufficiency create a sight, a local sub-center, a destination and thus makes the place attractive.

The uniqueness of place and its images

The place images should be **unique** and **authentic** in order to create the **basics of local identity** and **place attachment**.

The **standardized** image **repeated** from place to place **can't be a driver** of spatial **differentiation** and create **awareness**.

Only **unique distinctive place images** making it **different** from any other places form **shared values** of cohesive local **communities** and the basics of their local **identities**.

Driver 1 as the minimum requirement for all the other drivers

The drivers of attractivity of urban periphery(2-3)

2. Transport accessibility and 'comforted remoteness'

Transport accessibility – **a specific driver for the periphery** of Moscow as it creates awareness (*driver 1*).

'Comforted remoteness' of a peripheral district marks the quiet and densely populated areas free from the extra noise and diversification of the center.

*The district is really close to the Moscow Ring Road. It is a distant 'sleeping' district… Earlier Izmaylovo used to be a working-class area, however nowadays the Electrical Plant and all the other industrial sites, close to the Ring Road, they are all in decline. They are closed an turned into malls. So, this is more likely a **residential area, not a business district. And God bless it!** (Interview И10)*

*The people who live here [in Nagatinsky Zaton] love it because it is **a little bit insular, remote and residential** (Interview H310)*

3. Diversification of functions, built environment and services

Diversification is a criteria of **centrality**.

That's why the urban periphery lacks diversification as it is **typically monofunctional.**

Diversification makes a place notable, **known** and hence **attractive**.

Diversification creates a **local sub-center**, a destination, a **unique** material landscape **known and valuable** for the locals and for the visitors.

The drivers of attractivity of urban periphery(4)

4. Unique objects integrated into the district and valuable for the local community

The media discourse analysis demonstrate that the discussions in the local social media of the **periphery** is focused around **home and internal environment** contrary to the buzz around outdoor facilities and **sights** in the **center**.

Hence **the presence of any unique sites**, destinations is especially **valuable** for the urban periphery. These unique material objects may represent and **construct unique place images**.

Unique objects combined with unique place images (*driver 1*) **create a unique urban environment**, with unite, compound, authentic, self-sufficient and valuable urban cultural landscapes.

Uniqueness is more important than comfort for the attractivity of a place!

Limitations:
- Some unique place **images** in the periphery **lack any material implementations** in the landscape;
- Some **well-known** city-wide destinations are **not integrated** into the nearest residential areas, and thus their symbolic capitals are **not combined**.

There are **no universal drivers of attractivity** associated with **unique objects**, but we can try to name **some wide-spread examples** further on (*drivers 5, 6, 7*).

The drivers of attractivity of urban periphery (5)

5. The presence of parks and natural environments integrated into the district and valuable for the local community

«Green district» = attractive district.

Not only big parks, well-known all over the city, but also **small orchards, green areas in the yards and on the boulevards** may become important and valuable for the locals, as **natural** environments are of **limited** presence within the **artificial** man-made urban environment.

What I love about Yasenevo district is that the forest has become its integral part. It is not a separate object, it is included into the district.
One can go to the metro station Novoyasenevskaya through the forest. My children use to do that on demand. So, you are going to the metro station on business, but at the same time you are going through the forest (Interview in Yasenevo, 2019)

Parks and **natural heritage** may be regarded as **unique objects** (*driver 4*), central even for very diverse peripheral district. The **recreational function** is especially attractive specifically for the urban periphery.

Moscow features former **noble estates** (including estate parks), that are well-known (*driver 1*) and should be made integrated into the nearest residential areas (*driver 4*).

Tag cloud for Levoberezhny district (Yandex.Datasets reviews, 2023)

The drivers of attractivity of urban periphery(6)

6. The presence of water objects and rivers integrated into the district and valuable for the local community

Rivers make the district separated, comfortly insular (*driver 2*).

Embankments become the unique objects (*driver 4*), their **visual panoramas** represent unique place images (*driver 1*).

> It is rare that a person can leave his house on the weekend and think where to go for a walk – and decide to go to the **embankment**. And here he goes to the embankment as it is **in a pedestrian distance from any place** of the district (Interview H320)
>
> Strogino is **the 'most surrounded' by the waters** district in the whole Moscow. We have all kinds of water sports present here, including SUP boards, windsurfing, etc. (Interview C23)

Nagatinsky Zaton is imagined as a 'river district' or a 'water place', a kin'df of an 'island' both as a historic area of Shipbuilding Factory workers and the builders of the river lock, and a modern residential area famous for its 'sailors' houses', beautiful river panoramas and a new 'River Park' residential complex.

Остров мечты

Коломенское

Парк Коломенское

1. Коломенское
2. Шлюз №10
3. ЖК Ривер Парк
4. Судостроительная улица
5. Южный речной вокзал
6. ЖК Парус
7. Утраченный кинотеатр Орбита
8. ТРЦ "Остров мечты"

0   500   1 000 м

The drivers of attractivity of urban periphery (7)

7. The presence of cultural heritage objects (especially representing noble estates and Soviet architecture) integrated into the district and valuable for the local community

Cultural heritage form unique **objects** (*driver 4*), but they are also the representations of **unique historical identities** of the districts.

This is especially important for the unite continuous areas of cultural landscapes of Soviet modernist architecture. **Soviet architectural modernism** represent the image of **Moscow as a Soviet capital** which had made it a **World-famous tourist destination** decades ago.

The interest to Soviet heritage is rising especially as a driver for the **new urban tourism** and those who search for the destinations '**off the beaten path**' trying to '**live like a local**'.

Izmaylovo is a district of Soviet architecture, a unite ensemble, with series of houses, whole urban blocks, which are not chaotically positioned, but according to the architect's vision (Interview И21)

Northern Chertanovo Experimental Urban Block has become the well-known tourist destination in a few past years. It is a residential area in the periphery which may serve as a material representation of the image of Soviet heritage in Moscow

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