In Search of Uniqueness in a Standardized Urban District: Cultural Geography of Yasenevo (Moscow, Russia)

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Distant urban residential areas in Post-Socialist cities and beyond lack original / authentic urban environments and attractiveness and thus the very existence of their local identities is contested. People are not rooted in the urban districts.

This paper aims to use the potential of the theory of regional geography & cultural geography combined as an effective theoretical framework to envision the uniqueness of a typical standardized residential area in the outskirts of Moscow (Russia), Yasenevo.

Yasenevo has accumulated multiple layers of symbolic and semantic capital reproduced by its residents as a system of spatial representations. The analysis of this system of representations was carried out through a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews with residents of the district, supplemented using several additional methods, e.g. urban planning and statistical analysis, analysis of literary texts and historical documents, and some others.

Yasenevo is represented as a "green" area with a plenty of parks surrounding it and making it look also like a clearly bordered 'island' within the city structure. Its specific architectural project is emphasized through the green areas inside the district, semi-circled streets and buildings and the usage of geomorphological conditions in the district's skyline, as originally suggested by the architect Yakov Belopolsky. Yasenevo is paradoxically seen as a "young" area by its dwellers, though its historical heritage (3 former noble estates) is also a part of the place imagery.