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Urbs et orbis¹. Urban civilisation in Russia and how it affects the country's development

di ANDREI BYSTRITSKY

***Abstract** – La storia della Russia è alquanto bizzarra, come lo è la storia della maggior parte dei Paesi, del resto. Ma la domanda su come e perché l'impero sovietico abbia iniziato a evolversi in una Russia indipendente e democratica, anche se la gente di questo Paese non aveva alcuna esperienza di vita libera e democratica prima del crollo dell'Unione Sovietica, è una delle domande più interessanti nella storia recente della Russia. Sembra che la civiltà urbana russa e, di conseguenza, l'emergere di nuovi tipi di società civile sia stata una delle pietre miliari sulla via di questa transizione.*

Many thinkers have argued that humans tended to use their early inventions primarily for killing each other. This is not entirely true. Not primarily, but rather secondarily. The primary purpose of any invention is to broaden the scope of communication. As soon as electricity was discovered, people used it to create telegraphs, semaphores, telephones and the like. Clearly, paper was invented for communication purposes. The purpose of creating television, radio and the internet is clear. Unlike the scientists who created the atomic bomb, these scientists didn't have to be nudged into inventing them. (Even an important activity like eating can be seen as a form of communication. Psychologists have long noticed that if little children sense that their parents don't love them, they stop taking food).

In a sense, the evolution of the human race relies on the development of communication. It is a universal yardstick: clearly, communication is one of the most important, unique and integrative values. Anything that promotes normal communication between people is good, and anything that stands in its way is bad. At the same time, communication should be understood in

¹ City and world (Latin).

the broadest sense in which it includes trade, manufacturing, and interpersonal relations, among other things. Almost any action can be assessed in terms of attitude towards communication (social inequities, for example, have limited communication since a certain point in time).

In other words, communication is a dominant value that can bring independent human activity together. We often try to find the underlying cause of a conflict by looking at ideological clashes, financial interests, mental disorders and the like. However, almost always, communication and differences in understanding what they mean lie at the heart of inter-civilisational conflicts and even everyday squabbles and everything in between. In a shouting match in a kitchen in a shared apartment, deep down, people argue primarily about their communicative roles and the subject of communication. The debate between fascism and liberal democracy has arisen in no small part because of the incompatible ideas of the masterminds and the followers of these two political groups on communication techniques and human ability to communicate. (National Socialists in Germany believed, for example, that Slavs and Jews were unfit to be part of sociocultural communication at the same level as the “superior race.” In addition, they assumed that a station in the social and racial hierarchy linearly and rigidly determined interpersonal communication. Of course, the countries for which freedom primarily meant freedom of communication couldn’t agree on that point.)

An urban area is one of the most universal expressions of communication. If we assume that the evolution of humankind relies on expanded communication, then urban civilisation acting as an integrative indicator is one of the most effective and efficacious forms of this expansion.

The emergence of urban areas is shrouded in mystery. The assumption that the need for joint defence and trade forced the people to settle together is, in my opinion, incomplete. I believe that everything happened a little differently. First, people colonised certain territories, and only then engaged in attacking other settlements or in fighting off attacks. First, they identified potential buyers, and only then manufactured goods and sold them.

Of course, this is to some extent a stretch of imagination, but the emergence of urban areas is hardly the result of only rational causes (although the latter have, of course, played their role). Lorca once remarked that true poetry is not about conjuring up images in the mind, of say, giants, in order to explain the emergence of caves and imagining these enormous and ungodly creatures cutting through mountains with enormous picks. Real poetry is more about the ability to picture a small drop of water gradually wearing away the rock for thousands of years. The same is true of urban areas. It may be easier for some to imagine formidable faceless forces of blind instinctive necessity forcing people to gather together for safety and trade. However, I find it more accurate and tempting to see in the creation of urban areas the free and effective will of individuals and their main motivation – curiosity, knowledge and communication. (The type of communication that lies at the base of a given urban area is another question. A Muslim urban area is different from a Christian urban area; an Indian town is unlike a Chinese town.)

Clearly, the urban area emerged only at a certain stage of human evolution where people gained a certain amount of experience in human interaction and realised that the world was wider than their tribe or village, and that they needed to become like sand in the ocean, and that without forming a new unit of communication, they could not continue to exist and then evolve.

As it grew and expanded, the city gave rise to statehood, which is a new meaning and order in the life of society. The city becomes a measure of development and the structure of human life. Each of us is aware that organising our time is one of the biggest challenges in our lives, something that determines our entire life, behaviour, success and setbacks, work and recreation, etc. The more developed and cultured a person, the more important and more difficult the effort to structure their life becomes. Neuroses, physical disorders, nervous breakdowns and depression are most often a result of unstructured time. A villager or a plowman, who lives close to nature, or a shepherd in an alpine meadow are rooted in organic structure and the cyclicity of time. The seasons, the weather, the natural behaviour of the animals living next to and with them, set a natural structure of time. If one learns to live within that structure, life becomes almost problem-free. However,

even though this rhythm is, in its own way, natural, positive and appealing, it does not always allow a person to make intense volitional efforts to regulate life, to set a new pace of activity that exists, at least to some degree, independent from the environment.

Human development gave rise to new forms of communication structure. Everyone knows that the Greeks called their cities polises, and polises were, in and of themselves, nation states. What is important for us here is that the emerging cities and nation states brought with them a hierarchy, that is, structured communication. As is the case, almost nothing can be achieved without a structure. The social hierarchy established a code of conduct (in fact, communication) which prescribed who could communicate with whom, when and how, and to what extent communication was an arbitrary individual choice, and to what extent an individual was supposed to act in only one possible way. (This, by the way, is how the problem of relationships between voluntary and forced communication came about. The assertion that communication is a prerequisite for freedom can be considered a partial solution to this. That is, communication is freedom. When communicating, we become free, which, of course, is important, but we also become subjects of freedom, which is much more important.)

Compared to a rural community, an urban area not only added degrees of freedom to human behaviour, but also created a groundbreaking organisation of space and time for human interaction. If we do not confine ourselves to communication in the form of verbal communication alone, an urban area can generally be considered a material remark rolled out in time, a behavioural metalanguage, which can be spoken by people of different generations separated by hundreds or even thousands of years. (Of course, an urban area as a language does not fully meet Karl Buhler's axioms. More likely, an urban area is not a language in and of itself, but rather a means of facilitating that language). When you see a run-down, abandoned or a neglected city, which, unfortunately, we can occasionally see in Russia, one gets an involuntary sense of an unfinished sentence with missing words. Such cities often become grounds for uncivilised interaction between its residents where the communication space is destroyed. Inarticulate speech, rebellion without a cause, cruelty and pointless

aggressiveness are used as surrogates for actual communication. Substandard cities cannot offer full-featured communication.

The urban area, as a concept, gave a powerful boost to science and culture, and scientific and cultural, state and political entities such as the Academy of Athens or the Library of Alexandria, to name a few. *Urbi et orbi* (the city and the world) – this Roman address is in many ways symbolic, because it advances primary and basic things to the forefront. So far, we've been talking about European cities, the ones that are the progenitors of modern Europe, including Russia. No such cities were built in China or Japan, India or the Arab-Persian East. (In this regard, Marco Polo and other Christian travelers' memories about the cities they visited during their travels are quite representative).

In this paper, I will not delve too deeply into the peculiarities of the cities of various civilisations. I will only note that, by all appearances, the European model of a city – at least this is how it was until very recently – turned out to be more productive in terms of communication (which made European civilisations the leading models in the New World, such as North and South America, Canada, and Australia).

With its ostensibly rich culture, a Muslim city is, in fact, a mechanical form of cohabitation of various tribes. Each Muslim city quarter is isolated from the others and is a kind of habitat for an individual tribe or clan and is, essentially, a separate and an off-limits settlement. In other words, such a city retains its territorial divisions, and the townspeople identify as residents of their quarter before residents of the city as a whole. Internal barriers, rigid hierarchy, and mostly indirect bonds tying the citizens and the city as a single socio-cultural body are characteristic not only of the Muslim East, but China as well.

Of course, a European medieval (and even late medieval) city was a conglomeration of craft workshops where entire streets were populated exclusively by coppersmiths, leatherworkers, or armourers. Importantly, however, first, this division was drawn by occupation, that is, the decision was made by individuals of their own accord and, second, even with all these formal partition walls, a European could move to another location or change occupation quite easily. In any case, the restrictions on freedom that are to be overcome when changing a trade incomparably lower than when

changing tribal affiliation. (The latter is generally almost impossible in the Orient, with the exception of specifically stipulated cases such as marriage, banishment, sale into slavery, etc.)

Clearly, different cultures influence each other directly and indirectly. So, much of the urban civilisation in the Middle East was formed thanks to, first, Hellenic and then European and Christian influence (starting with Alexander the Great's campaigns and later the Crusaders). Europe has benefitted greatly from close contact with Arabs, Chinese and Indians. It is no coincidence that modern Ankara is a highly Europeanised city, and Istanbul is an example of an astounding mosaic mix and interpenetration of different cultures and civilisational models. As communicative beings, humans can hack many closed ethnic, cultural and religious traditions. At the same time, naturally, these same traditions most often irreversibly and uniquely influence the type and the character of cities and their socio-cultural physiognomy.

The challenge cities around the world face today is how to most effectively and seamlessly combine age-old traditions and ethnic mentality with the communicative, open and free nature of the *polis*. Wherever this bond is established, there arises a city that becomes a prosperous and comfortable place for human communities to live that is replete with ethnic culture and is favourable for interethnic and intercultural communication of its residents and visitors. Such cities are mesmerising. Books are written about them. They thrive on friendliness and love, entrepreneurship and art. Perhaps, that is what Paris and Rome were (and still are). And, perhaps, Moscow will become such a city in the near future.

Urban civilisation is moving forward at a fairly quick pace in our country. Russia's level of urbanisation is higher than in the Baltic countries with three quarters of the country's population living in urban areas, almost half of whom reside in large metropolitan areas. Even though the quality of life in the cities may leave much to be desired, they are still urban areas in the making. The relative calm surrounding fundamental reforms in Russia in recent years can probably be accounted for by the rather successful development of urban civilisation in the country. (Social studies show that, overall,

there is no difference between the complaints made against the government in Russian society and the usual complaints by the public in other modern developed civilised countries. No less important is the way these complaints are expressed. It appears that low-class uprising as a form of expressing disagreement with state policy no longer has enough traction in order to achieve the critical mass that is necessary to start a political upheaval, although there are exceptions to this)².

By the same token, many of our current problems, the complexity and inconsistency of ongoing democratic reforms are largely due to the complex and inconsistent formation of urban civilisation in Russia. Its specifics and incompleteness have a significant impact on the situation in the country. The tragic cataclysms that Russia has lived through in the 20th and 21st centuries were largely, and not least of all, due to the complex and dramatic history of Russian cities' development. The current situation stands apart in that, perhaps for the first time in Russian history, the forces of urban civilisation are, in the worst case, equal, or possibly even exceed the forces and capabilities of its opponents.

We need a universal yardstick if we want to analyse the specifics of current transformations and the extraordinary multidimensional and complex sociocultural processes unfolding in our country. The city is precisely such a natural benchmark, which seamlessly combines a variety of dimensions ranging from the sociodemographic to the value-based.

The fact that Russia doesn't have purely Western-style cities is axiomatic. The problem lies elsewhere, in what our Westernisers and Slavophiles have been discussing and arguing about so often and in so much detail: What is Russia? A substandard European country? A substandard Asian country? Is it something in between? Is it Eurasia or Asiope? Is it some kind of a standalone civilisation? There is no clear answer to that question. Professor Huntington gave two civilisational definitions of Russia: on the one hand, Russia (like Ukraine, Belarus and Serbia) is part of a separate Eastern Orthodox civilisation. On the other hand, it is a "split country," a battlefield for different types of civilisation. In a way, Huntington was right. And the fact that Russia is in the

² <https://polit.ru/article/2020/02/25/protestbystr/>

process of making an important civilisational choice is obvious. It is likewise obvious that the type of dominant culture, the way of life, behaviour, and the general pattern of national mindset are rapidly changing in Russia. New post-Soviet generations are coming of age and becoming the productive core of society. Consequently, the type of the Russian city and the nature of our urban civilisation are changing as well. At the same time, only the fevered imagination of the “patriots” and other neurotics who are not adapted to city life can see these processes as fatal for domestic culture, foreshadowing the decline of the Russian state, and other nonsense like that. I believe things are the other way round. We’re witnessing a renewal and normal evolution of the forms of national life, and Russians are gradually ridding themselves of their morbid and malignant social infantilism. But first things first.

Let’s begin with stating that Slavic, or rather, Russian, cities have acquired qualitative differences from Western European cities over time. Even if such differences existed in Kievan Rus, they were not substantial or fundamental. (The history of the Ugrians who lived on the territory of present-day Hungary is quite telling in this regard, as is, incidentally, the fate of the Western Slavic tribes in general.) Actual major differences began to take shape at a time when the Church was divided into Western Church and Eastern Christian Church, and intensified with the advent of the Renaissance in Europe and became utterly pronounced after the Reformation.

The formation and development of a free European city was the form and content, cause and effect of the formation of a humanistic civilisation, science and law, as well as the spirit of social partnership and a flexible social hierarchy.

Russia was in a catch-up mode all the time. The cities were developing slowly; the artisan and merchant classes were weak. I would not at all want to appear as a denigrator or detractor of my Fatherland. Indisputably, Russia’s destiny is that of a great power, and the Russian people have more than once displayed astounding courage and no less amazing talents. The Russians built a powerful country and won many spectacular victories, but the price they paid for their historical achievements was inordinately high. Clearly, some kind of fetters slowed Russian society on its way to progress and success. We will not list and review all of them, but

will focus instead on just one that weighed down many of our breakthroughs (which is the subject of this paper), namely, the place and role of the Russian city in the tragic collisions of Russian history.

Vladimir Solovyov wrote that «the historically formed way of life in Russia can be rendered using the following precise language: the church, which is represented by the bishops' council and is structured around monasteries; the government in the person of the autocratic tsar; and the people living off land in rural communities. The monastery, the palace and the village are our social pillars, which will not be shattered as long as Russia exists»³. But they were indeed shattered. Not just shattered – they turned into ruins almost overnight. Notably, later Solovyov made many other statements about Russia's urban civilisation. However, there remain unanswered questions as to why the towns and the town estates, as Solovyov (and not only Solovyov) believed, did not constitute the sociocultural foundation of the then Russian state and why one day the rural community or another day the marginalised working people were perceived by society as a foundation of stability of state institutions and at the same time as a prerequisite for their transformation. Clearly, the answer is quite simple: the city, in the full sense of the word, did not exist in Russia for a long time, and when it began to really take shape and structure, it was swept away by those whose existence was impossible in a civilised *polis*.

Interestingly, this problem was not unique to Russia. Something along these lines was experienced by the Latin American countries, among others. Sarmiento's novel *Facundo* has a subtitle «The Struggle between the Pampa and the Cities in Argentina». There are the Pampas, not just villages, farmers or landowners. The Pampa is something living on a borderline that has arisen in the space between traditional rural and urban cultures. At the turn of the century, it was the gauchos, all kinds of wanderers who preferred to have no roots, an element that lived beyond city limits or in the pampas, selling gold that they washed in the mountains, or trading in smuggled alcohol, or grazing bulls, who were the main cause of concern for the government as a constant source

³ V. Solovyov, *Works in two volumes*, Moscow, 1989, Vol. 1, p. 243.

of all kinds of uprisings, unrest and riots. There were probably many reasons for these people to be disgruntled with their lives; the world around them was often cruel and unjust towards them. But why did they always choose the path of rebellion? Why did they see the city as a place to plunder rather than an opportunity to assert themselves or acquire a new social status?

It is not my intention to look for direct prototypes of the gauchos on Russia's plains, but, clearly, even in very different settings, similar reasons led to similar consequences.

In his time, Yury Tynyanov aptly pointed out a phenomenon which he dubbed the urban settlement culture, that is, a special stratum of suburban residents who are no less and, perhaps, even more meaningful than the urban population itself, and who exist in-between the village and the city. In 1917, it was this group of people who played a decisive role in the victory of the Bolsheviks. The Red Guards were not comprised of manufacturing workers who didn't think much about the Bolshevik military revolutionary committees' calls for an uprising, choosing instead to focus on simple and mundane matters like getting a pay rise or working fewer hours. Petty shopkeepers, low-skilled workers, lumpen proletariat, vagrants, criminals and the like were the ones to join the Red Guards.

First, the reforms spearheaded by Alexander II and continued to some degree by Alexander III and Nicholas II, and then the decisive transformations of the Russian countryside by Stolypin dealt a shattering blow to the peasant community. Rural dwellers rushed to the cities in droves. However, the sparse and poorly developed Russian cities simply couldn't take in and assimilate all comers. Migrants settled mainly on the urban outskirts, engaged in small business or worked as labourers for a measly pay and saw the city only from afar as a tempting dream out of their reach which made them envious and annoyed and willing to simultaneously conquer and destroy the urban world.

However, in all fairness, we must admit that even before the reforms of the mid-19th and early 20th centuries, Russian cities were not structured as proper urban areas, like, for example, Western European cities, but were rather quasi-urban entities. A Russian city was mostly structured around office buildings, palaces, shops and a very small number of houses owned by government officials

and merchants. The petty bourgeoisie or the lower middle class, that is, the truly urban class, failed to take shape in our country. Properly developed urban culture was not widespread, and rural culture was gradually but surely disintegrating.

Nevertheless, after Stolypin's reforms the Russian urban areas began to grow faster, as can be seen from the flourishing of literature and the arts in the early 20th century, and the fast-paced formation of civil society, the rapid growth of the manufacturing industry, and the emergence of a significant group of true urban residents, such as workers and employees united by a common cultural and civilisational landscape and a single communication format. The coming of age of the city totally undermined the position of the social *raznochintsy* intellectual. An undergraduate student or a dropout from a telegraph vocational school, who wrote poems and secretly read Marx, ceased to be a cultural hero and the subject of young Russian ladies' romantic preoccupations. Society was on its way to maturity, but broke instead into a bloody revolution perpetrated by the lumpen masses led by a handful of half-educated intellectuals who took advantage of their last chance to achieve self-realisation.

After the revolution and civil war, the normal development of Russian cities was interrupted. With the accession of the Bolsheviks, the migration of rural dwellers to urban areas picked up the pace, especially in the wake of barbaric collectivisation and dispossession of the well-to-do peasants. Yesterday's peasants brought their culture with them, but, unlike the culture of a healthy rural community, it was a warped and pseudo-patriarchal culture.

An outcast in the city felt like a trailblazer, a conqueror of the stone jungle, which he had to colonise, defeating a host of imaginary enemies. Suspicious and angry, devoid of roots and humiliated by the need to deploy efforts that were unusual in terms of intensity and form in order to survive, such individuals were aggressive and utterly dangerous to society. Naturally, they strove not so much to master the past that they were unable to relate to, but to raze it to the ground. Hence, the "expropriation of the expropriators" (seizure and looting of palaces and museums); hence, the mass executions of those who remained in place from

the former era, violence and vandalism. What was once distant, has now become close and, most importantly, easily accessible.

Most of the former villagers tried to create oases of rural culture in the city. The emergence of urban courtyards that apparently resembled rural neighbourhoods was the most striking expression of this process. Their morals, an eternal court of judgment of old women sitting on a bench near the entrances to blocks of flats telling young people to follow their strictly regulated and often pharisaic standards of behaviour, as well as a lack of privacy, are well-known hallmarks of village life that are quite appropriate in the conservative and patriarchal village, but completely out of place in the city, since the city relies on a whole different level of communication.

In this regard, poems, songs, short novels and stories authored by many of our talented writers (for example, Bulat Okudzhava and Vladimir Vysotsky) that poeticise everyday life in the city courtyards and shared flats appear to be abstract nostalgic reflections that have little to do with real life. It is quite difficult, if at all possible, to imagine Alexei Tolstoy, Mikhail Bulgakov or Mikhail Zoshchenko, not to mention poets who have had their fair share of rough life in shared flats, such as Osip Mandelstam or Anna Akhmatova, admiring courtyards and shared flats and nostalgically missing them. These and many other writers, being true representatives of genuine, rather than pseudo-urban culture, couldn't stand the Soviet communal life, which they saw as evidence of a collapse of civilisational values and the triumph of barbarism and brutishness.

To back up on the socio-psychological rationale behind the events of 1917, quite a lot has been written and said recently about the economic, social and political backlog that had piled up by that time in Russia and was further exacerbated by World War I. Still, why all of a sudden did a certain group of people come to the decision that violent and radical action was what was needed back then? Partly because the masses of the working-class youth, living and working in their suburbs, had no idea how to structure their lives around time in order to achieve anything. Confined to an utterly simplified communication pattern, they did not see a

bridge connecting their lives to the life of the nearby city. They did not have a clear sense of an operational mode of behaviour that they could use to change their status, achieve the desired financial well-being, and assert themselves. What made them tick was impatience and fervour, that is, a wild and poorly thought-out desire to grab now, immediately, in one fell swoop things that they had been unable to achieve in a normal, civilised manner. These people were absolutely maladjusted to the city life and immersed in paternalism, which excludes personal accountability and generates fear of having to make decisions.

American psychologist Erik Erikson wrote about regressive behaviour in teenagers, which, in fact, is dictated by a subconscious desire to postpone adult and responsible life for as long as possible. Interestingly, this desire often pushes teenagers to join gangs, semi-criminal or outright criminal groups under the wing of an authoritative adult leader. The inability to structure time or participate in complex and ramified urban communication patterns inevitably turns an immature and irresponsible person into a big child seeking patronage and extremely simplified communication patterns with clearly defined roles. This is a direct path to the formation of social disability, dull foot soldiers in a gang, hoodlums and neurotics who, confronted with the slightest challenge, throw aggressive or escapist fits.

The revolutionary cruelty, the rebels' extreme hatred for well-off townspeople was largely due to their lack of proper communicative skills and inability to manage time or manage themselves in time.

Still quite young, the Russian cities did not succumb to the "victors" right away. Urban life in Russia continually reproduced itself, and the Bolsheviks' paternalistic power constantly stifled it. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Bolsheviks had people they could throw in prison. The spontaneous, and partly deliberate, resistance of the young Russian urban civilisation lasted until about the 1940s.

Today, a number of preconceived notions and myths about how Soviet power was established have some currency. There is, for example, an opinion that vast masses of the Russian people were overtaken by a revolutionary upsurge and that the communist ideology in Russia became a religion that replaced Christianity. As mentioned above, Bolshevism, in fact, relied on anti-urban,

essentially marginal, pseudo-patriarchal and paternalistically-oriented groups of people. Even though these groups were quite numerous in the then Russian society, the constituent social groups were still a minority, and only weak traditional rural culture that had been decaying at least since the 1850s and the underdeveloped urban culture itself, allowed this relative minority to take the upper hand. However, this minority was not driven by any conscious ideology other than the ideology of vulgar Nietzscheism. With the exception of a negligible small group of fanatical Communists, all other “revolutionaries” saw the ongoing social cataclysm as a unique chance to change their future and to reach the top of the social pyramid.

The career Bolsheviks were mostly young and energetic people, who came from the lower strata of society. At one time, yours truly had the chance to talk with a number of “prominent figures of the Soviet state and Communist party”. They started out in the 1920s and made fantastic careers becoming people’s commissars, industry leaders and “production commanders,” that is, the top of the Soviet nomenclature, by the 1930s. Interestingly, none of them particularly revelled in the ideas of communism and, in fact, they didn’t doubt the falsity of the accusations brought against the people who came under repression during the Stalinist purges. It’s just that they all saw life as a merciless and bloody battle for power and status. With this approach, the political prisoners looked like natural victims of the usual fighting. They just got unlucky and lost, that’s all. What the organisers and rulers of the new life found really valuable were the attributes of power. The empire, vast territories, millions of people under their command and the world standing in awe before them – this is what warmed their hearts and filled their minds with a sense of grandeur.

However, in addition to these people and their socially affined groups, there were millions of other people. Only the Soviet books for children had stories about the millions-strong units of young pioneers and Komsomol members that allegedly existed already in the 1920s and the early 1930s. In reality, there were very few pioneers and Komsomol members back then, so few that some high schools didn’t even have any Komsomol organisations. The students at the schools that had such organisations often beat the Komsomol members and even banished them from schools. The

archives are replete with accounts of young people refusing to toe the new government line and rejecting the Komsomol. I have often read stories about students of a particular school beating up Komsomol activists, booing the speeches of appointed Komsomol leaders, or throwing rags and apple cores at new Komsomol members. At the same time, schoolchildren were publishing amateur magazines, creating public associations, trying to run clubs and cafes and throw parties, that is, they tried, in every possible way, to revivify certain elements of a normal urban civil society. This process was so widespread that in the 1930s, the Communist Party and the Komsomol had to appoint a Komsomol leader, that is, a special commissar and overseer, to almost every school⁴.

This is only one aspect and one line of the urban environment's resistance to the Bolshevik system which relied on the lumpen proletariat. (Science and art defended themselves in their own way.) The Bolsheviks waged a total war against the city, while preserving a strange duality in their attitude towards urban civilisation. Instinctively, they realised that a traditional and thriving city represented mortal danger to their power, but they nevertheless secretly continued to dream of a city of their own that they fully controlled and owned: they were driven by jealousy no less than hatred. Jealousy led the Communist party members to create off-limits quasi-cities for themselves. Special stores, special houses with improved floor plans and clubs, restaurants, and country villas (which are also an urban attribute) gave them an illusion of comfort and belonging to a civilisation which they themselves were destroying. This process took on absolutely outlandish dimensions after the Great Patriotic War ended in 1945.

Around the mid-1950s, the children of the first "Red elite" came of age. First, they constituted almost the only generation in the Soviet Union that was somewhat devoted to the communist ideology (victory in the war, a relatively quick economic recovery, and a certain station in life are some of the reasons, albeit rather shaky, behind their faith in the ideals of communism). Second, these young successors to their fathers' cause passionately and purposefully sought comfort in their lives. Khrushchev's rule

⁴ <http://www.dslib.net/obw-pedagogika/razvitie-samodejatelnosti-uchawih-sja-komsomolcev-edinoj-trudovoj-shkoly.html>

followed by many years of Brezhnev's "reign" which brought a new ruling elite to the foreground (due to personnel reshuffles and the natural ageing of the former nomenclature) spurred urban development in Russia. On top of this, the competition with the industrial, and then post-industrial, West required the quick construction of large agglomerations, which formed the basis for building cities.

In the early 1960s, the urban and rural populations became equal in size. The urban environment had changed dramatically. The number of flats shared by several families, these pseudo-rural communities that were reminiscent of the American ghettos more than anything else, was steadily decreasing. Mass construction of the famous five-storey buildings – Khrushchevka (Khrushchev slums) – was underway. Telephone communications and transport were developing at a fast pace. Clothes and shoes were no longer worn by several generations in a family. People's behaviour was becoming increasingly urban. Numerous cafes were not now so much a place to eat, but to go out and have fun communicating with other people. The 24/7 street life became a romantic value, the transport ran late into the morning hours, and night strolls and returning home in the early morning became a cultural ritual and a semi-mystical act. In the end, something happened that should have happened, no matter what: the first truly urban generation – those who were born at the turn of the 1950s-1960s – became active members of social life. Those were the people who destroyed the Soviet Union and started building the new Russia.

The new generation of city dwellers that grew up by the late 1970s-early 1980s at least latently absorbed many of the values of modern urban civilisation, such as freedom of speech, privacy, partnership, human rights, and freedom of movement, which, in no small part, led to Gorbachev's perestroika and the subsequent collapse of the communist system.

Of course, the process of urban growth and development in modern Russia has never been smooth sailing. It had many setbacks (we'll cover them later). But it is still going fairly strong. Russia has found itself in a situation where the reserves of the anti-urban forces are extremely limited. About a quarter of Russians now live in rural communities. The urban population is constantly and steadily growing despite the across-the-board decline in the

birth rate. Most young people have been born and raised in urban areas. It is no longer possible to make them rise against the city and the urban culture. The battle between the “pampa” and the urban areas in our country has ended. And “pampa” did not emerge the victor.

Before I move on to discussing modern Russian cities, their “physiology” and the challenges facing them, it is necessary to understand an important circumstance underlying European urban civilisation. The fact of the matter is that European cities are tightly bound up with Christianity which presupposes the existence and domination of certain ethical and moral values that include, among others, partnerships between people striving for the gradual evolutionary transformation of the world. And if you take a closer look at a European city, you will see that its citizens’ partnerships largely determine its personality. Partnerships and progress (or evolution, which is the same thing in this particular case) imply primarily free and open communication which, in turn, implies a number of ontological and fundamental peculiarities which lie at the heart of urban civilisation. First, as a communication hub, the city represents a unique combination of what renowned cultural anthropologist Victor Turner called *communitas* and *hierarchy*⁵. Any given community relies, on the one hand, on communication, the sense of everyone being part of a single group, and the idea of equality. On the other hand, it relies on the orderly nature of this communication and the distribution of roles and functions, i.e., the hierarchy. There must be a balance between equality and hierarchy that depends on the level of cultural and civilisational development of the community, its size, and the degree of vertical and horizontal mobility within its main social strata. The members of an African tribe strictly follow rigorous laws of hierarchy throughout almost the entire year. However, once a year, they attack their leader, beat him up and tell him all sorts of nasty things. Medieval European carnivals, which were extremely loud and steamy, had the same underlying meaning of temporary abolition of hierarchy, and a spontaneous,

⁵ V. Turner, *Symbol and Ritual*, Moscow, 1983.

but limited in time, “canalised” manifestation of universal equality and a demonstration of the relative nature of all kinds of class differences. Of course, modern cities can’t afford this. They tackle similar problems in a slightly different way, mainly using festivities, sports events and mass performances that are organised and overseen by the authorities to achieve the same goals.

Second, urban culture relies on the principle of unconditional anonymity and the autonomy of the individual, and the existence of a special urban landscape of a cultural and communicative nature. In other words, the city is a multi-tier system. A single urban space is tessellated and is sort of dissected or, rather, diced by roofs, roads, overpasses and streets, the spires and domes of churches, and composed or assembled from the interiors of numerous flats, theatres, restaurants, clubs, museums, bars, and offices, to name a few. Life is everywhere, and it can flow from one “compartment” to another, while preserving its integrity. Importantly, life within the confines of the city is extraterritorial, that is, the reasons for the people getting together do not depend much on where they live: most often people don’t work next to where they live; their friends and company do not necessarily include people residing in the neighbourhood (although, of course, one should not forget about the territorial entities).

Third, the city is a system made of socio-cultural institutions that act as an integrating principle and allow people to effectively communicate with each other and with the city as a whole. Extraterritoriality is one of the foundations underlying these institutions. (In rural areas, the village or any other rural community has always been the core communicative entity that integrated the rural world. Thus, the administrative-territorial unit and the social integration institution turn out to be absolutely identical.)

Fourth, the city creates its own language of communication, which is different in each *polis* and consists of common words, idioms, symbols and myths, as well as legends and traditions, forms of courting women, ways of buying alcohol during night hours and hailing a taxi, as well as images of all kinds of renowned urban characters: shop and restaurant owners, theatre directors, actors, publishers, poets, city fools and other celebrities (all, even major cities like Paris, New York or Mexico City use this language).

Fifth, the city and the urban way of life are so strong and, in all appearance, so consistent with the direction of social evolution of our, especially European, civilisation that destroying them is extremely difficult. They begin to reproduce at the first opportunity, taking advantage of the tiniest bits of slack that comes their way. As we have seen, urban values, for example in Russia, have not been annihilated, or trampled down by some sketchy characters on the fringes of society. (These values have transformed, and as soon as the situation was ripe, they immediately began to rapidly resurge). Even in the darkest years of Bolshevik rule, large Russian cities retained many features of an urban lifestyle and elements of their original infrastructure.

Clearly, any of the above attributes and any of the characteristics of a modern city have their upsides and downsides.

Take, for instance, the unity of hierarchy and *communitas* that is inherent to the *polis*, which I mentioned above. Victor Turner wrote that ghettos in modern, mainly American, cities tend to reproduce absolutely monstrous forms of communication which can be easily understood. If large masses of people have few reasons for building an actual hierarchy, a pseudo-hierarchy is then created. In the Chicago inner city with its crowds of young, unemployed residents and limited opportunities for a normal civilised display of individuality, big gangs with their own castes and many stages of initiation are easily formed. Each caste is separated from others by complex rituals and external signs. Occasionally, transiting from one caste to another is an utterly humiliating procedure, and a member of a higher caste has infinite possibilities to influence those from a lower caste. To a certain extent, this is reminiscent of hazing/initiation in the army, which, deep down, has the same roots where a multitude of faceless soldiers left without any meaningful engagement, seek and find the most primitive and ugly ways of bringing order to their communication and behaviour.

Speaking of Russia, the “Kazan phenomenon” is quite interesting in this regard. As is well-known, in the mid-1980s, Kazan saw a rapid increase in the number of youth territorial (neighbourhood) gangs, which engaged in blood-chilling fights and showdowns, which were unsettling in terms of their cruelty and the number of fatalities. The city outskirts in Kazan were developed a little later than in Moscow. The semi-patriarchal central Kazan was destroyed, and

old courtyard traditions like fighting to first blood, the authority of adults, etc. followed. New city blocks grew like mushrooms, but no urban infrastructure was built. There were no cafes, no clubs, or open street spaces. The new housing developments looked like ghettos which spawned pseudo-hierarchical youth gangs. The poorly developed urban area combined with a low cultural level, the erosion of the language, the influence of criminal elements and the final death of patriarchal traditions predictably led to the spontaneous emergence of numerous gang-like youth groups. The local Komsomol, the Communist party and the Soviet authorities' attempts to counter them by promoting more civilised forms of leisure failed. (Nonetheless, the criminal teenager gangs in Kazan didn't last long. Urban extraterritoriality has taken its toll). Since, unlike, say, Chicago, the capital of Tatarstan was not a properly functioning city that could oppose the encroaching ghetto, the ghetto forms and way of life flowed freely across and beyond the boundaries of the new neighbourhoods. At the same time, in close cooperation with the then party nomenclature, the smart set and the criminal elite gradually started demanding that city officials create comfortable living conditions for them, including hotels, restaurants, bars, transport and services (including prostitution).

When I had the chance to discuss the "Kazan phenomenon" with several Komsomol leaders a while ago, I often heard in what they told me a secret desire to pit criminal groups against relatively civilised urban groups and subcultures such as hippies, rock music fans, and the like. But this idea fizzled out eventually. Although even in Moscow there were mass clashes between an athletic lifestyle-dedicated youth group from the town of Lyubertsy outside Moscow and heavy metal fans, the Soviet propaganda failed to portray this as an ideology-driven conflict between "plain working teenage Komsomol members" and proponents of the "bourgeois culture that is alien to us," because both of them were part of the urban culture, albeit different aspects.

Speaking of urban development in Russia, we must be clear about the fact that with all the massive success of large cities, a modern developed and full-fledged *polis* is still not anywhere to be seen here, although we are already being confronted with new and quite urban challenges and conflicts before we have even had the chance to get a taste of all the delights and joys of normal city

life. (However, many of those who have visited Moscow and St. Petersburg may disagree as the level of development in these two cities is quite impressive).

The unfinished urban landscape, which is designed to make the transition from life confined to the enclosed space of a flat to life in the open streets soft and pleasant may be a little on the nose for some people's aesthetic and moral sense.

All sorts of phobias, or, simply put, fears, that are not always even fully conscious and are inherent in a fairly large group of the Russian public who have not had the chance to fully adapt to the dynamic and intense rhythms and forms of urban life, are undoubtedly part of the obvious negative aspects of modern urban civilisation in Russia. When talking about fear, one should also bear in mind urban crime which is not only and not so much about internal criminal showdowns among the "mafia," engaged in redistribution of spheres of influence, but about ordinary street mugging and disorderly behaviour, among other things. Even though street crime is steadily declining, claiming that a Russian city can fully civilise large masses of young people tormented by an inferiority complex, envy and the inability to purposefully build their own lives would be a stretch. Some of them may attack passers-by, others start aggressive demonstrations using just about anything as a pretext.

Unfortunately, to a varying degree, aggression is inherent in many people, but normal modern Western European cities usually offer channels to vent it that are acceptable to most people. Of course, the most aggressive types still end up in gangs. Others, who are, in the least, able to manage themselves and to follow through with discipline, go to serve in the army or the police. The rest root violently for football teams, do sports, watch action films or self-actualise in risky businesses. Channelling aggression into productive action isn't always a readily available option in our cities. Therefore, the threat of criminalisation of Russian society and extreme political radicalism remain high for us.

Another important urban challenge – personal identification – especially with regard to "new Russians" represented by young businesspeople, politicians and economists – is being tackled in an extremely unsatisfactory manner in Russia. Earlier, 50 years ago or so, the ruling elite of both developed Western and developing

countries was fairly democratic and liberal, while the masses, on the contrary, were conservative and adhered mainly to traditional values and codes of conduct. The situation has changed a lot. Broad strata of the population in the Western world are very (occasionally, beyond measure) Americanised and super-liberal, while the elite are looking for self-identification in eternal religious values and conservative traditions. This is primarily due to the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet empire and the collapse of the entire Communist system. Another reason is the fact that the erstwhile avenues for the linear progressive and exclusively technotronic evolution of humankind have been used up. Also, a change in civilisational paradigms (going from a clearly technogenic to a more humanistic and anthropogenic paradigm) is in the offing and a quest for outside-the-box solutions to new problems and challenges facing the world (primarily environmental and ethnic) is underway.

Our “new Russians” are also looking for values and ideas which they could lean on. On the face of it, the history-adjusted traditional national values and the idea of building a strong and robust but, at the same time, flexible and effective national state fulfil the objective of the domestic elite’s self-determination and formation better than anything else. But there is a snag. The still underdeveloped Russian city with its substandard infrastructure clearly stands in the way of a healthy national consciousness, contributes to the profanation of normal natural values and ideas, and gives rise to trite and pathetic ideological surrogates like Communist chauvinism or obsession with an abstract market. (It is no coincidence that our “fascists” are comprised of strong, young and, importantly, often well-to-do people rather than older people).

So, a dangerous gap remains unbridged between the sentiment and the emotions of the Russians who have lost their former values and codes of conduct, but failed to acquire new ones to replace them (which makes them vastly neurotic and prone to impulsive aggression) and the world outlook of the political elite, which remains drowsy and is almost unable to articulate clearly and intelligibly anything that meets shared national interests or tactical

and strategic national goals⁶. Notably, having reached critical proportions, this gap led to horrifying and bloody revolutionary upheavals in Russia in the early 20th century. I would very much like to hope that this kind of development will not happen now. But hope is not a guarantee.

In addition, the situation is further aggravated by the slow formation of full-fledged and civilised movements and parties in Russia which could and should send the energy of the politically active masses into a law-based democratic channel and thus ensure civil peace and stability in the state. Again, not least of all, this cause that is beneficial to the young Russian democracy, society and the state is being slowed down and is stalling due to underdeveloped urban – extraterritorial – institutions and structures. Deep down, political parties are typical extraterritorial associations of citizens. But what do we see in Russia? The territorial principle underlying the party construction is a thing of the past, while a new (or rather, international) – extraterritorial principle – has not taken root.

Back to where I started. Clearly, in order to ensure state stability and law-based order, Russia desperately needs to achieve genuine (rather than declarative) civil accord based on national values and strategic guidelines for the country's peaceful evolution towards civilised democracy that have yet to be developed. This requires willpower and a spiritual and intellectual supereffort by the entire nation, that is, by all its constituent ethnic and social groups, without exception. In other words, there's need for a thorough and productive civil dialogue. We need a place and adequate means if we want to get this dialogue underway (provided it is understood not as an idle debate between two or three eggheads in a newspaper with a circulation of 100,000 copies, but as an

⁶The People and Politics poll that was recently conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation showed that the importance of liberal values and attitudes to Russian people should not be overestimated. Based on the poll data, we can conclude that the formation of domestic liberalism has just begun, and rhetorical declarations about commitment to democracy go hand in hand with state tyranny (extreme paternalism) or lack of personal accountability and impunity for many of our fellow citizens. See also B.G. Kapustin, I.M. Klyamkin, *Либеральные ценности в сознании россиян [Liberal values in the Russian mind]*, POLIS, 1994, No. 1.

ongoing and substantive discussion about the numerous challenges facing us today by the largest possible number of people). I believe a modern city with its ramified and multi-tier communication network is the best place and means to conduct such a national dialogue.

The question is, to what extent is today's information and communication space suitable for such a dialogue? Occasionally, one gets a sense that Marshall McLuhan's famous quote about the global communication village is more accurate and precise than one might think. Perhaps, the abundance of information and chaos in the communication sphere throw us back in some way and separate people rather than unite them, giving rise to new conflicts and undermining the foundations of possible peace. I think what we are seeing today is some kind of a conflict between urban civilisation and the anarchist communication world. The extraterritoriality of the currently available communications is a clear and dangerous challenge to the modern world order. However, this is a different matter.

Earlier, much was written about the imminent convergence and merging of town and country. In a sense, this has already happened in the West. On the one hand, the urban civilisation has finally won there. (The Western *polis* has ceased to be a stronghold used to defend against barbarism. The historical confrontation between a rural dweller and an urban dweller is almost nonexistent in Europe). Urban values and urban lifestyle have become dominant. However, the victorious city has given rise to new forms of communication and human society. The city has become a universal form that gives birth to new subspecies that modern people find more comfortable. Stating that most Western Europeans and Americans dream of a house of their own in a green suburb area is a truism. The mass environmental movement is a harbinger of a more flexible and demanding approach towards the city and civilisation in general.

I once happened to visit a small town in Germany called Daun with a population of about 10,000 to 11,000. Earlier, say at the beginning of this century, this town would, with a good reason, be considered a province. (Germany, and Europe in general, do not have provinces in the Russian sense of the word. There are many centres, and each German state (*das Land*) is a

self-sufficient entity). Daun is 80 or 90 kilometres away from the capital of Rhineland-Palatinate state. Now though, there are no fundamental civilisational differences between this town and a major industrial *polis*, such as Frankfurt am Main. Daun is just an hour's drive from Bonn or Frankfurt, and the road is excellent. Electronic communications create a common socio-cultural space for everyone. Satellites in geostationary orbits and new information technology make it possible to spread information with lightning speed. Residents of a town like Daun have no problem whatsoever with communication of any kind. If needed, they can join the life of a large metropolitan area, immerse themselves in its atmosphere of fun and carnival, and visit theatres, museums or libraries. If, on the contrary, they prefer a measured and secluded life, they are already there, living in a green and quiet town. Having placed its residents in an environment characterised by intense communication, the city quickly developed their individuality and raised the level of their demands and ambitions. Now that the identity of modern city dwellers has become somewhat stable, got more civilised and refined, it requires more privacy, freedom of choice and self-expression, as well as the ability to act completely independently, without any outside interference, when determining the rhythm, style and way of their lives. In the midst of unusually diverse and intense communication, modern humans are increasingly looking for (and finding) seclusion, the one-of-a-kind aesthetic decoration of their homes and their day-to-day activities. There's a reason why more or less well-to-do people in prosperous countries prefer to live in houses or cottages rather than in multi-storey blocks of flats which may be comfortable, but overly standardised.

Two interrelated and concurrent processes are underway in today's world, particularly in Europe: the formation of an increasingly open, diverse and accessible-to-everyone civilisation and the further development of a personality that is overcoming all kinds of utilitarianism and "communality" and striving to achieve diverse forms of cultural life. On no account is Russia an exception to this. The country's stronger urban civilisation opens the door to genuine integration into the common European processes.

There are reasons to believe that the common European house, or rather the common European city, that is being built right before our eyes will be a complex construct made of dwellings that

may be interconnected, but still ethnically distinctive and custom-designed socio-cultural projects rather than a shared rathole. Of course, this process faces major challenges and the threat of a fundamental split in Western European civilisation. However, Europe has always been on the cusp of a decline, but each time a dawn comes instead of a sunset.

But the question of questions is Russia's energetic (and invigorating for Russia itself) participation in this pan-European construction effort. Undoubtedly, the Russian city still needs to fully form. (So far, our cities have been somewhat reminiscent of large, but, alas, not fully operating life-size models: everything or almost everything appears to be in place, but a sense of a full-fledged city life is not always present there). However, Russia's broad integration into shared Western European structures that began a while ago would be helpful to us, Russians. Alas, we are seeing numerous obstacles along the way which is regrettable, all the more so as, not only we, but also the Europeans, appear to realise that the emerging pan-European (and, more broadly, global) city will not be complete without our country with its rich history, great cultural traditions, and human and natural potential.

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I *Quaderni di Scienze Politiche*, la cui pubblicazione è iniziata nel 2011 sotto la denominazione di *Quaderni del Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche*, si ispirano ad una tradizione scientifica interdisciplinare orientata allo studio dei fenomeni politici nelle loro espressioni istituzionali e organizzative a livello internazionale e, in un'ottica comparatistica, anche all'interno agli Stati. Essi sono promossi dal Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, costituito nel 1983 e interprete fedele della tradizione dell'Ateneo.

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In copertina: Martin Waldseemüller (1470 ca.-post 1522), *Mappa della terra*, 1507. Edito a Saint-Die, Lorena, attualmente alla Staatsbibliothek di Berlino - Foto: Ruth Schacht. Map Division. © 2019. Foto Scala, Firenze.

La mappa disegnata nel 1507 dal cartografo tedesco Martin Waldseemüller, la prima nella quale il Nuovo Continente scoperto da Cristoforo Colombo è denominato "America" e dichiarata nel 2005 dall'UNESCO "Memoria del mondo", è stata scelta come immagine caratterizzante dell'identità del Dipartimento, la cui aree scientifiche hanno tutte una forte dimensione internazionalistica.



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