

NEW LIFE OF NEW HOLLAND IN A CLASSICAL CITY

NEW HOLLAND, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA

VALERY GORDIN (DR. SC, FULL PROFESSOR, NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA)

MARINA MATETSKAYA (CAND. SC, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA)

MARIYA DEDOVA (POSTGRADUATE STUDENT, NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA)

Since the early 1700s, when St. Petersburg was founded by Peter the Great, the city had been continuously developing as an industrial and military centre of Russia. In recent decades the city has been undergoing de-industrialisation and demilitarization processes that are typical of many post-Soviet cities. Today restored industrial and military objects are found side by side with well-known museums, cathedrals and other sites of the city with incredible cultural heritage. A city quarter named New Holland is located within walking distance of the Mariinsky Theatre, the Yusupov Palace and the St. Petersburg House of Music. The Museum Quarter, the territory of the residential quarter in the historic city centre comprising nine museums and exhibition halls, bounded by Moika, Kryukov Canal Embankment, Horseguards Boulevard and St. Isaac's Square is located in the immediate vicinity of New Holland. In the foreseeable future this territory will become a part of a great tourist cluster in the city.

New Holland is a man-made island in the centre of St. Petersburg which was called like that because of the Dutch shipbuilders were invited by Peter the Great to create his model city on reclaimed swamps. The island has been under naval control from the moment of its erection. The huge territory of approximately 7.8 hectares was used for storing lumber for shipbuilding. Rows of red-brick barracks and warehouses were constructed for this purpose; a basin for testing ships as well as a naval prison in a rounded form nicknamed The Bottle were also designed on the island. In the early 1890s New Holland also became a laboratory for experimenting on smokeless gunpowder under supervision of Dmitry Mendeleev. The basin was employed for testing prototypes of Russian battleships, frigates and Soviet submarines. Later, in the 20th century, the navy built a radio station at the island, from which Vladimir Lenin announced the start of revolution in 1917. During World War II New

Holland was heavily destroyed by artillery attacks. After the war tumbledown architectural buildings were left deserted until the beginning of the 21st century.



Figure 1. New Holland. Source: Metro News (www.metronews.ru)

The idea of converting the island into a cultural centre was firstly claimed by architect Veniamin Fabritsky in the 1970s. However, the renovation of the island was firstly initiated only in 2004, when the ownership rights were transferred from the navy to the city of St. Petersburg. After the tendering process Russian developing company ST New Holland in cooperation with celebrated British architect Norman Foster was to create a complex of modern art galleries, a theatre, hotel, shops, apartments and restaurants on the island directly connecting it with Nevsky Prospect, the Mariinsky Theatre and the Hermitage Museum by new bridges. The project ran into financial difficulties and a new investor represented by Roman Abramovich's Millhouse Company acquired a right from the city to redevelop the island in 2010. The current concept of the island is being implemented by the American architectural firm WORCac aiming at creating "a city within the city" with a variety of cultural programmes.

The redevelopment project is to be ready in 2017, but already in 2011 the island was opened to the public and instantly became popular among citizens and tourists representing a creative approach towards urban space development. During summer time most of the space is transformed into a green lawn with deckchairs, place for yoga, skate pool, fitness classes or frisbee playing. Stationary decommissioned shipping containers scattered all over the island are used as kitchens for a few cafes run by St. Petersburg's restaurants, open

library regularly replenished with donated books, sport ground for playing table tennis, computer-equipped club and art gallery hosting temporary exhibitions of contemporary art. The summer programme is also saturated with various outdoor events such as music or poetic concerts, theatre performances, cultural festivals, thematic days for children and their parents, various workshops and markets.

Over the summer of 2012 the island attracted more than 200,000 visitors compared to 130,000 visitors in 2011. Most frequent visitors are aged between 18 and 25 years. According to a representative of the Iris Foundation that runs the island during the reconstruction period all activities taking place on the island is a marketing research aiming at learning public opinion for future development of the investment project. However, despite its temporary character Summer in New Holland has become one of the most popular projects in the creative industries initiated in recent years. The high popularity of the project can be explained by the possibility for visitors to spend their time outdoors.

Currently there are more than ten creative spaces in St. Petersburg offering various types of activities, but all of them are located in revitalised buildings of former factories or other abandoned industrial sites. The low number of urban parks and absence of organised creative activities make New Holland a unique example of outdoor cultural space in the city with five million inhabitants.



Figure 2. Summer in New Holland. Photo: Mariya Dedova

One of the main features of the project is private ownership meaning that regeneration development strategy is formed by the current investor New Holland Development, a division of Millhouse Company. It is the investor who provides different types of services for a whole row of customers. The first group of customers are visitors of the island, both residents and tourists. They are offered various opportunities for creative leisure activities. The second group is represented by the local government interested in providing public space for common use. It is worth mentioning that entrance to the island is free of charge as well as the greater part of activities provided, but to enter the island you need to pass face control. The third group is formed by artists who get a chance to use the island to present their artworks. The managing foundation stays very open to ideas of contemporary artists. Finally, there is a large number of particular customers interested in specific events. If it is a handmade market, independent designers are offered an outlet for their entrepreneurial activities. If it concerns a painting workshop for children, both parents and children receive creative educational services. Thus, a plethora of available services makes this island be a centre of attraction among active parts of population.

However, in our view, the creative character of the present concept of the island development ignores the history of the quarter. Being a place for recreation and cultural activities, the identity of the territory is obscured. Right opposite the island, on the far bank of the canal, there is one of the oldest Russian museums and one of the world's largest naval museums, Central Naval Museum. It seems that creative New Holland would enhance its attractiveness by cooperating with the museum. Such cooperation would help to develop the identity of the space that, in its turn, would foster the formation of St. Petersburg's brand as a sea capital which is currently not being attributed and articulated enough.

References

- Mendick, R. and Rosser, N. Roman Abramovich to spend £250 million on St. Petersburg art museum project, *The Telegraph*, 28 November, 2010. URL: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/8164981/Roman-Abramovich-to-spend-250-million-on-St-Petersburg-art-museum-project.html> (Accessed 15.03.2013)
- Minner K., WORKac to Redesign St. Petersburg's New Holland Island, *ArchDaily*, 3 August 2011. URL: <http://www.archdaily.com/156067/workac-to-redesign-st-petersburgs-new-holland-island/> (Accessed 15.03.2013)
- Museum Quarter. St. Petersburg URL: <http://www.museum-city.ru/> (Accessed 12.03.2013)
- Tyomkin, A. Abramovich wins New Holland tender, *The St. Petersburg Times*, Issue 1626 (87), November 16 2010. URL: http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=32950 (Accessed 15.03.2013)
- Work Architecture Company: New Holland Island, St. Petersburg URL: <http://work.ac/new-holland-island-st-petersburg/> (Accessed 14.03.2013)
- Wrathall, C. St Petersburg's Cultural Revolution, *Financial Times*, August 10 2012. URL: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/71dc9640-dcc0-11e1-99f3-00144feab49a.html#axzz2PDUTwsBQv> (Accessed 15.03.2013)
- Ахмедова, А. и Ковтун, Н. "Красное знамя" продадут за долги его владельца (Akhmedova, A., Kovtun, N. "Krasnoe znamya" sold for the debts of the owner), *Деловой Петербург*, 14 August 2012. URL: http://www.dp.ru/a/2012/08/13/Krasnoe_znamja_prodadut/ (Accessed 10.03.2013)
- Новую Голландию этим летом посетили более 200 тысяч человек (More than 200,000 people visited New Holland this year), *Фонтанка.ру*, 6 September 2012. URL: <http://www.fontanka.ru/2012/09/06/160/> (Accessed 10.03.2013)