



Unpredictable Transformation of Modernistic Public Spaces of the Biggest European New City of Tolyatti, Russia in Two Last Decades

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The city-agglomeration of Tolyatti (located in Samarskaya oblast' on the Volga River, 707,000 inhabitants in 2009) is the Europe's largest new town and the largest planned city of former USSR built from scratch after the 2nd World War. It is composed of two main parts: so called "Old Town" (157,300 inhabitants) planned by neoclassical scheme close to big chemical factories in the 1950s; and the "New Town" (439,700 inhabitants) built from the late 1960s near the largest soviet car factory AvtoVAZ in the radical modernistic paradigm.

Tolyatti's New Town is one of the most typical examples of socialistic urbanism with the strong separation of industrial, residential and recreation zones, standard blocks of 1 km² and two perpendicular public esplanades (the main one is half-a-kilometer-wide and 4-kilometer-long). Processes of planned and self-organized forming of the Tolyatti's public center were analyzed by the author by graph-analytical means and sociological survey in 1988. The proto-element of real city center in form of narrow trade "street" going along the initially developed front of the esplanade was found out. However the real all-city center (according to distribution and activity of public and service facilities and citizens' opinion) was localized in the Old Town's core close to traditionally formed public park and squares. A core nature of town - a wish and need of town-dwellers in normal urban places - was evident in both parts of town very sharply. Twofold brief research in Tolyatti in 2009 (on-site visual/sensual analysis and expert survey carried out by electronic mail) shows, on the one hand, the sustainability of principal elements of the city center established till 80s, and, on the other hand, sufficient innovations in the urban structure.

The process of "Russification" of environment - a saturation of formerly "atheistic" soviet urban space by objects of ecclesiastical architecture built by private money is visible everywhere. An appearance of new public sub-spaces near new churches and chapels made an environment cozier and more diverse. Mighty Cathedral of Our Savior's Transfiguration in the very center of the New Town became a visual and symbolical dominant of not only this part of Tolyatti but probably the whole city. The location of the Cathedral is very symbolic: it is superimposed on the point of intersection of esplanades - instead of unrealized Lenin monument planned here in 1960s. Secondly, it is a construction of the "icons of consumption" - trade and entertainment centers (TECs) of so to say "global" appearance. More than hundred TECs have been dispersed all around formerly "poor" public spaces in the last decade. Most sufficient cluster of TECs in the gap between the Old and New cities probably may become a really new element of the city center. Unplanned appearance of these two new layers of urban public environment - "neo-Russian" churches as symbols of both spiritual values and the State power (most of them belongs to the official Orthodox Church); and TECs as places to touch "universal" global goods - means significant trends in a transformation of formerly homogeneous public realm of new modernistic city.

KEY WORDS: Socialistic urbanism, new town, public space, self-organization, unplanned transformation.