

Not only see and understand, but also fulfill

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The era of industrialization gave rise to rapid growth in cities and workers' settlements. This was due not only to economies of scale (the need to accommodate an increasing number of workers in close proximity to industrial centers), but also to the development of state management systems and the expansion of the range of tasks to be solved – from administrative ones to the development of science, education, and the preservation and enhancement of cultural potential. In each country, in different geographical and cultural-historical conditions, the formation and development of cities and large settlements have their own characteristics. And the differences between them can be quite significant.

One of the first Russian scientists to pay attention to the processes of urbanization was the outstanding geographer Veniamin Petrovich Semenov-Tian-Shansky¹. His book "The City and Village of European Russia" became one of the world's first works on geo-urbanism, a branch of geography that studies cities. In it, he not only analyzed the established types of rural settlement, which depend largely on natural conditions, but also compiled a typology of cities based on population size and commercial and industrial turnover.

Following in his footsteps, many generations of researchers have devoted themselves to studying the characteristics and dynamics of urban development in relation to changes in economic conditions and the geographical, socio-cultural, and historical characteristics of a particular area². Moreover, this field of research has expanded and become more detailed over time. For example, «...Arctic cities have become the focus of attention in the field of spatial development management in Russia: over the past 2–3 years, research has been conducted on cities as strongholds for the development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation. A list of such strongholds has now been approved, and master plans have already been developed for them... Managing

¹ *Semenov-Tyan-Shansky, Veniamin Petrovich* (1870–1942). *Town and Country in European Russia: An Essay on Economic Geography / Notes of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, Statistics Section*; Vol. 10, Issue 2. St. Petersburg: Typography of V.F. Kirshbaum, 1910, 212.

² *Jacobs, Jane* (1916–2006) *The Economy of Cities*. – New York, 1969, 232. Novosibirsk: Cultural Heritage, 2008, 332. One of the latest Russian works in this vein is worth mentioning: *Zamyatina, N.Y. The City in the Void: Urbanization and the Arctic*. Moscow: Higher School of Economics Publishing House, 2025, 456.

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urban development requires knowledge of the specifics of urban development in the challenging Arctic conditions, both natural and economic”³.

The “face” of a city (settlement) is determined not only by the above-mentioned factors of its formation and development, but also by the system-specific features of the assets⁴ it has at its disposal within a certain socio-historical formation, at a specific stage of development of science, culture, and productive forces.

The city’s assets include not only buildings and structures for various purposes (from residential to administrative, industrial, social, cultural, etc.), but also infrastructure – energy, road, housing, utilities, and recreational facilities. During the period of accelerated industrialization in the USSR, new workers’ settlements and cities were typically built “around” or near large enterprises, with maximum population density.

As a rule, in this case, the communal engineering and energy infrastructure was tied to the main industrial facilities and was not divided into “industrial” and “domestic.” It is no coincidence that currently in Russia, “about half of the heat energy is supplied by power plants” (paper by V.V. Semikashov and A.S. Budnik). In the planned economy system, this resulted in enormous economies of scale, but later, with transition to a market economy and reduced production volumes, it gave rise to many problems. In modern conditions, more flexible and environmentally friendly energy supply systems are emerging and developing, usually focused on individual consumers.

Solving urban infrastructure problems and renovating the housing stock inherited from the USSR now requires different approaches (paper by A.V. Markarov). Soviet approaches are not applicable today for obvious reasons, but purely market-based approaches, based mainly on criteria of economic efficiency and focused on achieving a certain rate of return, are also unsuitable. At the very least, this is completely unacceptable and impractical in the case of modernization and renovation of buildings that are more than 40–50 years old. This is due both to the social nature of the problem and to the fact that many buildings in historic city centers are unique, shaping their appearance and unique aura.

The solution lies in creating institutional conditions that allow for the diversity of local conditions and characteristics to be taken into account. First and foremost, this means abandoning strict regulation and focusing on creating norms, rules, and procedures aimed at involving all interested parties (the state, the population, and business) in the decision-making process.

³ Zamyatina, N.Y. Op. cit, 7.

⁴ Kryukov, V.A., Medzhidova, D.D. Arctic Assets: From Scale to Transformability // ECO. 2021. No. 1, 8–39.

But in any case, there is no single effective solution to the problem of urban renewal, both because of its scale and complexity and because of its highly dynamic nature. Probably the most acceptable approach in these conditions is a step-by-step approach, moving from one significant decision to another, based on a thorough qualitative (institutional) and quantitative analysis of the situation in each settlement (paper by I.P. Pilipenko).

The implementation of a flexible, socially oriented approach to the renovation of housing stock and urban infrastructure requires not only consistency, but also mandatory preliminary “training” – both at the level of specialized organizations and institutions that will regulate and control the entire process, and at the level of the main actors and beneficiaries of these transformations – the residents of cities and towns, the citizens of Russia. Because in solving this extremely complex problem, the role of each of us is extremely important, dear authors and readers of ECO.

The author of these lines hopes that the dialogue he has had with you for almost 17 years has been interesting and useful not only for him personally. Our country’s economy is currently in the process of transitioning from copying “external” concepts and models of socio-economic development invented and/or implemented in other countries to forming its own approach. An approach that takes into account the fact that a significant part of Russian assets (not only urban infrastructure) has its own characteristics, determined by the entire previous path of development – economic, socio-cultural, and infrastructural. Hence the extraordinary diversity of local conditions and characteristics.

There is no other way forward than to create a new environment for interaction between the state, society, and business, based on trust and a shared desire to embark on a path of development worthy of our Fatherland and all our citizens.

Editor-in-Chief of the journal,
academician of the RAS



V.A. Kryukov