

# Ostozhenka – a Moscow District in Transition

## Reflections of Post-Soviet Restructuring Processes

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The changes Moscow has been undergoing as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union are dramatic. Social and structural change is accompanied and influenced by architectural and urban change. The tasks of the city planners include reconstruction of the historic fabric of the city as well as providing the basis for a post-modern world city. Although contradictory to an extent, these two aspects drive the discourse of urban development: heritage has become a cultural and economic commodity. As befits a capitalist city, the results of such a development include the creation of winners and losers – gentrifiers moving into restored city centre locations and ordinary citizens leaving for the high-rises on the outskirts.

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### Introduction

“...one of the *best locations* in the historical centre of Moscow, 5 minutes walking distance to the *Kremlin* and *Christ the Saviour Cathedral* ... this great location conveniently combines proximity to central Moscow *business* areas with *quietness*, safety and *favourability* of Kropotkinskaya residential district ...” (MCD Group 2000). This is how developers describe the location of their “high class” apartments for sale in a new residential project in the heart of the Ostozhenka district. From noble yet rural origins, the district declined during the Soviet period. Residents were moving out of the city centre into modern apartment blocks on the outskirts while the historic buildings were left to deteriorate, housing short-term immigrant workers, or were pulled down. During the post-Soviet era it has been re-discovered as a prestigious area, with developers, private investors and businesses starting to turn the district into a top address for apartments and offices.

Moscow during the 1990s, that is Moscow since the collapse of the Soviet Union, has been undergoing dramatic changes: in the urban

fabric, architecture, functions, and population. Although not on the same scale as Berlin where vast areas in the bombed out geographical city centre became the playground for investors and architects, in Moscow, too, there emerged an enormous demand for new housing and especially for office and retail space. This has been created to a large extent in old buildings still in existence in need of restoration, but also in new constructions. Many debates have been going on about the political, economic and social transformation *in* the city, but less yet about the transformation processes *of* the city itself. It is these processes which are at the same time informed by the macro-processes of Russian economics, politics and societal structure, but *they* also influence current developments.

This article describes an ethnographic study of a district in the historic centre of the Russian capital to highlight developments and problems in contemporary Moscow as well as to contribute to understanding of urban change in post-socialist and post-industrial societies generally. The research was carried out during the mid-1990s as a study at micro-level with ethno-

graphic research methods to complement more general information about economic, social and city planning developments in Moscow.<sup>1</sup> The findings were that while history in the city's fabric has become a vehicle to promote a Moscow and a Russian identity and has become a major driving force to regenerate the city not only physically, historic architecture also has become a cultural and economic commodity. The art nouveau or older buildings in the city centre have become prestigious real estate, and new buildings more often than not reinvent a historic style in post-modern fashion. Parts of the city centre are becoming gentrified by a new upper (middle) class of the business elite with residential and office buildings, and also with western luxury supermarkets, boutiques and restaurants. As a result, facing a move out of the city centre into now less modern apartment blocks continues to be a reality for a considerable part of the local population.

The city centre represents at once historicity of post-Soviet Russian culture, identity even, and the inner circle of the powers that be. It has become more exclusive through prohibitive prices in shops and venues and of rents or private apartments, while cheap markets and low-cost housing persist and expand on the city fringes. Although the end of the model communist city has heralded a re-opening of public space within the city, these places are either dedicated to the new ideologies of consumerism and/or Russian folklore and religion, or have become part of new buildings with fenced in surroundings. It seems contradictory – the city (centre) *has* become more accessible, but it has also created new spaces of exclusion.

## Functions and Land Use within the District

Ostozhenka is the area bordering the river Moskva to the southwest of the Kremlin, opposite the *Red October* chocolate factory, between metro stations *Park Kultury* and *Kropotkinskaya* and the newly constructed Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. The area's predominant function has always been residential, but it includes an increasingly changing range of non-residential functions: manufacturing and com-



Map 1: Central Moscow and location of Ostozhenka.

mercial, retail and services, administrative and cultural. They are mainly located along the edges of the district but also within it, giving it a diverse character. This pattern has evolved over centuries and the current redevelopment plan for the area envisages retaining this mix of functions: the district is to stay residential, with commercial and office establishments along its edge, especially along Ostozhenka street.

### *Manufacturing and Commercial*

*Tekstil*, the textile factory with research and teaching facilities, successor of a 19<sup>th</sup> century factory, is the only manufacturing enterprise left in the district. On its premises are now a BMW repair workshop and a paints retailer, giving the factory its necessary additional income through rent, and testifying to the decreasing production capacity.

Around the factory, in the southern part of the district, and across two-thirds of the eastern side, new commercial enterprises have settled during the mid-1990s. These include a *Trade Centre*, a telecommunications and pagers dealer, car repair workshops and a stomatology centre as well as a large number of unidentifiable and inconspicuous firms. This is a manifestation of the positive outcomes of the market reforms: localised economic growth. It also reflects the contrasts being created during the transition period: these new firms are occupy-

ing old, run-down commercial buildings. The almost derelict outer appearance of the neighbourhood does not suggest a successful new enterprise culture, and the contrasts between old and new, run-down and successful, are becoming more acute. This is a phenomenon encountered across the city centre. The downside of the district is a considerable number of closed enterprises, which include two publishers belonging to now redundant Soviet institutions, and derelict buildings of manufacturing and warehouse character no longer displaying signs of their previous function. These are witness to a by-gone era of a different political and economic system, temporarily forming a reminder as well as anachronism.

This image is reinforced by the first major new construction project, the Moscow International Bank, juxtaposing dereliction with state-of-the-art modern office construction. Located on the embankment of the Moskva, the bank backs onto industrial buildings and faces the large 1970s modernist *Central House of Artists*

across the river, making an interesting new connection within the area's alignments. According to the architects, their design "has demonstrated a possibility of the new building that 'speaks' the modern architectural language and nevertheless enters reasonably well into the context of the historical housing" (Ostozhenka Architects 1996).

#### *Retail and Services*

Almost all shops are located on the ground floors of the multi-storey buildings lining the northern half of Ostozhenka Street. Although there are several new shops, the variety is limited. You can buy basic groceries in three shops which are the privatised successors of state shops, now stocking imported foods. There is also a large pharmacy at Kropotkinskaya metro station which doubles as the Russian Orthodox Church shop and houses offices of the Moscow Patriarchy on the upper floors. Local residents have to go further, into neighbouring districts, for anything that is not basic. What is



Renovated and privatised formerly Soviet fast-food restaurant on Ostozhenka. Photo: Cordula Gdaniec 1996.



New businesses springing up on Ostozhenka and around the corner, while old buildings are being gutted. Photo: Cordula Gdaniec 1996.

well provided, though, are spare parts for cars, sold in at least three shops along Ostozhenka street.

Other new establishments in Ostozhenka include a bank, two travel agents, two modernised *kulinarii* (Soviet fast-food restaurants) and three expensive bars/restaurants. In the future redistribution of living space, if current trends continue, a majority of the local population will be able to shop for groceries by car in one of the modern supermarkets, while the people employed in the new offices are likely to frequent new restaurants and use other establishments of the modern service industry.

In the commercial zone of the district, which is roughly the southern half of the district, there are more technical and wholesale shops and services such as shops for (office) furniture, parquet floors, blinds, tennis equipment and a small liquor store which has dishevelled-looking people queuing outside towards the end of its lunch-time break.

#### *Administrative and Cultural*

The third non-residential function in this area can be classified as administrative/cultural.

It includes three schools, a kindergarten, three clinics, a new commercial/private stomatology centre, six buildings related to various embassies, one bank head office (the Moscow International Bank), several foreign bank representations, a swimming pool, indoor tennis courts, a number of municipal organisations and departments, administrative offices of various organisations and firms, and the office-cultural complex of the “School of Operatic Art” which was built on the largest green area of the district in the centre of Ostozhenka street. The offices in the district belong mainly to small and medium-sized Russian firms (mainly in the service sector or administrative offices), and are concentrated around the northern corner of the district.

There are two functioning churches and one old, unused church building. This former church



of the Old Believers is a listed building; as yet there are no signs of restoration. The other two churches are the church of Elias the Prophet in the northern part of the district, and the small church above the main gate of Zachatevskii Convent, built in 1696. The convent was closed in the early 1930s and the main church pulled down. On its foundations a secondary school was built which is still in use today. The small church was reopened a few years ago and a few nuns are living in one of the dilapidated convent buildings dating back to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The remaining buildings in the convent grounds house various administrative offices of former state organisations.

### *Residential Land Use*

Redevelopment in Ostozhenka is concentrated on housing and offices, and geographically it is in the northern third – the area that was already historically more prestigious. Apartments in the tenement blocks are being renovated, some of the smaller houses are being fully restored, and part of the new space is being turned into offices. The absolute amount of residential space will probably not be reduced because most of the office space as well as some of the housing is being newly constructed. The share of office space among the overall built space, however, is likely to increase significantly.

In the northern part of the district residential space takes the form of apartments in tenement blocks of various sizes. Bordering Ostozhenka Street are five- to seven-storey buildings which either date from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or are art nouveau tenements from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>. These houses have large apartments, often with period features such as doors and staircases, and an attractive outer facade. These are among the most sought-after apartments in Moscow today, just as their equivalents are in Paris or Prague.

In the middle of the district there are smaller, one- to four-storey brick and wood buildings in various states of repair. Generally, these houses are run-down and most date from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even where they look fairly dilapidated, the flats are evidently occupied and old people sit on the benches in the green areas between the houses while children

jump around the playgrounds. The further away houses are from Ostozhenka Street, the more we see a distinctive decrease in height, size, condition and prestige.

During the Soviet period only the Party built apartment blocks in the city centre. *Nomenklatura* housing is located in either these yellow blocks of flats from the 1960s to 1980s, or blocks from the Stalin era, but not in restored old buildings. In Ostozhenka the Central Committee built a block of flats in the mid-1980s, set back in large grounds behind high security fences. At the corner of the embankment at the northern end are two of the city's most important monuments. These are early 20<sup>th</sup> century art nouveau houses by famous architects, using motifs from ancient Russian art and folklore. One of them is now the administration of the *UPDK*, the former state organisation responsible for housing foreign diplomats. Since privatisation, they are one of the biggest property owners in Moscow.

Residential space becomes less dense, small-



Map 2: Ostozhenka district.

er and of lower quality towards the southern end of the district. This is where commercial and administrative or cultural functions are concentrated. Along the embankment there are almost no residential houses. The variety of functions and land use in the district is growing while economic activities that are no longer viable are being phased out. The main function – residential – is meanwhile being consolidated, all of which reflects the changing economic climate. However, within the housing sector of this area dramatic changes are occurring, connected with a transformation of living space into elite housing and the construction of residential-office complexes, i.e. a mixture of functions, and a resulting shift in the population structure.

## A Typology of the District's Buildings

For a detailed characterisation of the district a mapping exercise was carried out in 1997 to log type and age, condition, function and use, as well as prestige of all the buildings in the district. The following section is an account of these maps.

### *Type and Age of Buildings*

The city planning and architectural history of Moscow can be traced through the characteristics of buildings from particular eras and patterns of built-up areas. In the city centre there are many quarters which still display a medieval structure of small streets, small houses and plots of land surrounding these. The centre of the Ostozhenka district, around the convent, is an example of this. Planning of the Stalin era is also very obvious with its wide streets and squares, and large, ornate grey or beige stone buildings for which much of the historic fabric was sacrificed. The prime example of this is Tverskaya Street. Individual styles of houses of certain eras found in Moscow's centre include *usadby*, or estates from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, which are one- or two-storey houses in classicist form; the so-called *dokhodnye doma*, or tenements, from the turn of the century, either in brick or art nouveau blocks of four to seven storeys, art nouveau single residential houses, constructivist buildings from the 1920s for res-

idential and non-residential use; Stalin-era buildings; Brezhnev-era 15-storey, yellow brick, blocks of apartments built for the *nomenklatura*, a concentration of which is located in Moscow's most prestigious central district between Prechistenka and Tverskaya streets; and, lastly, the 1990s buildings which can be characterised as postmodern reconstructions.

Most of these building periods are found in Ostozhenka:

1. the *historic* period, which includes buildings up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, about 1890. Roughly one third of the district's buildings date from this period and they are concentrated in the southern and inner part of the area.
2. the *pre-Revolutionary* period, which includes houses built roughly between 1890 and 1920. These are mainly tenements and single dwelling art nouveau houses which are concentrated in the northern part of the district, as well as many commercial buildings along the embankment and in the southern part of the district. They account for the vast majority of the district's buildings.
3. the *early Soviet* period, which includes buildings from between 1920 and 1945. These are few in number and are commercial/administrative buildings combined with residential functions, located in the northern half of the district.
4. the *post-war Soviet* period, which includes an equally small number of buildings built between 1945 and 1991. These include administrative, sports and residential functions and are scattered around the district.
5. the *1990s*, which includes all buildings built or reconstructed after 1991. Their number is already larger than those built during the Soviet period, and growing. They include office and residential functions, often combined, and are concentrated in the northern part of the district.

### *Condition of the Buildings*

The condition of the buildings ranges from total dilapidation to excellent, and this gradation can be traced geographically from the southern part of the district to the northern part as a general

indicator. More characteristic of the district, though, is the juxtaposition of houses in very good condition with buildings marked by degradation or next to waste grounds. Two other striking features are the large number of construction sites, and the run-down character of the district generally which is made worse by the noise, dirt and hazards caused by the building work. To sum up the whole district's condition, one would have to classify it as run-down with small pockets of restoration and high standards.

For the purposes of this study the condition of the houses has been divided into six categories:

1. *derelict*, including total dilapidation and very bad condition. Generally, buildings in this state are empty.
2. *bad*, including houses with dilapidated parts. These are usually still inhabited.
3. *below average*, whereby *average* means a satisfactory condition that could be much improved, but poses no serious risks to the users. About 40% of the district's buildings fall into this category.
4. *average*, the Russian "standard" condition of buildings, which would be classified as "bad" in a western context. This is the second largest category, the vast majority of buildings are either average or below in this district.
5. *good*, or above average. This includes 1990s (re-)constructions and the Soviet party-elite house as the only building from the Soviet period.
6. *excellent*. This includes only 1990s (re-)constructions, either single apartments in tenements or entire buildings, most of which were not actually finished at the time this research was compiled.

### *Functions and Uses of Buildings*

The district is characterised by a mixture of uses and functions, and many individual buildings themselves either comprise or represent a mixture of functions and uses. Many buildings were built for a different purpose from the one they are being used for now, or they house a range of uses which were not all envisaged at the time of construction.

Most of the historic buildings from the early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century were originally built as residential houses but turned into administrative buildings after the revolution. The *usadba* on Pozharskii was transformed into a clinic in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. All the art nouveau houses were converted for administrative or foreign diplomatic use in the Soviet era. Some of the manufacturing and warehouse buildings from the turn of the century were turned into commercial space in the Soviet or post-Soviet period. The convent was transformed into a school and offices for state institutions in the 1930s. Parts of it were returned to convent use in the early 1990s, while the administrative institutions remain there. The cement factory was turned into tennis courts in the 1970s, and today also houses an expensive restaurant, and on the premises of the *Chaika* swimming pool is a small currency exchange office.

The most significant change in uses is occurring within the tenements of the turn of the century. There is a significant increase in office space which is concentrated in the more prestigious northern part of the district and along Ostozhenka Street. Although many, probably most, of the renovated apartments in the art nouveau tenements have kept their residential function, an unknown, but certainly not insignificant number is being turned into offices. The office of the Ostozhenka Architects is an example of this phenomenon: They reside in two first floor apartments of a six-storey art nouveau tenement at the corner of Ostozhenka, but there is no sign advertising their presence.

The share of office space is increasing in the district, partly at the expense of existing residential space. At the same time, new residential space is being constructed, increasing the combination of residential and administrative uses. The complex of the School of Operatic Art includes a residential-office development which is much larger than the school itself, in order to finance the project. One of the other new development projects is a residential complex with a kindergarten. So far, this trend is concentrated in the northern, more prestigious part of the district, indicating that the new housing will be of high standard as well as high price.

For this study the functions and uses of the

buildings have been categorised as:

1. *administrative* (state and municipal organisations, embassies)
2. *office* (medium and small private firms of various description, most of which are actually located within residential houses, bank head offices)
3. *office-housing* (combined complexes, in construction or planned)
4. *housing* (along Ostozhenka street the first floors of the residential houses are all occupied by trade and catering)
5. *housing (empty)* (residential houses earmarked for reconstruction the inhabitants of which have already been resettled)
6. *education* (two secondary schools, one art school, one kindergarten)
7. *trade, catering* (shops, restaurants, bars, and services. The vast majority of these is located on the first floors of the residential blocks along Ostozhenka street and include a *Sberbank* branch, two hairdressers, two restaurants, three travel agents, three grocers, two photo processing shops, a money exchange, a car spare parts trader, one furniture shop, a cosmetics shop, a mobile phone dealer, a fashion firm, and a book shop.)
8. *sport, cultural* (Chaika swimming pool, tennis courts, cultural centre, churches)
9. *medical* (three clinics)
10. *manufacturing* (textile factory)
11. *commercial (empty)* (commercial, possibly manufacturing, buildings from the turn of the century that are now empty and in a very bad condition).

Two different zones can be discerned: The northern part of the district can be classified as an office and retail zone, while the southern part can be classified as a commercial and manufacturing zone. In the northern part are also the higher and more prestigious residential buildings. New firms, including banks, insurance companies and developers, tend to prefer office space in this northern part in the better quality buildings. This means along the main street Ostozhenka, near the metro station (*Kropotkinskaya*), and close to the neighbouring zones of

new prestigious office space along Gogolevskii Bulvar and in the Prechistenka/Arbat area. Another important development that can be gathered from this study is the increase of office space in the residential sector.

#### *Prestige Rating of the Buildings*

Although in general Ostozhenka is a prestigious area because of its historic character, green space, low density and vicinity to the city centre, high prestige is only bestowed upon the art nouveau tenements in the northern corner of the district. Prestige decreases with growing distance from that corner and from Ostozhenka Street, parallel to a decrease in quality and height of the buildings. However, there are many potentially very prestigious buildings inside the district. Only the southern part with its commercial and manufacturing character has really low prestige at the moment, although that may change in the future if its potential as downtown riverside development is realised.

In order to characterise the prestige rating of the district and its buildings in their current state and their potential for developers and reconstruction, *prestige* is based upon a subjective judgement which takes into account the following factors: *condition* of the building, *architecture*, *function*, *location*.

The rating has been divided into four categories:

1. *low* prestige. These are buildings in a bad or degraded condition, without any particular architectural merit, and/or were built for functions that can be reconstructed to fit post-industrial functions only with major effort and cost.
2. *potential* prestige. These are buildings in a bad or run-down condition which are architecturally valuable, located in strategic places near main roads and amenities, and which could easily be adapted for modern residential or office use.
3. *prestige*. These are buildings in a relatively good state, of high architectural value and in a strategic location. They are built for and used for functions needed today.
4. *high* prestige. These are newly (re-)constructed buildings, as well as renovated apart-



ments in the art nouveau tenements, of high architectural value, excellent condition and purpose-built for present day functions and uses: high class housing and offices.

## Urban Policy for the Regeneration of the Historic Centre – Conservation and Planning

During the 1980s urban conservation gradually gained importance within government structures and attention was finally focused on Ostozhenka when significant potential was realised. Potential in terms of a fairly unspoilt historic settlement structure and empty space as well as houses of historic-architectural value that can be transformed into quality or prestige housing. Although not awarded the status of a “strict” conservation regime, the district was officially classified as a “historically valuable area”.

Regardless of the increased official concern for urban conservation, however, valuable old buildings were still destroyed during this period. This was the case with the houses in the centre of Ostozhenka Street on the site of the largest green area, which included a number of architectural monuments. In 1982, the city’s architecture and planning authority (GlavAPU) organised a competition for the project for a new building of the USSR Academy of Arts. The space was cleared but the building was never constructed. In its place emerged the largest *skver*’ or green area of the district. *Subbotniki* (volunteers who clean the city’s spaces in between and around the houses on Saturdays) were called in to plant trees and establish a simple park, but the city would not invest resources in maintenance or establishing paths, lights, benches, flower beds and the like.

It is exactly this plot which was the subject of protest and dismay over a large construction project. The *skver*’ was destroyed, evoking futile protest from the local population who considered the green in spite of its shortcomings an integral part of their neighbourhood. The dismay was all the greater as the project was a large office-cultural-residential complex, the ‘School of Operatic Art’ which is unlikely to be of use to local residents. This project is a good example of disregard for inclusive planning on

the part of private business and influential individuals, and of the mayor’s penchant for large-scale, expressive projects.

The other two small greens exist only as a result of two churches falling victim to Stalinist purges. It is interesting, thus, how spaces and their perception are relative to their time and context. Judging by the statements in the interviews with the Ostozhenka Architects and the reports on the protest movements during the glasnost years (Colton 1995), Muscovites are usually in favour of conserving their urban and their ecological environment.

The entire territory within the Garden Ring, the historic core of the city, is classified as an urban conservation zone. Recent new regulations have dispensed with more detailed degrees of strictness or “special town planning regimes”. Only the Kremlin and its immediate surroundings are still in the strictest conservation zone. Ostozhenka is today subject only to the general guidelines about urban conservation set out in the planning document for the Central Planning Zone.

On the city government’s list of hundreds of buildings to be reconstructed for the 850<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Moscow, the Ostozhenka district is one object of reconstruction in its entirety. The organisation responsible for this is the Prefecture of the Central Administrative District, and the Ostozhenka General Directorate is the single contractor. Sources for financing the reconstruction are supposed to be private, the emphasis is on “attracting investors” (Moscow City Government 1996).

## The Redevelopment Plan for the District

The *Programme of Reconstruction and Development of Microregion No.17, Ostozhenka* was worked out on the basis of historical documentation of the area, the guidelines of the planning document of the Central Planning Zone and of the urban conservation authority, as well as modern architectural thought. The main concepts of this programme are the preservation and restoration of “the historic ambience” of the district, the regulation of new development by height and functions and the maintenance of

the traditional residential function of the district. At the same time, the commercial, administrative and cultural functions are to be developed along the edges of the district (Ostozhenka Architects 1996).

Moscow has a number of General Directorates, quasi-governmental institutions with control and facilitating functions, reminiscent of Urban Development Corporations which were set up by the British government in the 1980s' drive to regenerate the country's inner cities through public-private partnerships. Their aim is to attract projects which will advance the regeneration process but in practical terms they are duplicating the city's architecture/planning authorities' administrative functions. Although municipal organisations, they are joint stock companies and derive their income from commissions of projects.

The Ostozhenka General Directorate was set up on the basis of, and still includes, the local housing maintenance committee. Apart from this, however, it is not much more than an extension of the city's planning and development authorities. It aims to put the official redevelopment plan into practice, and "the entire programme is to be implemented at the expense of future investors, on the basis of investment contracts which cede into investors' ownership some of the constructed or reconstructed facilities" (Moscow Investors' Association 1996). The local residents, for example, are referred to as numbers of families and rooms and square metres, because they only seem to become important when they need to be rehoused. Consultation with the locals is restricted to negotiations about resettlement programmes. In this respect the agency fulfils a controlling function, negotiating on behalf of the residents with the developers and checking that developers do not deceive the residents. In a sense, they are actively engaged in removing one set of residents and inviting in a totally different set of residents. In their promotional literature, they represent themselves as partners of the developers rather than as the guardians of the redevelopment plan, offering "a full set of services" (ibid.).

### *Selling the City*

Everything happening in Moscow during the mid-1990s seems to have been directed towards the 850th anniversary of the capital in September 1997, and history has become a marketing tool to promote investment in the centre. The mayor intends to transform Moscow into a capital that lacks in nothing that other world cities feature (Barry 1995 and *Itogi* 1996). An office in a restored historic building is very popular among banks and other businesses. This connection between economy and culture in the widest sense is exploited on various levels. The development in Ostozhenka is a manifestation of this. The reconstruction of the historic centre is thus driven by Soviet-style projects for a big event on the one hand, and office construction for the growing business community on the other. In most cases, the former is not actually discernible from the latter, indicating a growing merger of economic and cultural aims. This is another similarity with western redevelopment practices in addition to development agencies – marketing of the city's architectural and cultural heritage.

Because the city itself does not have the funds needed to restore all old buildings, it is forced to attract investors. Deals are made that give the investor at least 50% of the finished space, and the other share, or its cash equivalent, goes to the city. Recently, due to the difficult economic climate, the city has had to make concessions to the investors, increasing their share of the deals to up to 80%. Even projects that are totally financed by the city, like *Gostiny Dvor*,<sup>2</sup> are dictated by potential investors: only by leasing prime office and retail space can the construction costs be recouped. In fact, more important than the restoration itself is the hunt for future tenants (Shchukin 1996).

### Population Change

Until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the population of the district was mainly aristocratic or connected with the convent. As the area became more urbanised, merchants and civil servants moved in and gradually came to dominate the class structure by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the

population included an increasing share of the middle and lower social classes. This was especially so along Ostozhenka Street itself, where apartments were rented out by merchants turned landlords who had built tenements. At the turn of the century, the new bourgeoisie moved into the northern part of the district, where the prestigious art nouveau tenements were built. The other inhabitants of the district were members of the *intelligentsia*, civil servants, traders and artisans. A growing share of workers (was) moved in between 1914 and 1930 in the wake of expropriation of the large apartments. In order to solve the appalling housing conditions of workers, who were living in overcrowded hostels, often sharing a bed with people working different shifts, the bourgeois apartments were divided up to house an entire family in each room. This was the creation of the infamous *kommunalki* – communal apartments.

Virtually all the flats in the old unrestored houses in the city centre were so-called *kommunalki*. Up to six families used to live in these, sharing a communal bathroom and kitchen, and having one, or possibly two, rooms for themselves. The communal flats and housing generally was a major problem throughout Soviet times. In spite of massive housing construction between the 1950s and 1980s, *kommunalki* have not been phased out yet and there is still a serious housing shortage. The city's declared aim to eradicate communal flats by the year 2000 seems much more feasible, of course, in conjunction with the emerging housing market

than if the government alone were responsible for housing provision.

This situation offers great potential for developers and private investors who want to buy flats in the art nouveau tenements or other old houses in central locations. In order to become the owners of such an apartment they have to buy every party of the *kommunalka* a flat of their own. In the tenements in the northern corner of the district, on the basis of observation, almost half of the flats have been renovated, i.e. bought up by *New Russians*<sup>3</sup> or developers. A considerable number of apartments are burnt out or otherwise derelict and therefore vacant.

In Ostozhenka most of the buildings were houses with communal flats. In fact they made up over 60% of the district's housing stock in 1989 (Sotsialno...1989). A consequence of this concentration is that there is now a massive turnover of the population, spread over a relatively short time. In 1989, at the time of the last census, the number of inhabitants was about 3 800, representing a steady decrease since the early Soviet period. This represents a low population density as the district is roughly half a square km in size (43 ha), which would be 8 000 per km<sup>2</sup>. The average population density for Moscow is 10 000 per km<sup>2</sup>. In the Arbat and the Yakimanka districts it is even between 20 and 40 thousand per km<sup>2</sup>, but the Sretenka district, which is in many respects similar to Ostozhenka, has an even lower population density (ca 5 000 per km<sup>2</sup>, Mosgorkomstat 1996). It will be interesting to see whether the population in



On the quieter side streets behind the establishments for the New Russians. Photo: Cordula Gdaniec 1996.

Ostozhenka will rise again, now that the mass out-migration of the 1960s to the 1980s has stopped and a new class of people who choose to live in the centre has emerged. Between 1992 and 2002, if current developments continue, possibly the whole structure of the population will have changed in the area.

A mix of professions and social classes has always been sustained in this district in spite of the growth of the share of certain strata of the population. At first it was the bourgeoisie that increased in relative terms, then workers, and in later Soviet years *limitchiki*,<sup>4</sup> low- or unskilled immigrant workers. Thus, at the end of the Soviet period, there was a relatively large share, nearly 50%, of people with secondary or uncompleted secondary education in the district, most of whom lived in communal flats. The other half of the population, with specialised secondary or higher education was living to a large extent in separate flats. Of the total population of the district, 30.9% had higher education; 3.6% uncompleted higher education; 19.7% had specialised secondary education; 32.1% had secondary education; and 13.7% had uncompleted secondary education (Sotzialno...1989). In contrast to the large numbers of *kommunalki* residents, only a small number of the party elite lived in the 1980s nomenklatura block. As a result, there was no process of social polarisation in this district during the later Soviet period. Although such tendencies were visible in the city centre as a whole and in certain districts in particular, as for example the Arbat, where the party elite built many residential houses during the 1970s and 1980s.

In at least the northern, most prestigious, part of the district this is now changing due to the replacement of the mixed population by *New Russians*. With their wealth and business occupations they constitute a diametrically opposed social class to the original inhabitants, leading to a process of social polarisation. At the moment, however, this is only a trend. The absolute number of inhabitants and buildings in the district is so small that the presence of *New Russians* is relatively significant, although small in absolute terms.

In the drive to provide every family with

their own flat and increase living space per person, much of the central population has been moved to the outskirts since the 1960s. Buildings in the city centre were often pulled down rather than restored in order to modernise the centre, but mostly nothing at all was done with them. The residents moved into huge apartment blocks in new microregions around the city limits. The inconvenience of the location of the new residential districts aside, people were glad to receive better housing. This was true for those who relied on the state to provide their housing, but even enterprises and later on the housing cooperatives, which would build better and larger flats, would build on the outskirts.

The vacated old buildings in the city centre, often in a bad state of repair, were subsequently filled with so-called *limitchiki*. These are migrant workers who came to the city to work on certain projects or in certain industries because of a shortage of low and unskilled workers in the capital. Not getting a residence permit to live in the capital indefinitely or receiving other rights like Muscovites immediately, these workers were restricted in their choice of residence and therefore were concentrated in the run-down blocks with communal flats. Many of these *limitchiki* managed to stay on in Moscow and even get themselves on the city's or an enterprise's housing lists, and now live on the outskirts themselves.

As a result of the out-migration of the "ordinary" population of the centre the proportion of the *nomenklatura* increased. Trushchenko recognised this development as a Soviet form of gentrification (*oburzhuazivanie*) which is not based on any economic or market forces characteristic for gentrification (Trushchenko 1995: 86). The influx of a low status, poor, marginalised population effected a simultaneous downward spiral of the centre, which Trushchenko terms *proletarianisation* (*proletarizatsiya*) (Trushchenko 1995: 95). These completely opposing developments did not occur in exactly the same areas, but can be found very near each other. The *nomenklatura* housing and other party or army buildings would always stand out.

Within Ostozhenka there have been all three developments: remaining mixed population, influx of *limitchiki*, and *nomenklatura* build-



ing. The current influx of a new elite is thus not a totally new phenomenon. However, the quality of the developments is different and new. It is a direct result of the introduction of the market economy, now that the state has lost its monopoly on the distribution of living space, and shaped by free market forces and a *laissez-faire* approach by the city government regarding urban policy.

Another characteristic of the original central population is age. As younger families, people of working age, were the first to move to better housing on the outskirts, it was increasingly the elderly and single who stayed behind. In 1989, 19.5% of Ostozhenka's population was aged over 60, while children up to six years old accounted for only 11%, 7–16 year olds for 12.2%, and 17–59 year olds for 57% (Sotsialno...1989). With the influx of younger and middle aged working professionals, likely to be married, and possibly even with a child, this age structure and household size are about to change fundamentally.

The population in this district is currently at a very interesting point – on the verge of fundamental shifts in composition and structure. There are many empty residential houses awaiting reconstruction whose original inhabitants have been resettled in new apartments on the outskirts. By the time the new residents arrive, after the houses may have been newly built rather than restored, there will be no link between the old and the new. Across the district and across the years there is more continuity as original residents continue to live in the district while more and more new residents are moving into the district. However, these two sets of inhabitants do not mix, barely do they even meet on the street or the staircase. Yet they know of each other's existence and the original population is only too well aware of the developments. Eventually they, too, will have to move out and a new class of residents will gradually take over the district and change its character by their different demands and standards.

#### *Centrifugation, Moscow-Style*

Olga used to live in a *kommunalka* in one of the art nouveau tenements, sharing with three other families. In spring 1996, she was rehoused in

the Northeast, not far outside the city. According to her, the residents had some choice as to their new abode, but could not refuse offers endlessly, because in the end, they *would* be rehoused. Olga requested and received a flat near a metro station along the red line which serves Kropotkinskaya metro station, because she is still working in this area. Apart from the travelling time and cost, she is not satisfied with the quality of the new house, although the quality of life is much better in a separate flat with its own bathroom and kitchen. On the whole, though, she regards the developments in the district as positive.

In fact, all the people remaining in communal flats in Ostozhenka are living in anticipation of being rehoused. At the moment, the fact that they are being forced out of a prestigious central area is of less consequence than the fact that they receive individual flats and improves their standard of living. Maybe they are just resigned to the inevitable. The socio-economic study of the district in 1989 showed that 62.2% of the residents wished to stay in the wider district (the then administrative district *Leninskii raion*) 13.3% wanted to live in the centre or "good" outer districts (such as *Rechnoi Vokzal*, *Strogino*, the Southwest), and 24.5% did not express a wish regarding their future residence. According to the researchers many of the residents "simply do not believe that their wishes will in any way be considered".

Although these 'forced emigrants' gain an advantage in terms of their housing situation, the profits gained by the new residents of the city centre seem incomparably greater, especially seen in the long term, and reflect the social injustices being created in the wake of the transition to a free market system. The centre simply *is* prestigious for those who value the architectural environment and access to cultural and other facilities. Among residents of the centre generally, more than 50% want to live specifically in the centre, and only 10% prefer the outer districts with modern housing. It is those residents who are better educated and better off, for example living in separate apartments, who have a stronger wish to stay in the centre. The newcomers, *limitchiki*, move to the outer districts more willingly. The socio-eco-

conomic study for the redevelopment plan concludes in its recommendations that it is “necessary to support the residential functions within the historic city centre”.

In an attempt to defend the rights of older, or native (*korennye*) Muscovites to remain in the city centre, the City Duma passed a law on compensation and subsidies in July 1996. Native residents will be offered either compensation for the central apartment they have to give up or subsidies in order to buy a restored apartment in the centre instead. This money is supposed to come out of the city’s budget. A justification for this expense is that the new ruling will make it easier for developers to go ahead with reconstruction projects. Drawn-out negotiations about resettlement of the inhabitants of houses to be reconstructed are discouraging potential developers, and the failure to reconstruct houses is in the long term more expensive for the city than investing now in the speeding up of the reconstruction process. However, the success of the new law still depends on the type of contracts the city manages to agree with the developers.

What is happening in parts of Ostozhenka and other districts of the city centre is a process of gentrification: high-income residents are moving into restored or newly-built houses in a run-down area, thereby, if not replacing, then marginalising the original population and changing the character of the area. The basic underlying economic causes of gentrification are the same in Moscow as in western cities, where the phenomenon was first described – upgrading of the existing buildings with ensuing high rents or purchasing prices denying the original population access to the restored apartments. Often gentrification of this type was preceded, and is accompanied by, a ‘symbolic gentrification’ (Lang 1998) and a certain consumer culture and ambience, transforming the entire quarter, not just the buildings or apartments, with a certain style and atmosphere. This also means that the gentrifiers are not necessarily rich but bring in and exploit certain symbolic and cultural values in the district. These are often artists, people working in the creative industries, students or people with “alternative” lifestyles (Zukin 1982). This aspect is missing completely in Moscow. However,

the new residents in Ostozhenka *are* in fact living differently. Money in abundance has never been so available outside the Party *nomenklatura* or so useful, since the revolution. Even when people were able to save in the USSR, they were not able to spend their money due to shortages in the production of consumer services and the restrictions on foreign travel.

In western cities gentrification tends to occur in areas largely inhabited by a marginalised population which results in stark contrasts. In Moscow there has been a more subtle form of socio-spatial segregation so that most districts have been characterised by a social mix. Even those districts with a high share of workers and low prestige, such as the south-east of Moscow, did not become as degraded as the “problem estates” on the outskirts or in the inner cities of many western cities. A reason for this was, in simple terms, the Soviet centralised system, where everybody lived in similarly bad conditions and only the party elite lived in areas that were markedly better and segregated. The present gentrifiers in Moscow thus represent a high-end stream of population which contrasts sharply with the emerging poverty, but also continues the social mix of a residential quarter in Moscow. It seems contradictory that at the moment there is no significant middle class in Russia or even in Moscow, but still there is less pronounced polarisation in residential areas. Everything indicates, though, that this will not continue for much longer. Because a mortgage system is only in the early stages of development in Russia, even the emerging, “new”, professional middle class who are now earning relatively well with wages of about \$1000–1500 per month, cannot afford to improve their living situation in ways similar to the options of the *New Russians*, or the western middle class. Once this group of the population has the means to buy or rent a flat in a location of their choice – for example in the expanding, environmentally desirable high-rise district *Mitino* – then more distinct socially and qualitatively differentiated areas will emerge within the city.

With the emergence of the *New Russians* a new type of consumer culture is emerging. This is characterised by western influence and is largely limited to the small financial elite. It



Renovation of art-nouveau tenements next to postmodern office constructions. Photo: Cordula Gdaniec 1996.

consists mainly of expensive bars and restaurants, supermarkets, specialist shops and casinos. In the Ostozhenka district two expensive establishments have opened that cater for this new class: the *Tren-Moss Bistro* on Ostozhenka near the cathedral, and *le Chalet* restaurant on Korobeinikov between the tennis courts and the commercial district. This “Swiss cuisine” restaurant highlights the emerging contrasts in the district. It is surrounded by some of the most run-down buildings of the district, its customers arrive in BMWs, the American chef allegedly has the beef flown in from the USA (Parks 1996), while further up the alley elderly locals can be seen sifting through the rubbish containers. Still further up, on Ostozhenka, locals are trying to make ends meet in the grocer’s shops which are stocking goods that are up to 90% imported.

The polarisation and gentrification processes occurring throughout Moscow’s centre and within the Ostozhenka district represent trends rather than abrupt, large-scale changes at this

point. Polarisation exists in Ostozhenka in the sense that the two extremes of the social and income continuum exist next to each other. The broad middle of this continuum still exists alongside, and is in numbers much larger than especially the emerging top end of the scale. Present trends indicate, however, that the top end will expand its presence in the district (and the whole city centre) and gradually replace the current middle. The middle will also change its composition and divide into an upper middle stratum, leaving more marginalised people in increasing poverty. A renovated apartment with 129 m<sup>2</sup> in one of the art nouveau tenements on Ostozhenka was for sale for \$160 000 in 1996. The rent for a three- to four-room flat in this building before refurbishment and privatisation is about \$50 per month. If privatised and rented out, such a flat costs between \$800 and \$900 a month even if not very well renovated. Considering the officially recorded average monthly income of \$65 for Muscovites in 1994 (Mosgorkomstat 1996), one must conclude that

the original inhabitants, and people with modest incomes, are de facto excluded from the regenerated centre.

This process of gentrification has resulted in a high degree of fragmentation within the city space and a creeping privatisation of space. Reconstructed buildings and blocks form pockets within the old city centre which contrast with the more or less run-down character of the surrounding area. Often these new buildings have delineated their private space in a very clear and also very secure way in order to exclude those who are not part of this new society. In this way, the reconstructed expensive apartments and offices form their own, private, encapsulated city space that is physically, socially and economically on a totally different level of the city. The development of the School of Operatic Art on the former *skver* is a case in point. What used to be public space has, in the name of redevelopment, been turned into private space. It is an example of what Short has called the “new enclosure movement” of the postmodern city (Short 1996:32).

Taking all these pockets of reconstruction for the wealthy together, a ‘new’ central Moscow emerges that is far removed from the ‘old’ Moscow which is still characterised by historic buildings and ‘native’ inhabitants. In his film, “Hello Fools!” (1996), the Russian director Eldar Ryazanov depicts this gentrification process in central Moscow as background to, and part of, the storyline. The specific example used in the film is Ostozhenka No. 3, a grand art nouveau tenement at the northern corner of the district. There is serious restoration work going on in the house; some apartments have already been restored by *New Russians*, who have decorated their flats with the most expensive materials and furniture in a neo-classical style (or kitsch); and there are unrenovated flats that are inhabited by “ordinary” Muscovites. In the film, the *Novye Russkie* are followed to their place of work, to all sorts of *biznes* in other luxurious renovated apartments, and on their encounters with shady businessmen and their bodyguards. The hero of the film, living in an unrenovated flat and working for the municipal services, has to fight off real-estate agents who try to persuade/coerce him to sell his flat. Following him,

we see a lively Moscow in which the characters engage, encounter problems or enjoy themselves. In the Moscow of the *New Russians*, the apartments are mere property and investment and their lives are unrelated to Moscow as they are lived almost exclusively inside buildings of a type that could be found anywhere. They avoid the “real” Moscow of the majority of citizens and probably do not even know or remember it.

## Conclusions

Meanwhile, in 2001, several of the district’s new developments and restorations have been completed, adding some important new neighbours on the block, such as the UN Headquarters in Russia. Many of the offices and apartments are still up for sale or rent, though, while yet more are under construction. The enthusiastic climate of property speculation with large-scale projects and high prices of the early 1990s has given way to more sobriety, even bankruptcy in some cases. The number of customers for this top level of property was over-estimated. On a more mundane level of economic activity, the developments observed in 1997 have continued: there are more small computer firms (repairs, sales), underlining the establishing of a city and a society oriented towards the new service industry, while dereliction and closure persist.

Although urban conservation has taken up a higher place in the hierarchy of city planning issues it remains an issue that more often than not is put back behind more pragmatic considerations. In a letter to *The Moscow Times* a reader recounts his vain attempt to fight for the professional restoration of an art nouveau apartment house on Ostozhenka in 1995. His efforts led him to discover that such buildings were often not registered as architectural monuments because of “pressure from business interests”, or the documents about their registration were not found or changed, and that “bribery was wide-spread” (*The Moscow Times* 2001).

In a sense, this lack of respect for history and architecture is part of the architectural re-design of the city. Whereas in the Soviet era history was re-written through the demolition of pre-revolutionary architecture and construction of socialist ideas, history is now re-written



more literally with pre-revolutionary buildings being converted or completely recreated in the case of churches. There is a definition of a new Moscow being created through a particular use of architecture – for economic as well as for political purposes. As before, and as always, the combination of past and future is a difficult, at times controversial, task for those who want to shape the city. But a task that is at the top of every city's agenda. Mayor Luzhkov is returning something to the citizens that has been missing in the model communist city and is at the same time trying to leave his mark in modelling Moscow as a postmodern world city.

Apart from the political discourse on restoring Moscow's cultural heritage there is also a particular marketing discourse of the newly constructed apartments and offices. Apparently contradictory qualities are making the properties valuable and attractive. For example, they have to be in a quiet location yet within easy reach or proximity to bustling cultural or business life, they have to feature a historic ambience if not in the building itself then in the district, and also modern conveniences. Ostozhenka seems to combine these well, especially with its leafy lanes and large corpus of residential space.

If you are looking for an office or an apartment to buy or to rent in Moscow you will find Ostozhenka in the "expensive" section of the real estate agents. Most, if not all, of the new properties are classified as "luxury", "high class" or "elite" and feature security. Comparing this to the days of the late 1980s until 1990s, when there was a squat on Ostozhenka, the district seems well on the way to sanitation and gentrification. Gentrification of a different type from that in western cities, though. In Berlin, for example, the process was initiated by young "alternative" and/or creative people who moved into disused workers' houses, bringing in more culture than money. They revitalised the old features and atmosphere which had been pushed into oblivion during the modernisation frenzy of the 1960s and 1970s.

In Ostozhenka, as in comparable other districts in Moscow, there is no such "symbolic" gentrification with a concomitant consumer and social culture, but an influx of high earners with

a minimal consumption culture in the same area. These remain isolated in the sense that there are no rows of trendy bars, restaurants or shops. The handful of expensive bars and restaurants in Ostozhenka make no impact on the environment of the neighbourhood, unlike the increasing number of renovated apartments and offices in former apartments. This difference, in spite of the similarities to western cities in terms of the transition to post-industrial economics, is probably rooted in the Soviet history of the city and the fact that the houses in the district were not originally built for factory workers but for gentry and intelligentsia, and it retained a village-like atmosphere well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Notes

1. Sources of this research were: planning documents and city statistics, observations (mapping of the district), interviews with experts and with local residents, background documentation and other materials about the district kindly made available by Ostozhenka Architects. The research was carried out between 1995 and 1998, the survey of the district's buildings in the summer of 1997.
2. Gostiny Dvor, originally a 19<sup>th</sup> century trade hall which had fallen into a state of complete disrepair, has been restored into a historic-21st century shopping mall for expensive, specialist shops, boutiques and cafés.
3. New Russians (*novye russkie*) is a colloquialism for the new class of rich, mostly very rich, Russians who managed to acquire wealth during the first years after the collapse of the Soviet Union when state-owned firms and property was being privatised, or through quick and adept exploitation of new economic opportunities.
4. *Limitchiki* was the term for immigrant, low-skilled, labour for the city's factories during the Soviet period, who were not given Moscow residence permits (*propiska*) and most of whom had to live in a marginalised state for a long time or until they left Moscow again.

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