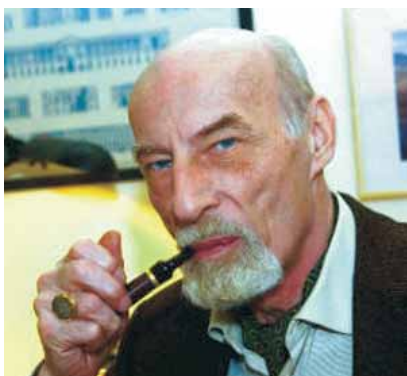


THE 'MEGALOPOLIS' CORPORATION

Vyacheslav Glazychev



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Truth be told, it is important to note that a megalopolis cannot serve as a paragon of the democratic form of governance. A megalopolis is far too big and complex for that. Moscow, which is already being caught up to by Saint Petersburg by leaps and bounds, is, of course, a separate story. There was a moment in its history when the new concept of territorial public self-governance (TPSG) emerged as part of the wave of perestroika. I was a witness to and a participant in this process in various districts of Moscow. Originally initiated for the purpose of administering the distribution of humanitarian aid, TPSGs, which were headed by quite a number of competent and educated people, quickly started to deal with other questions, such as land and real estate inventories, with the intention of taking them under their own control. After the notorious

coup of 1991, the Moscow authorities quickly quashed these claims, after which the activities of these institutions eventually ceased to be pursued.

I had a chance to participate in the activities of an improvised group, which outlined 125 metropolitan areas in Moscow as an alternative to the existing Soviet areas. This was proposed in order to facilitate the elimination of the district Party committees and the district executive committee structure of the Soviet times as quickly as possible. The objective here was to make the new areas something like the boroughs in London, with their elected authorities controlling all activities within their jurisdiction. Instead, after a simultaneous establishment of prefectures, which are devolved elements of the Moscow government, and the subsequent establishment of municipal councils, it became clear to people that they would not actually get a chance to participate in any real control over their direct environment. **Lacking even authority over landscape gardening (an activity that requires funding), municipal**

heritage site (Khitrovka Chambers is the most recent example of this happening) or a studio school for children. However, such cases are rather rare.

As of now, the rule that 'might is right' seems to ring true. In contrast to a blind riot, a struggle makes sense only in the case that there is even a meagre chance for success. Right now there is no such chance, in particular because **the federal authorities are trying to ignore the municipal issues facing Moscow, and the mass media almost never touch the 'sacred cows' of our megalopolis**, which, strictly according to the law, is not even a city but still a guberniya (i.e. a province).

The recent debate about the General Plan for Moscow is an excellent illustration of significant sophistication. Formally, there was a public discussion, which went peacefully on the whole, and there are also thousands of articles in the press reflecting that fact. The missing point here is that one can have an earnest discussion of the most complicated problems of a megalopolis, like when a particular

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councils are manifestly ornamental structures, and the local residents, who are by no means stupid, are reflective of this very reality in their paltry turnout at municipal elections.

The city dwellers can only resort to segmental, localised protests against all sorts of specific effects of population pressure, which, in any case, nearly always result in their monotonous defeat. Sometimes, it is possible to mobilise the public while attempting to protect yet another historical

transportation problem cannot be resolved without dynamite. Here it is important to consider three separate conditions. First of all, different options must be considered, not just a single solution, of which it is only possible to criticise separate elements. Secondly, public discussion should be preceded by an independent professional assessment. Thirdly, in order to ensure the equality of input, experts and professional lawyers should be entitled to act on behalf and upon the authorisation of large

public civic organisations. That's how it has been done throughout the world since the 1970s. That is, however, not how things are typically done here. It should be noted, however, that protesters were treated much more harshly during the famous 'corn ear' discussion in Saint Petersburg.

What is the use of discussing the particularities of these issues, when **the policies promoted by the Moscow Administration in relation to this megalopolis have never been particularly open to discussion?** What are 'extra-budgetary financial flows'? 'The Moscow government airline', what sort of contraption is that? What are these specific financial investments that Moscow has made in the country and beyond? What is their effectiveness? Why did nobody hear us when we forecast the current transportation collapse ten years ago and suggested the measures that needed to be taken to prevent it, something that could have been done with relative ease back then?

There are a multitude of similar questions. I failed to get answers to such questions from the deputies of the Moscow City Duma, whom I knew rather well, while they were still working there. They could not even figure out what was going on themselves. Now there are no such people in the Administration who will ask those questions. I am not sure why Mr. Platonov, who took Mr. Kuzmin with him, got so offended that he stormed out of the hall of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation when this discussion was taking place. I have a strictly philological complaint about the choice of words of my former friend Marat Gelman – I would not say it is greed, I would say it is avarice, which would be a much more eloquent choice of wording.

Undoubtedly, all sorts of formalised religions will benefit from this, of course other than the Hare Krishna followers, who are perceived as being rather outlandish here in Russia. On the whole, ethnic groups have gotten used to Moscow's sensibilities and way of doing things. There is currently a group of courageous people fighting for the establishment of a Public Chamber in the city. There are dozens of such chambers around the country, and they are interesting in having special rules applied in its formation. I wish them luck, but let me express my particular doubts. A new Public Chamber has been recently created in Yekaterinburg, with total neglect for the fact that such a chamber already existed in that city from the beginning of the 1990s. Its members were not even asked for their opinion in that process.

The intellectual class of the capital has been somewhat spoiled by their rich and colourful museums and other such joys of life in Moscow. On the whole, this class is also somewhat nervous, knowing that there are many ways to destroy or at least to seriously hamper the activities and order that they are so used to. Most of these class members have somewhat fallen into lethargy, which was brilliantly described by the Russian writer Saltykov-Shchedrin in the first lines of 'Contemporary Idyll': We should endure. ■

Exclusively for RJ

NEIGHBORHOOD RESISTANCE RISES UP THROUGH THE GALVANIZATION OF LOCAL SOCIAL NETWORKS



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Balancing input from, and participation by, neighborhood residents with city-wide needs and interests is an ongoing challenge for all large cities and metropolitan areas. Both are required for good governance and neither should predominate over the other, yet often their interests or perspectives are at odds. Many cities in the U.S. have developed consultative mechanisms that allow city government to get neighborhood reactions to proposed central initiatives or that devolve certain decisions to them. In New York, Community Boards have advisory power over land use changes. While they cannot block large developments, their opposition often causes them to be modified and community benefits agreements negotiated.

City council members in New York and Los Angeles can help to shape overall priorities on spending on services. Their opposition can slow the momentum of the central administration. Of course, they are also influenced by powerful city-wide interests, whether they be developers, trade unions, citizen organizations, the media, or major business.

Many city governments often complain about constraints imposed from above. At the same time, the City of New York has an annual budget of \$59.5 billion and employs approximately 260,000 people. It provides a wide range of services and operates many capital facilities. Municipal government has a pervasive impact on the quality of life in the city. It raises most of these resources from its own multifaceted tax base – property tax, sales tax, income tax, and many other revenue sources. This gives it a certain degree of independence.

Most forms of neighborhood resistance rise up through the galvanization of local social networks organized around various communal institutions, such as churches, social service organizations, or local political clubs. But to be truly effective, they need to make city-wide alliances and also to be able to articulate their arguments and interests in policy terms. Intellectuals can be quite useful to this process, even indispensable. ■