

Material culture in post-industrial neighborhoods: housing, practices and identities

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Industrial Neighbourhoods

- around the biggest Soviet plants and constructed in 1920-1930s
- system of building working class neighbourhoods around plants

The collapse of Soviet Union
& Deindustrialization

- dramatic cases of changes in materialities and social relations
- post-Industrial (Sadowy & Lisiecki, 2019)



- Post card of 1950's-60's with Uralmash neighborhood 'The socialist city of the Uralmashplant'. Source: local online group 'Nash Uralmash' [Our Uralmash] URL: <http://uralmash.my1.ru>

An Ethnographic Case-Study of the post-Industrial Neighbourhoods

- Time of data collection: 2017-2018
- Sample: **two post-industrial neighbourhoods** of Yekaterinburg and Moscow
 - **Dramatic cases of changes in materialities** and social relations because of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the resultant deindustrialization
- The empirical base consists of more than **35 interviews and more than 40 sessions of observations** fixed in research diaries and numerous photos and videos
 - Biographical interviews were conducted with residents of the areas, who are **workers or former factory workers and new residents** of the neighbourhoods (middle classes - creative workers, office workers etc)
- Main participants of projects: A. Vanke, A. Strelnikova & E. Polukhina

Sites and some publications of the projects

- field-notes.tilda.ws
- present-past.ru
- <https://foi.hse.ru/openrussia/sverdlovskaya-workers>

Polukhina E., Strelnikova A., Vanke A.

The Transformation of Working-Class Identity in Post-Soviet Russia: A Case-Study of an Ural Industrial Neighborhood / NRU Higher School of Economics. Series SOC "Sociology". 2017. No. WP BRP 77/SOC/2017.



Type of Neighbourhood	Practices of Policies Makers with Housing Stock as Materiality	Type of Gentrification
Capital case close to city center in Moscow	Demolishing the plant and constructing the new residential area, Soviet housing maintenance	State-led (capital) gentrification
Regional case close to periphery in Yekaterinburg	Soviet housing and plant maintenance, 'light' constructing of the new residential area	Cultural-led gentrification

'State-led Gentrification' in Moscow case



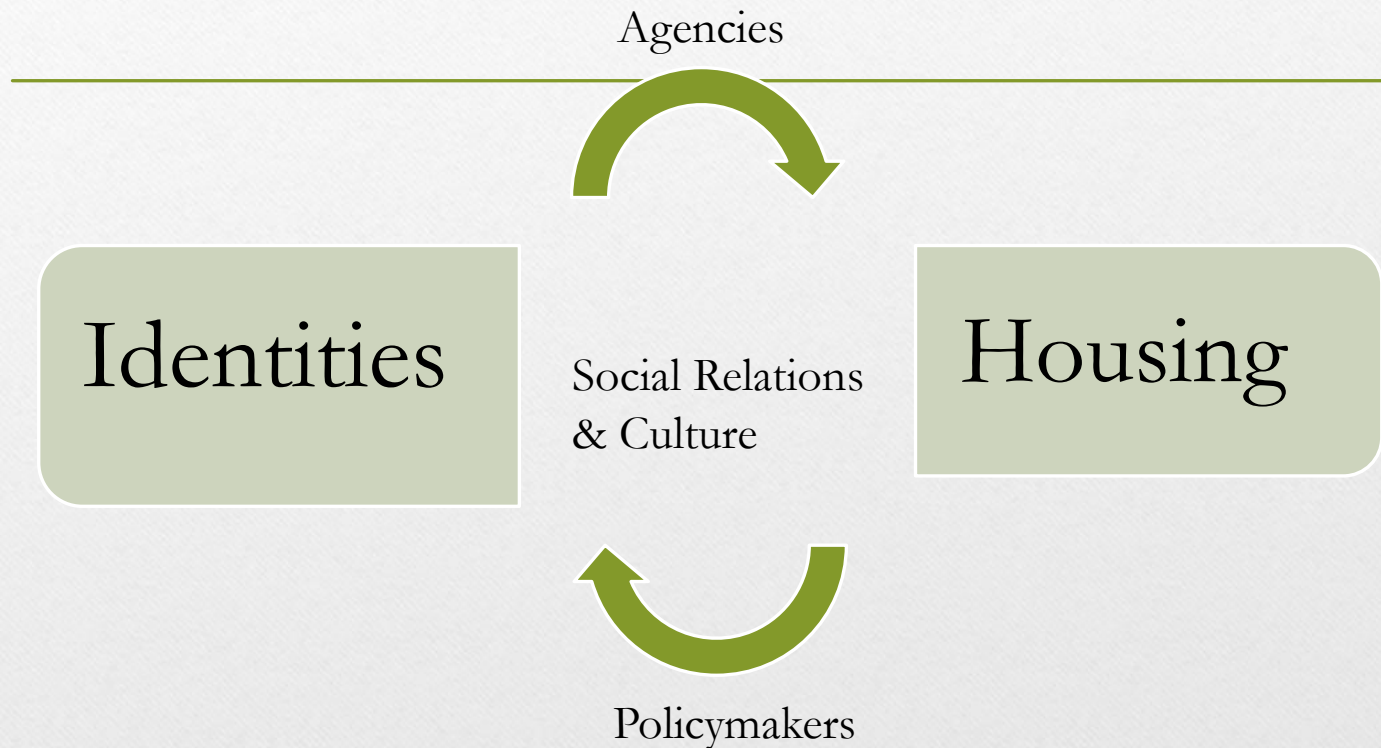
'Culture-led Gentrification' in Yekaterinburg



Material Culture as Concept

- ‘*We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us*’
Winston Churchill’s
- ... the dynamic relationship between objects and individuals
(Appadurai, 1986; Miller, 1998; Tilley, 2012)
- The material object communicating with individuals **produced such elements of culture** as social meanings, symbols, practices, and habits
- This **materiality co-produces the culture**
- Co-constrictions of ‘**subject-object**’ to **housing as a material object and to the people who live in and use it** (Miller, 2013)

Material Culture: Relation Approach



Relational approach sees the identity and materiality as intertwined
(McCarthy, 2020)

Material Culture of Housing in post-Industrial Neighborhoods

Residents and Newcomers

Identities (working-class, middle-classes etc)

Social Relations
& Culture

Housing (Soviet Housing and New Housing Estates)

Policymakers (municipal authorities, developers etc)

How neighbors in Soviet housing constituted relations in Russian post-industrial neighbourhoods?

- Raymond Williams' distinction between *residual*, *emergent* and *dominant* cultures
 - *Residual culture* is related to *the past*, to previous experiences and semantics, which continue to exist in the form of textual, visual and material remainders
 - '*Emergent*' culture include 'new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences, are continually being created' (1997, p. 41)

Williams, R. (1997) 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory.'
Problems in Materialism and Culture. Selected Essays, R. Williams
(London, New York: VERSO) pp. 31–49.

Raymond Williams framework for post-Industrial Neighborhoods

Residents and Newcomers

Residual culture/
identity of working
class and emergent of
middle-classes
(cooptation and
blurring of groups)

Dynamics
of
Social
Relations

Soviet Housing as
'residue' of Soviet
(authentic) culture
and class symbol

Policymakers (authorities, developers etc)

Type of housing as theme for analysis

- I applied the **thematic analysis**
 - the database was split into the 2 main types of **Soviet housing – Stalin-era (1 theme) and Khrushchev-era (2 theme)**
 - split the groups of informants based on the type of housing



Khrushchev-era housing, Yekaterinburg, 2017



Khrushchev-era housing, Moscow, 2017



Khrushchev-era housing, Yekaterinburg, 2018



Elite Stalin-era housing 'Nobel Nest',
Yekaterinburg , 2018



Elite Stalin-era housing 'Nobel Nest',
Yekaterinburg, 2017

'Stalin-era' versus 'Khrushchev-era' flats

- *Stalin-era housing*, constructed from the early 1920s to the late 1950s
- more **comfortable** and were designed for individual families
- framed the main streets, demonstrating the grandeur of the **Soviet system with their luxurious facades** (The architecture of the Stalin-era, 2010)
- the inhabitants of these elite houses were **mostly high-ranking officials**
- *Khrushchevki* constructed in the middle of the 20th century
- provided a common standard of living, giving people the **opportunity to establish their own personal life**
- a project of global **typification**
- liberal changes were called the period of the **'Thaw' and De-Stalinization** (Varga-Harris, 2006)

Stalin-era housing as class symbol

- Our informant discovers the conflict of classes:
 - *'And the Nobel Nest [...] when you look from the barracks of the workers' settlement [...] it looks very tall, very powerful, very beautiful. [...] And there was another group, who came out and said: 'In general, all of you in the Noble Nest are freaks! We are totally tired of you! Everything in your life is based on favours' [M, 35 year old, Museum Worker, Yekaterinburg]*
- Workers still **perceive elite Stalin-era housing as unachievable for them due to the social distance as well as the cost and inherited principles for moving**

Stalin housing as art & functional object

- Perceived by **the middle classes as art objects, prestigious housing for living in contemporary times**
- For workers is perceived as a socially different type of housing. But ordinary Stalin housing **is habituated mainly functionally, without the values of the neoclassical style**
 - *‘I love high ceilings. When I visit someone who lives in a modern apartment, I do not have enough air. I love my apartment. It is warm in winter, cool in summer. I have a large bath, I can lie full length. Everyone is amazed by the stucco. I also love this stucco. But it’s difficult to clean’* [F, 59 year old, Plant Worker, Yekaterinburg].

Khrushchevka as art object

- *‘It is super interesting to me that such artifacts remain. [...] I heard this term last year, ‘sovmod’ [Soviet modernism]. This is all such a continuation, in fact, of constructivism, only in more rigid forms, it is purely functional - to live and that is all. And they do not change. [...] **‘Khrushchevkas’ are Soviet modernism, that is, no decorations, absolutely no decorations at all’** [M, 35 year old, Museum Worker, Yekaterinburg].*

Khrushchevka as ordinary housing

- *'Well, it's a typical Khrushchev-era building. If you arrange everything wisely, there is enough space'* [M, 29 year old, Plant Worker, Yekaterinburg]
- *'How can I describe it? 'Khrushchevka'. What else can I say? I've done some renovations'* [M, 42 year old, Plant Worker, Yekaterinburg]

Similarities between interiors



Elite Stalin-era flat, informant - psychologist, female



Khrushchev-era flat, informant - worker, male

Housing and Identities

- Two types of **Soviet housing** as ‘residue’ of Soviet culture habituated by both **classes differently**
 - workers perceive as **part of everyday life**
 - creative groups as part of the **historical heritage**
- **Cooptation** of groups/classes **while the identities within group are blurred**
 - mixture of residual / emerging cultures and identities in one type of Soviet housing
- Housing
 - as a symbol of a certain class is produced by policy makers
 - habituated by residents and re-signified during habituation

Thank you for
attention
