

SAMUTINA N., STEPANOV B. (EDS.) (2014) TSARITSYNO: ATTRAKCION S ISTORIEJ [TSARITSYNO: AN ATTRACTION WITH HISTORY] (IN RUSSIAN), MOSCOW: NOVOE LITERATURNNOYE OBOZRENIJE. 464 P. ISBN 978-5-4448-0171-0<sup>1</sup>

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In the last few decades, the attempts to conceptualize urban life focused upon particular cities and places. New York City and Berlin became the illustrations of gentrification processes, and Paris is known as the canonical case of a re-planned space. Certain parks, shopping malls, squares, and transportation systems became the sites for studying sociality in cultural geography and urban studies. At the same time, accounts that describe how urban spaces in Moscow are transformed, what are their qualities, meanings, typical forms of interaction, what images of the city prevail, how communities appropriate spaces, and what are the historically-defined areas, are scarce. Recently, several projects were organized to accomplish a social cartography of Moscow and portray its citizens (see, for instance, “Archaeology of the Periphery”, presented at the Moscow Urban Forum 2013<sup>2</sup>). However, such research is primarily done in a quantitative manner and could not provide an elaborate description of what life in different parts of the city is like. An ethnographic study is able to add vivid details to the image of Moscow. That is why the book *Tsaritsyno: An Attraction with History* is so important. It is a great example of what has to be done to begin answering the questions of Russian urban spaces.

The research is object-centered. It is a thorough, multifaceted analysis of the reserve-museum Tsaritsyno, a place in contemporary Moscow where new collective experiences are formed, and a place that contests traditional ideas about historicity while introducing significant patterns of visual perception. The book is the result of a project led by Natalia Samutina at the Higher School of Economics. The study, carried out in 2009–2012, was a collaborative work of an interdisciplinary group including students as well as experienced researchers. Topics that were not initially subjects of the study but were found to be important were covered by several invited guest authors.

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1. The results of the project “The Construction of the Past and Forms of Historical Culture in Contemporary Urban Spaces”, carried out within the framework of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) in 2014, are presented in this work.

2. Archaeology of the Periphery. Moscow Urban Forum 2013. Available at: <http://mosurbanforum.com/study/arch/pdf/> (accessed 20 June 2014).

The research was aimed at describing the “everyday anthropology of Tsaritsyno” (p. 182). This means that visitors were classified and rigorously observed in their diversity and similarity. Researchers demonstrate how people bring their own different ideas, representations, motives, and patterns of behavior to the park and museum. They might seek solitude and serenity, or play and experiment. They might come to enjoy nature, to take pictures of the spectacular scenery, or to feel the sense of history. They could use the chance to dress up. A visit could be anything from an everyday promenade to a fairytale wedding scenario. At the same time, research introduces a spatial perspective (p. 10–11) and analyzes how the material environment of the park and museum frames its visitors’ actions and interpretations.

To study the different aspects of Tsaritsyno, resources from various academic fields were employed. Methodological schemes and concepts were borrowed from public history, as well as from urban, visual, and museum studies. Accordingly, data came from various sources. The issues of the park’s historical and architectural transformations demanded working with archives and mass media messages, as well as interviewing experts (museum employees and local historians). To study contemporary Tsaritsyno, surveys and brief interviews with visitors were organized, and participant observations were recorded. Additionally, analyzing discussions on the internet helped in the understanding of certain audiences (for example, people who are planning their wedding).

To better understand the goal of the researchers, some information on the subject of the study should be provided. Tsaritsyno is a museum-reserve situated in the southern part of Moscow, a well-known place with a curious past. Tsaritsyno was destined to be an ambiguous, multilayered space. It was planned as a residence for Ekaterina the Great, but she refused to live there and the project was left unfinished. The site was abandoned and appropriated by various groups, with religious cults and Tolkien fans being the most unexpected inhabitants. In the early 2000s, Yuri Luzhkov’s architects gave it a new life, having started a costly and pompous renovation project. Tsaritsyno was subject to what people called a “fantasy restoration”. Ekaterina’s palace was given a “rich”, “historical” appearance, despite the fact that as the tsarina’s quarters it never was real. In the book, the cultural-architectural transformation of Tsaritsyno is discussed in detail. B. Stepanov rigorously tracks historical documents, the decisions of the Moscow government, and analyzes public reaction in the media. Even the reader who had heard little about Tsaritsyno would find that the story explaining what changes had been made and how they shifted the meanings of the place is told in a clear and amusing way.

Therefore, Tsaritsyno is “the object of cultural experimenting” (p. 33), a festive laboratory which is impossible to control. It is simultaneously a historic landscape park, a Soviet park organized as an exhibition of national achievement, an amusement park, and finally, “an ordinary contemporary municipal recreational park” (p. 130). Spatially and culturally entangled, the museum coexists with the church, nature with unauthentic buildings, and gaudy wedding ceremonies with local families.

In the book, there are several topics that describe the life of Tsaritsyno as a cultural phenomenon. First of all, it has a historical dimension that developed into its temporal

transformations and “fantasy restoration”, with different narrations performed by local historians and tour guides about the place and its past (Stepanov), and the construction of authenticity (Khlevnyuk). The second most important topic is Tsaritsyno as an “attraction” (Samutina, Komarova). In referring to attractions, the authors refer to the new types of images and perceptions that appeared in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Attractions are connected with the issues of visibility and aesthetics; they produce certain practices, for example, photography. Visitors of Tsaritsyno join a fascinating hunt for images; their companions, fountains, the palace, landscapes, and even squirrels are immediately turned into objects for the camera’s eye. Finally, several papers dwell upon how people behave and communicate with each other. The “anthropological” dimension of Tsaritsyno is constituted by the human interaction in material settings (Samutina, Zaporozhets), exploring the park through navigation (Sivak), rituals (Rozhdestvenskaya) and creativity (Abramov, Zaporozhets), and various communities claiming their right to be there (Abramov and Riise, Ozhiganova). The issue of the park as a system of surveillance and control is not overlooked; the technologies that produce the normative space of Tsaritsyno are also investigated (Abramov).

The book is divided into three parts. The logic of this division is not explicitly described, and the chapters are not titled. The first several papers discuss the topic of Tsaritsyno in an historical context. The second chapter is devoted to the ways of framing and constructing the space through practices, rules, gaze, and movement. The place takes form normatively, physically, aesthetically, and visually. The last part of the book focuses on the communities that have to protect their interests and get along with each other in the park’s territory; these are the sportsmen, members of the parish, local historians, children, senior citizens, and newlyweds.

In being aware of the manifold nature of the subject, the authors foresee their readers’ questions. How do people interact with each other? What restrictions are set out in the park? Why does the architecture matter? Cross-references throughout the book suggest relevant papers on various aspects of Tsaritsyno.

The volume is saturated with photos which help present the settings of Tsaritsyno and the typical social situations observed by the research team. It is also supplemented with a survey report, although, in my opinion, it seems unnecessary. As long as the results are integrated in the analysis, they are relevant and meaningful. As such, the survey report does not provide much information, and is rather difficult to make sense of.

There are several points which can be formulated for discussion. First, I would like to comment on the methodological strategy of research, and then briefly mention some theoretical and empirical questions.

N. Samutina and O. Zaporozhets emphasize the methodological value of microscopic views as compared to a broader categorization and rigid concepts; “These distinctions [that define cultural patterns of Tsaritsyno visitors] lie beyond rough sociological schemes, giving a microanalyst and an anthropologist all the cards” (p. 181). While this strategy seems justified regarding the research questions of the project and gives a depth to the analysis, the authors go further, claiming that the description of visitors is

only possible as a never-ending list based on different definitions. I would argue against this Borgesian Chinese classification in social scientific research. The popular metaphor graphically shows the irreducibility of reality to any analytic catalogue, but contributes nothing to the findings while leaving the reader confused. However multivocal, multidimensional, or even multisensory, an ethnography does not yield in the face of the imponderabilia of actual life. Rather, in concordance with the initial problem or with the theoretical framework, it should demonstrate why certain microscopic details matter.

The book presents a biography, a cultural map, and an illustrated diary of Tsaritsyno made with curiosity and sympathy. As a nice, safe park and a kitschy architectural complex, it is no doubt one of those places that “many of us love to hate... and a space we hate to love”, as Sharon Zukin describes<sup>3</sup>. Despite the controversies surrounding the place and its recent changes, the authors manage to remain impartial, giving voice to different audiences. It is evident that observations were performed with great enthusiasm and interest. The researchers wished to be closer to the object of the study, and the setting was open enough to make it possible. As they mention, sometimes observations were made through strolls in the park with friends.

However, the sympathy towards the observed object leads to some methodological problems. Despite the fact that the book dwells upon critique and conflicts to some extent, it is mostly focused of the festival façade of Tsaritsyno. Empirical findings tell us about the life of the place on fine, warm days. This is exactly when people flock to Tsaritsyno, yet social science has leant to investigate conditions in nasty weather conditions as well as sunny ones. It is crucial to take into account the negative side of any object, be it an amusement park or a kindergarten. How does Tsaritsyno look on rainy or snowy days? Which people are not allowed in the park? How do the guards act in case of emergency? These are also questions that must be taken into account for a more thorough understanding of the research.

Additionally, the notion in the book's title invites new questions. A century after the introduction of the “cinema of attractions”, visitors to Tsaritsyno are still lured by the bright colors, the spectacular scenery, and the rich decorations. For example, hundreds of different people gather to watch the enormous fountain, fascinated by water and lights moving to the sounds of music. At the same time, one cannot regard this phenomenon in the same way as the perception of visitors of the first cinemas was regarded, as mass audience. The authors point out that the mass public today should be considered as having individual stories, ideas, and reflections (p. 10). What nevertheless makes this “mass”, unifying effect of an attraction possible in the presence of distinct backgrounds and creative intentions? How do individual experiences transform, in turn, the notion of attraction? The research does not provide answers to these questions.

There is no doubt that the book will be insightful to researchers interested in Russian public spaces and cultural heritage in terms of the comparison with empirical findings and methodology of the Tsaritsyno project. However, regarding the theoretical frame-

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3. Zukin S. (2000). *The cultures of cities*. Oxford: Blackwell. P. 261.

work, the study lacks conceptual explicitness. How is the bringing together of history and memory, authenticity and attractions, space and routes, norms and practices, images and gazes, regimes and logics, and communities and communication possible, and how these concepts could be embedded into one coherent frame of reference remains unclear. Although the project was object-centered with the researchers coming from different disciplinary fields, there are several shared fundamental theoretical assumptions. An outline of this perspective would serve pedagogic goals, and provide the groundwork for a conceptual and methodological reflection.

The case of Tsaritsyno is important because it is emblematic of a place that is criticized but loved at the same time by many Moscow citizens. Tsaritsyno was reopened in 2007, and although many things have changed in urban planning and historical reconstruction, all subsequent city projects in the domain of public spaces inevitably are influenced by it. It is with Tsaritsyno that new popular places, parks, museums, and historical reconstructions are compared to. Including a chapter on recently created public spaces would be of much relevance, and reflecting on how the Tsaritsyno experience influenced the imagination of city planners and the opinions of urbanites could provide material for further discussion of the transformation of urban spaces within Moscow and Russia.

## Рецензия: «Царицыно: аттракцион с историей» (под редакцией Н. В. Самутиной, Б. Е. Степанова)

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