

Russian Heritage, a New Route Out of the Past

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Through the auspices of the British Governments aid programme to the Republic of Russia, The Conservation Practice (UK) and Spetzproyektrestavratsiya (RSFR) are working together to examine the methodology and principles for the economic rejuvenation of historic towns and cities in the Republic of Russia.

Russia, coming from the central planning theory of the former USSR, has a planning system that is far removed from the British system. In Britain the legal emphasis is firmly placed to encourage active development and the economic reuse of the built cultural heritage; in Russia the situation is very different.

However the economy of Russia is changing fast. Politically the rush to the free market economy is now unstoppable. The implication of this to the built cultural heritage could either result in the historic towns being left in an economic backwater with strict controls that stubbornly refuse to adapt. Alternatively they could be swept along towards a system that adopts the less positive sides of a free market economy.

The paper will examine and report on the work so far carried out by both organisations in the RFSR. The paper will include an upto the minute analysis of the rapidly moving programmes being put in place to assist the world's largest, newest, yet oldest nation to deal with the conflicts between the preservation and promotion of a national identity and the urgent political need to achieve economic reform and success. The paper will be illustrated with examples of the problems of typical towns included in our programmes from amongst the 150 important historic centres in Russia.

Through the symposium we intend to encourage discussions and positive contributions in order to provide management framework based on the best various nations can offer. There is a need to promote a developing relationship so that the better aspects of our various conservation systems can assist other emerging countries.

The last five years have provided momentous changes to the structure and organization of Eastern and Central Europe and the States of the former USSR. Certainly in Russia these changes are clearly not yet completed as the various factors jockey for power. These world politics have a crucial influence on the care of the cultural heritage. The issues of national identity loom large in the current crisis and this is frequently reflected in the fabric of the past that society has chosen to preserve. The inheritance of the former USSR via its foreign policy and the influences it has exerted not only in Europe but also in Africa and the Far East in particular, has created a substantial vacuum that many countries now need to deal with. Strong centralised planning has left its mark in many areas of the world.

The purpose of this paper is to look at the management of the built cultural heritage of Russia. Curiously the immediate post war planning legislation in Britain and in the USSR had many similarities. The left wing policy makers created a structure that was based on the idea of firm masterplans into which development opportunities would be tailored. From that point on, the two approaches have developed the ideas in totally opposite directions. Yet the data gathering process remains a common discipline to both approaches. *

At present the Monuments of Russia retain strong state protection. The care and protection of the built cultural heritage has always been a strong element in the policies of the USSR. This starts from Lenin's early edicts, that "all citizens should protect the monuments of the past". The current controls, like all the existing planning legislation firmly reflects the ideas of central organisation. There is little provision for change and the adaptability needed to ensure that historic buildings are available for economic reuse is frequently lacking. The current structure of official bodies and of the control process is reasonably straight forward. There are some complications caused by the various parallel organisations that exist but no doubt the economic wind of change will gradually blow some of these away. In simple terms it works as follows:

Historic Buildings in Russia have five statutory categories:

1. World Heritage, included in the UNESCO World Heritage list.
2. Monuments of the Union's Heritage. (This class is due to be abandoned).
3. Monuments of the Republic's Heritage.
4. Monuments of local importance.
5. Monuments that are being recommended for inclusion, (this class has no statutory status).

The level of decision making depends upon the grade of the monument. A monument can range from being an individual discrete building, groups of buildings, monastic complexes, historical zones to complete historic towns. All monuments in Russia are the property of the state and Parliament has recently decided that the buildings can only be privatised in special circumstances. However the buildings can be disposed of on long leases and the land immediately surrounding the monument can be sold. Each monument has a special classification for the zone of

land immediately surrounding it, which controls the development that can be allowed adjacent to the monument.

- Class 1. Only the restoration of buildings in the historic group that have been previously demolished will be permitted and any works require Government approval.
- Class 2. All new buildings must respect particular regulations for height, massing and architectural style.
- Class 3. Natural ecological zone, no buildings permitted, ecological considerations only.

Although this sounds a tightly regulated system the potential of selling off the monuments is still being considered. The future of ecclesiastical buildings is especially sensitive. A Presidential Decree has been issued that seeks to reinstate consecrated buildings back to the Russian Orthodox Church or other relevant religious body (e.g. mosques). In some areas this has resulted in a stop in the progress of repair programmes and a general feeling of uncertainty amongst those responsible for the buildings. Concern has also been expressed that the religious groups do not have the resources to care for the numbers of buildings involved.

It is estimated that Russia has about 80,000 monuments included in its formal list. Of these only 5-10% are in a reasonable state of repair and properly used. But this list includes 150 legally protected historic towns and it is recommended that another 100 towns need to be added to the list so the actual number of individual properties is considerably greater. The detailed control has been delegated by the Council of Ministers to the 76 Regional Administrations. Each of these has a Regional Department of Culture which is advised by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Russia. This Ministry has two relevant branches, Inspection and

Control with a team of regional inspectors; and a department concerned with the Use of Monuments and the Identification of Projects. This structure commenced last year, and is under the control of the Chief Inspector of Surviving Monuments of Russia. The practical works are controlled professionally by the Institute Spetzproyectrestavratziya who have a number of regional offices.

Each of the Regional Department of Culture have a department entitled, "The Centre of Surviving Monuments". This department is concerned with the co-ordination and management of tenants and their agreements. Some Regions have set up their own specialist professional teams, Novgorod, Vladimir, Tver, Yroslavl, Saratov, Volgograd and Sverdlovsk. These teams, report direct to the Regional Administrator. Three years ago the State Committee of Buildings set up the Institute for the Reconstruction of Historic Towns specially to concentrate on Pskov and Novgorod. In practice the personnel work closely with staff of the Institute Spetzproyectrestavratziya, frequently working alongside on the same proposals.

Non Governmental Organisations play an important role in the practical work across Russia and little is known about them in the West. The All Russian Community of Surviving Monuments of History and Culture, shortened to VOPIK is the largest. This is a voluntary organisation with approximately 10 million members and 4,000 collective members. It has its own financial base and does not have any direct government subsidy. The membership fees are tiny at 20 kopek for children and 60 kopek for adults. However the annual income is currently 70 million Roubles from fees and donations; about 3 1/2 million Roubles are spent on repair programmes. They have active regional offices and weekend work projects for volunteers are a regular feature of their activities. At the moment there are three special initiatives, wooden monuments in the north of Russia, Russian monasteries, and the restoration of the countryside of famous Russian writers.

It is clear that there is considerable scope for this organisation to play a much more active role along the lines of the English National Trust. It has already been suggested that VOPIK could take over some of the roles of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. So far this has been resisted.

The Cultural Foundation of the Russian Republic is the other main NGO. In many ways it is the younger brother of VOPIK but its aims are much wider. In particular its profile has concentrated on trying to return Russian Cultural Heritage from abroad. They also concentrate on searching out omissions from the State List and seek to have buildings included.

The background to all work is the legislation passed by Parliament and the subsequent decrees. The cultural history in its broadest sense has been the subject of decree 266. Here of particular interest to us is the proposed modification of the taxation structure. Modelled on other policies from former USSR countries and reflected elsewhere in Europe a series of taxation exemption measures are proposed. There clearly is a problem of perception of what taxation is meant to achieve both for the state and for the citizen. Tax breaks for conservation can work but they must be carefully structured. Tax exemption gives a subsidy that depends on the citizens income, it will give greater assistance to the high income craftsman than the specialist struggling to make ends meet. When a tax system has as many potential exemptions as Russia's the intention of the policy frequently ceases to be effective. Disabled people and prolific mothers for instance are given no incentive to practice craft skills because their income is already exempt.

Giving subsidies through the tax system means that tax inspectors have to administer them. An efficient tax inspector is not usually the sort of person that is best skilled to administer a subsidy efficiently. They are typically, strict, suspicious of human nature and determined to save the state every trouble they can.

It is important to understand the practical differences between subsidies given by way of tax relief and an equivalent subsidy given by way direct government or regional expenditure. The main difference is that tax relief is difficult to quantify and express in government budgets. This loss of accountability is one of the strong reasons against using tax expenditures.

The strong control over the privatization may result that in some areas whole sections of towns will not benefit from initiatives to inject momentum into development and industry. In some areas this is possibly just as well. But when the capitalization of the development process succeeds, as politically it will have to, the danger is that the historic quarter of the town will be left behind to become an economic backwater rather than remaining the heart of the town's urban life. This will inevitably lead to a cycle of decline and decay as we have witnessed in many cities in the West.

There are however areas of major opportunity for conservation to form a key part in the policy making for the communities of Russia. The historic town could form the centre of this urban renaissance carrying with them their strong statements of regional identity.

Tomsk is a city that has recently hit the headlines, has pressing issues of redevelopment and urban upgrading. Tomsk is basically of eighteenth century foundation and regards itself as the cultural capital of Siberia. The eclectic nature of the vernacular architecture provides the essential character to the city and the late nineteenth century centre retains many buildings of interest, mostly unoccupied and of course in State ownership. Recent contact between the City of Tomsk and UK Housing Associations may help to show the way how to harness the desire to improve the living conditions within a planned revitalization of the historic town. However, the cost of preparing this sort of project proposal and the subsequent follow up is of course high. Investment in

infrastructure is clearly essential but it needs to be coupled with assessment of the cities built tradition.

The city of Novogorod has an international reputation for its art treasures. Already it is a popular venue for organised tours, however, the framework for urban planning is rigidly deterministic. Forward planning by the City Authorities have little space to be able to respond to the challenge and opportunities of potential private investment. The area of the city across the river, the early eighteenth century expression of Novogorod contains many of its eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings. Even the post World War II buildings are built to a suitable scale. Here the injection of economic momentum is essential to halt the gradual decline of this part of the city.

Tourism is already emerging as an important earner of currency and employment generator. It also provides, in some towns contact with the outside world that has been long denied.

The Volgda Region of northern Russia is an example of an area where tourism began as a state initiative. Here a string of medieval towns some such as Veliky Usting are now effectively open air museums and provide the visitor with a unique opportunity to experience the northern heritage. At present the tourist route is largely confined to boats that travel up the waterways visiting the towns and culminating at Kizi the timber cathedral on the World Heritage list.

The infrastructure related to tourism is in a poor state and the concepts of managing tourists need to be developed. There is considerable potential for ensuring that cultural tourism plays a key part in the development of the local economy. But tourism needs strong management. We have already seen in other areas of the world how the parasitic nature of the tourist industry can develop. Indeed the monuments themselves can only receive a finite number of visitors before they start to

destroy the very attraction they have come to visit. This is becoming a particular problem at the World Heritage site at Kizi.

To look at less remote tourist potential, Ostankino is a substantial eighteenth century country house in the suburbs of Moscow. The landscaped estate still survives at least in part and the church is a popular venue for local visitors. The house can only be described as sumptuous. It has one of the most important collections of eighteenth century furniture in Russia and the majority of the rooms retain their contemporary decoration. With its private theatre and opera house complete with contemporary scenery there is enormous potential for Ostankino to be a major tourist attraction, but this needs careful planning with a structured business plan. A conservation programme is also urgently needed.

A common theme through Russia Conservation is the desire to rebuild lost monuments as a testimony to the Russian past. This needs to be treated with great care, the idea of society trying to recreate its identity is understandable, but artificial monuments is not a way forward. Whilst the activities to rebuild Kazanskaja Church on Red Square are understandable the reconstruction of the Gate of the Holy Virgin between the State Historical museum and the former royal mint is less easy to justify.

Conservation management always needs to cross the boundaries of the sectoral approach to urban economic strategy and take a geographic and historic outlook that will try to consider the interaction between services within a given geographic space at particular times. Primary targets for conservation management are the growth of awareness in cultural identity in environmental management and in providing communities with an economic future for their past.