

City on the Edge of Moscow Agglomeration: a Chance for Sustainable Development

Alexander Antonov, Anna Shagova

(Alexander Antonov, Moscow region Institute for Townplanning, 47, ul. Gilarovskogo, Moscow, Russia, alexfusion@rambler.ru)
(Anna Shagova, Land Development Institute, LLC 19/1, B. Sukharevsky per., Moscow, Russia, steps-anna@mail.ru)

1 ABSTRACT

Moscow is the largest city in Europe, economical, financial, research, educational and transit center of Russia. It attracts a lot of newcomers from the whole country and the neighboring states. While the total population of Russia is slowly decreasing, Moscow has shown 10% growth during 2002-2010 inter-census period.

This hyper-centralized position of Moscow affects the development of rural areas of thousands square kilometers and a hundred of cities and small towns in central Russia. Discussions about so called Moscow agglomeration – metropolitan area are popular in the planning community. However, it is still a problem to determine exactly its size, shape and internal structure.

Obviously, all cities adjacent to Moscow Ring Road may be included in the agglomeration. Almost all of them have been focused on low cost multi-stored housing during last 20 years. Now they look like distant “sleeping districts” of Moscow. Probably cities within a distance of 20-50 km from Moscow boarder may be embraced into the agglomeration too. Most of these cities that are situated on radial rail directions are also seeking a doubtful reputation of extremely distant “sleeping districts” by their housing policy.

Cities situated 70+ kilometers away from Moscow are not so uniform in their development. Some of them show economic stagnation and 1-2% population decrease according to census 2002-2010 data comparing to 6% average growth for the Moscow region. Some others are looking for alternative strategies to find specific place on the edge of agglomeration or going further trying to get rid of the “peripheral” complex and become resilient livable urban centers.

The paper explores three cities situated within the distance up to 110 kilometers away from Moscow looking for planning and strategic opportunities and researching threats for their sustainable development.

City of Egorievsk is 225 years old. In the middle of the XIX century city became a center of textile industry. In the beginning of the XX century it was the third city in the Moscow region. During soviet period Egorievsk was developing engineering industry. Both textile and engineering industries failed after Perestroyka came. During the last 20 years Egorievsk completely transformed its economic base, more than 10 new factories were opened: food and construction materials production are the main industries now. As a result the city demonstrates 5% population growth in 2002-2010 period – amazing result for a the city so far from Moscow. Now it has a good position for sustainable development and smart growth.

Town of Veryia is more than 500 years old. In the XVII century during a short period of time it was the largest city in Moscow region. Now it is the smallest one with almost the same population (5000). It seems that the city is still in the XIX century. Nothing had changed through years. What are the prospects for such an “Island of Quite”? Should it look for changes in the XXI century?

City of Kurovskoe is a typical so called “Mono-industrial town”. It was founded near a small textile factory with railway station and became a city due to the soviet industrialization in the late 1930-s. In the 1990-s textile factory was closed as in Egorievsk, but the railroad junction formed one of the main cargo stations in the Moscow region. Should Kurovskoe just exploit its strengths or look for more valuable place on the edge of agglomeration?

2 MOSCOW AGGLOMERATION

2.1 Size and Shape: Different Points of View

Moscow is the largest city in Europe, economical, financial, research, educational and transit center of Russia. While the total population of Russia is slowly decreasing, Moscow has shown 10% growth during 2002-2010 inter-census period. This hyper-centralized position of Moscow affects the development of rural areas of thousands square kilometers and a hundred of cities and small towns in central Russia. Discussions about so called Moscow agglomeration – metropolitan area are popular in the planning community. However, it is still a problem to determine exactly its size, shape and internal structure.

Moscow agglomeration has not any political or administrative legislative base – it just a virtual spatial phenomenon. Some experts deny its existence at all. Other planners and geographers consider that agglomeration concentrates along the main transportation routes not further than 20-30 km from Moscow ring road (MKAD). According to another point of view the agglomeration includes not only Moscow region (40000 sq km) but parts of neighboring Tverskaya, Jaroslavskaaya, Kaluzhskaya regions. Extreme theory defines “The Great Moscow from Volga to Oka rivers” as a territory of approximately 300x400 km.

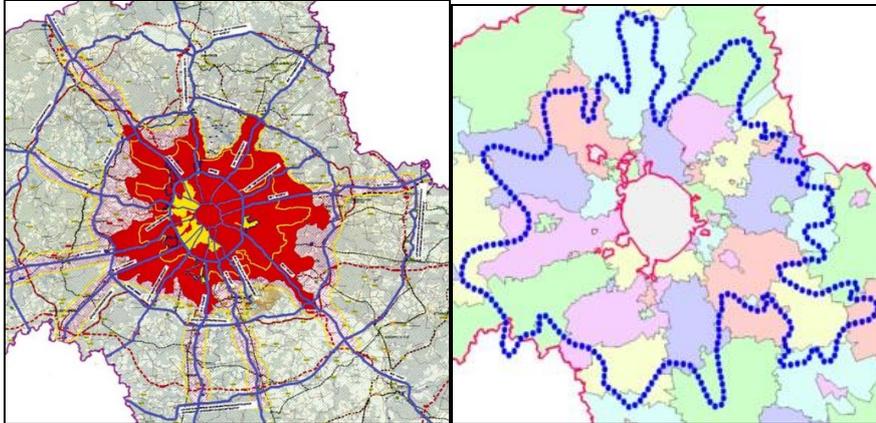


Fig. 1: Different views on Moscow agglomeration.

Regardless different theoretical approaches, all cities in central European Russia more or less are under the influence of Moscow’s proximity. They should pay attention to this while thinking over strategic plans and competing for human resources.

2.2 Special Features

Traditionally Moscow agglomeration is compared to London or Paris metropolitan regions. Moscow with Moscow region is similar to Great London and Ile-de France in population size (15-20 million people according to different estimations) and ways of growth – mainly by migration processes from former USSR countries.

Today population quantity in Moscow counts from officially 11,5 million (census 2010) to 13-15 million by various estimations. Moscow region population is 7,5 million. At first glance the metropolitan area seems to be a typical mono-centric agglomeration. However somebody can find special features characteristic only for the Moscow metropolitan area.

Moscow agglomeration ignores sub-urbanization processes unlike Paris or London metropolitan areas. Both psychological and economic reasons have an influence on it. Once become a muscovite the person never would refuse this status. On the other hand Muscovites have considerable discounts for utilities payment; elder people get higher pensions than all over Russia. The retirees prefer to live in Moscow despite low environmental quality.

Sub-urbanization in Moscow agglomeration is substituted by seasonal migration out of the city. Almost all Moscow citizens have the second dwelling somewhere around the city. It may be a small hut or 3-stored estate – in any case it’s a place for weekend or vacation living during the summer time.

Moscow and Moscow region both are separate subjects of administrative subdivision in Russia. There is no organizational framework or agreement between two the city and the region aimed for joint development.

2.3 Prospects and trends

Genesis of the Moscow region is an excellent illustration for the urban sprawl processes. Urbanized spaces were widening during the soviet period. The process of sprawl accelerated dramatically during the last 10-15 years. It is very difficult to precisely forecast now the processes of acceleration or stabilization in agglomeration’s further development due to the resent president’s decision concerning expansion of Moscow itself. Nevertheless somebody may refer to the general centrifugal and centripetal tendencies.

Migration pressure will continues: 15-20 millions ofr young people from Russia and the former soviet republics, still have a dream (or delusion) about career and sweet life in Moscow. Newcomers need housing.

Due to the limited spatial resources inside the city new housing - distant “sleeping districts” - will continue emerging all around Moscow.

Heavy industry, logistics, transit cargo traffic will seek to escape out of Moscow. Probably sub-urbanization processes will go faster due to predictable repeal of privileges for the Moscow citizens. Already now a lot of middle-aged people like to talk about living outside Moscow on pensions.

Obviously the future of the Moscow agglomeration is dynamic and unpredictable.

3 CITIES ON THE EDGE OF AGGLOMERATION

The paper focuses on planning processes and possible strategies in three cities situated on the edge of Moscow metropolitan area: Egorievsk, Kurovskoye and Veryia. These are very different cities in size, population rate, history and economic base. One equal trait for all three – they don’t experience population decrease like most distant cities in the Moscow region.

City	Year founded	Population 1989 census	Population 2002 census	Population 2010 census	Distance from Moscow, km
Egorievsk	1778	72500	68200	70130	108
Kurovskoye	1952	20200	19500	21820	100
Veryia	1371	5900	4900	5370	112

Table 1: General information about cities under consideration.

The pressure of megapolis is not so strong far from Moscow as in the core of agglomeration. The location allow peripheral cities to look for independent strategies, compare alternate visions based on re-mixing or stability and pay more attention to the planning process.

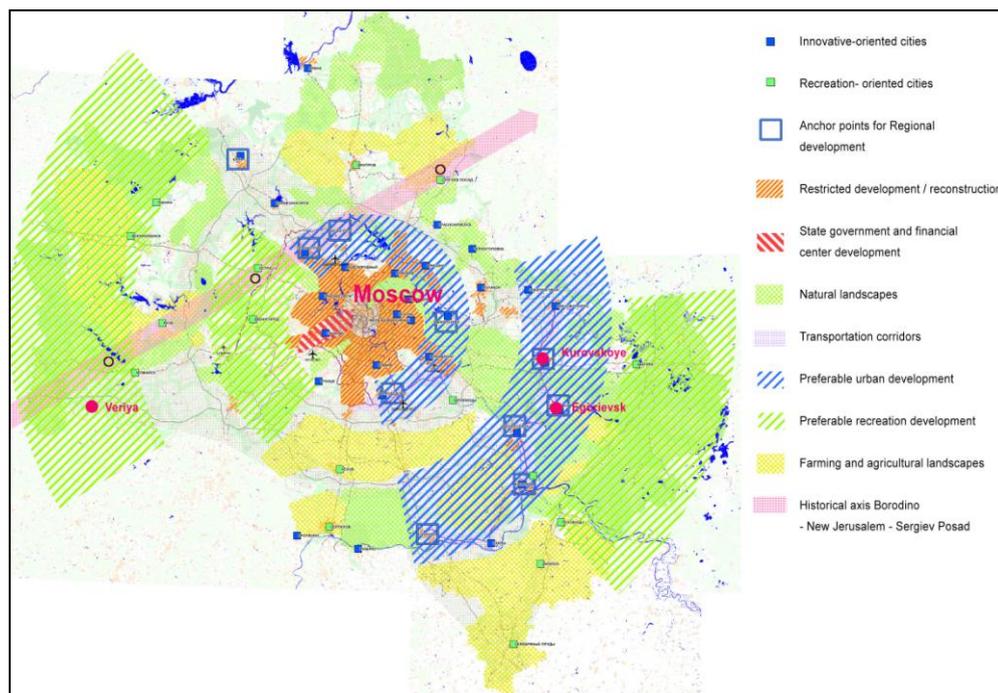


Fig. 2: Principal scheme of Moscow region spatial development.

3.1 Egorievsk

3.1.1 History and Post Soviet Transformation

City of Egorievsk is not so old: it was founded in 1778. Historically it was refuge of Old believers people – a branch of the Orthodox Church that was prosecuted for hundred years. In the middle of the XIX century Egorievsk was a small merchant town surrounded by thick forest with less than 5000 inhabitants.

Textile industry causes the first period of “remixing”: During 50 years population has grown 6 times up to 33000 people, more then 20 factories emerged, but the city community remained small business oriented. In

the beginning of the XX century it was one of the largest cities in the Moscow region formally being a part of the neighboring Ryazan gubernia.

During soviet period engineering industry was developing in Egorievsk. By the late 1980-s the population of the city increased up to 72000 inhabitants. Both textile and engineering industries collapsed after Perestroyka came. 18000 workplaces were lost. Population decreased to 67 000 people.

Egorievsk probably is the only large industrial city in Moscow region which is not situated on transit railways or highways. That is why it is attractive neither for migrants nor for developers of typical multi-stored housing. In the early 1990-s the Egorievsk started to look for new industrial development projects. Careful work with investors allowed the complete transformation of the city's economic base. More than 10 new enterprises were opened. Food and construction materials production became the main branches of industry.

All these years of transition the city was governed by one mayor and the same team of managers. As a result Egorievsk demonstrates 5% population growth in 2002-2010 period – amazing result for the city so far from Moscow. (70000 people – 2010 census).

Economic transformation has no effect on planning processes. The city adopts a policy of reasonable development following the master plan, designed in 1985.

Egorievsk has succeeded in preservation of compact 2-3 storey historical center and in expanding street network. Several housing and industrial development projects were completed. At the same time some planning problems occurred: asymmetry in new housing in the western part of the city and further industrial development in the eastern part, lack of transportation links, critical traffic situation in the historical center, etc.

Abandoned buildings of former textile factories constructed in attractive style of late 1800-s red-brick architecture are bordering the east side of historical center. This brownfield partly includes the valley of the only rive in the city. Industrial buildings are the property of dozens companies. Very few of them have just started slow reconstruction.

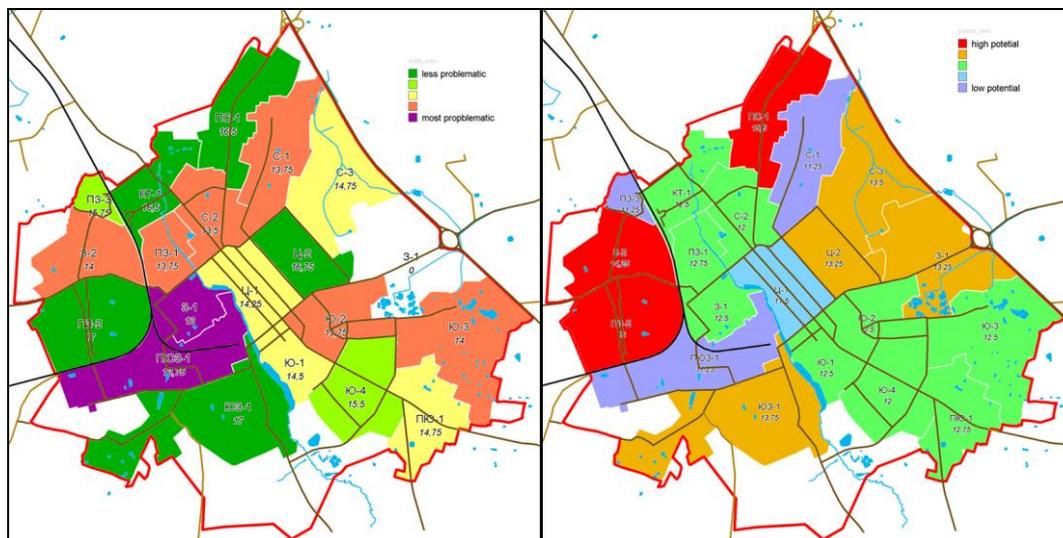


Fig. 3: Egorievsk: the city problems (left) and potential (right); evaluation by planning zones

Generally speaking Egorievsk is one of the most sustainable cities in the Moscow region. There is no need to put efforts on creating city's vision or strategy, as "everything goes well" anyway without a strategy. On the over hand the city has a good starting position for further development and smart growth. But this way needs to be planned and widely discussed in the local community.

3.1.2 Alternative City Strategies

The city may consider some traditional strategies aimed at sustainable growth. Further industrial development or tourism-oriented strategies are the main of them. In both cases the city will face competition with neighbor cities: industrial Voskresensk, Orechovo-Zuevo and historical Kolomna. All of them are larger

then 100 thousand people and have strong advantages in significant positions like energy supply, transit networks or reputation.

Post-industrial innovative strategy that is very popular in today's Russia requests for a new reform of city's economics and society. Innovative competitors are a few so-called "scientific cities" founded all over Moscow region 50-60 years ago for space, nuclear or biology researches. They are not as large as Egorievsk but still keep their intellectual potential and democratically-oriented communities.

3.1.3 Future Vision

All main city strategies in Russia are focused on investors. Cities do all their best to attract large-scale business in goods production or retail. Nobody pays attention to the citizens. Megapolices like Moscow, Perm, Ekaterinburg etc. just have started thinking about public spaces, comfort and livability for their inhabitants, but faces soviet industrial (and post-soviet free-market) inheritance in planning, street networking, "microrayon" housing and traffic.

There is a belief in Russia that small or middle sized cities are limited in their resources for development of modern public spaces and not attractive for creative young people. Is it so? Nobody has verified this statement in practice yet.

Creating a community-oriented city may be a good challenge for Egorievsk to attract creative, intelligent well-off middle class. Here in Russia we have a demand for comfortable urban environment for people who wish to escape from megapolices. Under the circumstances the city should invest more in social services, physical planning and place marketing.

This year Egorievsk is starting to work on its new master plan. According to the current planning legislation in Russia this document officially named "General Plan" is rather an obligation to build a list of social objects and streets than a city development framework.

Probably some kind of planning concept should be accomplished prior to the General Plan adoption. It is necessary to set a strategic vision of city's development for 20-25 years, evaluate planning alternatives. Planning concept should be discussed widely in the local community in order to avoid spatial "west-east" imbalance and keep the preferences of compact shape of the city.

3.2 Kurovskoye

3.2.1 The History

Town of Kurovskoye integrates the history of three completely different settlements. First – the most "historical" settlement was the Guslitsky Transfiguration Monastery – the youngest cloister in the Moscow region built in 1869. It is situated in the western part of the town. Second was a village where a textile factory started its work in the second part of the XIX century. And the third was a small town near the rail station, founded in the beginning of the XX century. These three settlements were united in one town due to the soviet industrialization in the late 1930-s but still are separated by lakes, swamps, railways and streets.

In the 1990-s textile factory in Kurovskoye was closed as the one in Egorievsk, but the railroad junction formed one of the main cargo stations in the Moscow region with locomotive depot. In spite of small industries in the field of construction materials production, woodwork and food production Kurovskoe may be considered as typical so called "mono-industrial town". Railroad infrastructure occupies 1/3 of the town territory. At the same time a new industrial park partly developed by foreign companies (e.g. Michelin, Tegola) is situated 5 kilometers far from Kurovskoe in the village of Davidovo.

Now the population of Kurovskoe is about 22000 people and is notable for a high level of social care. Due to direct railway connection with Moscow (2 hours) up to a half of able-bodied population prefer to work in the center of agglomeration.

3.2.2 Challenges and Prospects

Kurovskoe doesn't look like a city yet. It's rather a pattern of multi-stored housing blocks, private housing and industrial sites with a cascade of ponds and swamps in the very center of the settlement. The General Plan of the town was completed last year. It is focused on traditional priority of housing just mentioning the

significance of developing the central part of the city and need for special projects combining public, business and recreation activities.

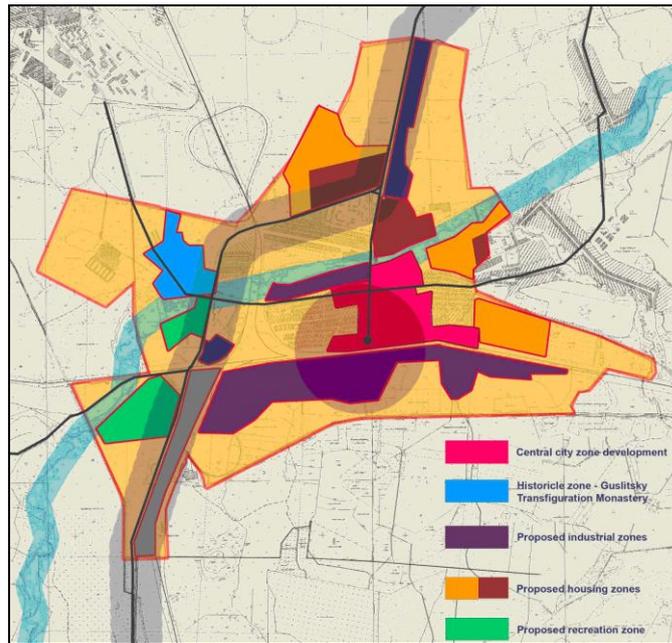


Fig. 5: Kurovskoe: Proposed Structural Scheme

Kurovskoe and Davidovo with its industrial park are different municipalities. They were working on their own plans on the lowest level of coordination. The current General Plan of Kurovskoe pays no attention to the possibility of joint development with neighboring settlements.

Today Kurovskoe faces the necessity of strategic choice – should the town just exploit its strengths as a transportation nodal point or look for a more valuable place on the edge of agglomeration. The potential of logistics development in Kurovskoe is very high. In a few years Moscow will start reconstruction of its spacious rail cargo fields: all cargo processing will be transferred 50-70 km out of the capital towards the Great Rail Ring. Kurovskoe is a candidate to host this activity. It may offer greenfield sites for warehouse, logistics and industrial development.

Besides that, prioritizing economic aspects may cause a danger of marginalizing the social, cultural and ecological needs of the city. In order to become more livable Kurovskoe should invest much more not only in workplaces and housing but in the urban environment, public spaces and service sector. The city needs any kind of creative measures to push further its development.

3.3 Veryia

3.3.1 The History

Town of Veryia is one of the oldest settlements in the Moscow region. Now it is a typical small town with glorious history in the past. It is situated about 110 kilometers to the west from Moscow far from transit highways and railroads in a less economically developed part of the region.

It hasn't always been like that. Three centuries ago Veryia due to its position on Protva river was in the junction or the trade routes from Russia to Europe and from the north of the country to its new lands in the south. In the XVII century during a short period of prosperity it was the largest city in the Moscow region with population 5941 people (1787). During this period the majority of the churches and public buildings were made of bricks and the town acquired its regular planning form, that remains the same until nowadays.



Fig. 6: Veryia. The bird eye view.

After the Belorussian railway had been constructed in the middle of the 1900-s 27 km to the north from the town, Veryia lost its importance for transportation. No new stimulus for development came with Revolution in 1917. Now it is the smallest town in the Moscow region with population less then 200 years ago – about 5300 people.

3.3.2 The Quiet Town

It seems that the city is still in the XIX century. Nothing has changed through years. According to the statistics there are few small engineering and construction enterprises in Veryia. But they don't seem to be drivers of the town's economics.

The main potential for the city's development lies in its "historicity" and "soulfulness" – features which are so intimate for most Russians. People talk about Veryia with such epithets as "sincere", "quiet", "hospitable" or town "that I want to live in". Together with town's surroundings that are rewarded for the best environmental situation in the whole Moscow region all this attracts a lot of artists, creative people, freelancers, etc. They are not residents but many of them may live in the town (or near it in temporary dwellings - so called "dachas") for months, acquire real estate for living and play a remarkable role in the town's politics, governance and strategy.

Probably Veryia shows more "livability" then most of economically successful cities, which seek for investors, not for community's welfare. From the beginning of the XXI century Veryia is paying attention to its historical image investing in restoration of the churches and public buildings.

Like in Kurovskoe the General Plan of Veryia was completed last year. It pays attention to environmental protection measures, developing transportation, engineering and service facilities, providing recreation-oriented public spaces. At the same time it offers new sites for industrial development and multi-stored housing. Probably the town may try more restricted approach for new civil and industrial construction based not on functional separation but mixing different functions in one quarter or even one building.

3.3.3 Future Vision

What are the prospects for such an "Island of Quite"? Should it look for changes in the XXI century? Unchangeable city in case of Veryia is the same as sustainable, isn't it?

At every epoch somebody can find out two or three hundred wealthy people got tired of megapolis way of life and who appreciate silence and natural landscapes. A few cities in the western part of the Moscow region may offer a good state of historical heritage and environment, combined with better connection to Moscow, better services and more activity in public life then Veryia.

Veryia should define particular thrusts for development in this concurrent environment keeping in mind that „Changes spoil the image“. The town can't fully rely on artistic-minded newcomers but should bring up its own creative community based on small services, handicraft industry and artisan production. Typical backwoods – is a good idea for place-marketing. The technologically equipped backwoods with active public life is better!

4 CONCLUSION

People need different cities. In order to attract citizens some of them should dynamically change, another should ensure stability and quiet. Thanks to location on the edge of Moscow agglomeration the cities discussed above independently can weigh up different opportunities of and visions on their own development.

Currently general priorities on the state level are housing and industrial sites development. Under the circumstances long term local strategies adoption, careful planning of public spaces and transportation nets, paying attention to environmental quality issues and participation processes can do more for urban community rather than construction of new houses and new factories/

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