

On the situation in building and preparation of project “Great Vladivostok” in Primorye region in 1950-1960

Sobre la situación en la construcción y preparación del proyecto "Gran Vladivostok" en la región de Primorye en 1950-1960

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Resumen

El proyecto "Gran Vladivostok" del período de Jruschov es relativamente poco conocido en la historia de la URSS debido a razones políticas. No solo fue parte de la gran reforma de la construcción de Jruschov en el país, sino también un intento de consolidar la influencia de la Unión Soviética en el este de Asia, crear un nuevo tipo de puerto y asentar el territorio del sur del Lejano Oriente. Oriente con inmigrantes de la parte occidental del país. Además, el proyecto tenía una serie de características a las que ni los académicos soviéticos ni los extranjeros prestaron atención. Sin embargo, el proyecto tuvo un significado muy importante no solo para la política de construcción en la región, sino también para el estado. Además, tuvo influencia para la política de construcción en los otros períodos de la URSS existente y diferentes estados del sistema socialista. Los autores utilizan materiales de archivo, historia oral y trabajos de investigadores, incluido uno inédito, en este artículo.

Utilizamos métodos de investigación histórico-comparativos y hermenéuticos en este trabajo.

Los objetivos del trabajo son la consideración de la situación de la construcción en Primorye antes del inicio del "Gran Vladivostok".

Palabras Clave:

Vladivostok; Lejano Oriente; URSS; historia; urbanización; ciudad

Abstract

The "Great Vladivostok" project of the Khrushchev period is relatively little known in the history of the USSR due to political reasons. It was not only a part of Khrushchev's great construction reform in the country, but also an attempt to consolidate the influence of the Soviet Union in Eastern Asia, to create a new type of port, and to settle the territory of the south of the Far East with immigrants from the western part of the country. In addition, the project had a number of features that both Soviet and foreign scholars did not pay attention to. However, project had very important significance not only building policy in the region, but for state too. Moreover, it had influence for building policy in the other periods of existing USSR and different states of socialistic system. The authors use archival materials, oral history, and the works of researchers, including unpublished one⁴, in this article.

We used historical-comparative and hermeneutic methods of research in this work.

The aims of the work are consideration of building situation in Primorye before the start of "Great Vladivostok".

Keywords:

Vladivostok; Far East; USSR; history; urbanization; city

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Situation in the region before start of project

Despite the fact that the south of the Russian Far East became part of the Russian Empire in the 1860s, St. Petersburg did not seek to develop this newly acquired region, focusing mainly on the western direction. In fact, it was supplied on the residual principle, which greatly affected its development. Another problem was that the governors of the newly-acquired region were appointed people, most of whom were not very broadminded and did not understand the importance of the territory in the long term. During the Soviet period, the situation of the region improved somewhat, which was related to the strategic objectives of the USSR. But even tense and conflictual relations with Japan in the 1930s-1940s did not encourage the Stalinist leadership to promote the development of the southern part of the Far East. After the end of World War II, the situation remained virtually unchanged, even though cooperation with East Asian countries (primarily China and North Korea) and the beginning of the "Cold War" in the Pacific region intensified. Therefore, in the late 1950s, Vladivostok did not correspond to the level of the main city of the region, as about half of all houses in it were one-storey. Much of the city was in the private sector (Lomova 2013: 93-94; Vlasov 2010: 76).

The situation began to change dramatically after the death of Stalin in 1953, when the power in the country came to N.S. Khrushchev. He soon turned his attention to the third belt⁵ of the Soviet Union, specifically mentioned Vladivostok, which was the beginning of the development of a new construction project. Among cities of third belt Vladivostok had most important place for Soviet Union. In Soviet times, it was commonplace to use propaganda slogans to inspire the population for a particular event. Vladivostok was no exception to the rule: Khrushchev announced that this city would become the second San Francisco. Moreover, housing reform in Vladivostok considered as an etalon for future of the other cities of third belt.

The question of moving forward with such a plan has been ripe for a long time. One of the most pressing problems in the region was the housing problem. Clearly, this question was actual for all regions of USSR, but in eastern areas, it was most complicated. Khrushchev understood that after Stalin era the Soviet population needed better living conditions. Therefore, he started new policy for population. It had different aspects. Already mentioned building reform, Khrushchev indexed salary and pension, it reflected to situation in Soviet family. Soviet citizens had meat and fish every day. For example, in Stalin era Soviet people had problem with bread. However, most complicated situation was in the Far East. In the early 1960s, the Far East had an average of 5.2 square meters of living space per person (this figure also included private houses built from planks of crates and other material unfit for construction), far behind the nationwide figures of 9 square meters (Slabnina 2006: 433). In reality, the housing situation was even worse. The authorities even used the policy of "compaction" by taking "surplus" space from offices and institutions and subsequently converting it into residential space (Vlasov 2010: 178), but it was also inefficient, because it still gave very little space. Therefore, many people huddled together as best they could.

For example, candidate of economic sciences (it's like, Ph D) A. Nesterenko in 1959 lived in Vladivostok with his family of six in a communal apartment with poor heating system, with constantly freezing kitchen, squatting on 12 square meters. His acquaintance had a family of four, living in a hut in a room of 10 square meters (Slabnina 2006: 435-436). According to Konstantin Dulov, a resident of Vladivostok at that time (later the head of the Vladivostok City Executive Committee⁶ in the 1980s): "It's a terrible thing when people live in communal apartments. Nowadays, few people can imagine what it's like to live for decades in a communal apartment⁷ with one kitchen, one toilet and a corridor for several families. The result is constant scandals

⁵ During the Soviet period many regions belonged to price areas, called as belts on the base of prices, the first belt were Moscow, Leningrad, capitals of republics and closed territorial-administrative units (like, Arzamas -17), Baltic republics, the third was the northern areas territories, and the Far East. Second included all other areas of Soviet Union, most cheap prices were in first belt. Most expensive was third belt. For price system second belt located between other two belts

⁶ City Executive Committee - a city executive committee in Soviet times, nowadays this institution in Russia corresponds to the mayor's office.

and mutual bullying, hatred... Of course, when under Khrushchev they started to demolish huts and partition communal compounds, and gave people separate apartments instead, albeit with tiny six-meter-long kitchens and shared sanitary facilities, it was a true happiness for them. Nowadays people say "khrushoba"⁸ with disdain, but then people were so happy about the very fact of receiving a separate apartment! ” (Most cherez Zolotoj Rog edva ne nachali stroit` esche v 80-h gg...2012).

And the above facts are confirmed by other witnesses who lived not only in Vladivostok, but also in other cities of Primorye region at that time⁹. For example, the family of Alexandra Pavlovna Krinitsina lived in Nakhodka. She lived in a communal apartment, where there was a family in each room of the apartment. The apartment had one sanitary unit with all outlets. There were several tables in the kitchen, each with a single burner electric stove. Each family cooked food on one burner, and one member of the family tried not to leave the kitchen, because in that case the neighbors tended to take soup or porridge from a pot left unattended. Food was kept in the kitchen cupboards, which were locked because no one could guarantee that the neighbors would not steal the food. Of course, the atmosphere in the apartment was very tense and conflicted¹⁰.

Despite the fact that the state made efforts to retain personnel in the Far East by means of benefits and increased salaries (Slabnina 2006: 437), there was a large outflow of specialists to the western regions of the country (Makarenko, 2008: 211) in all seaside institutes and universities.

In particular, in 1955 there was a decision of Council of Ministers of USSR "About measures of help to Vladivostok in housing, municipal and cultural-household construction"(SAPK (Государственный архив Приморского края/ State Archive of Primorye Region), F. 373, Opis. 4. Delo. 6, List. 23 - 28.), such measures did not help much. Inviting people from the western part of the Soviet Union to work permanently in the Far East also went badly - specialists came only for 2 to 3 years, but then returned home, an example of which was the Yaroslavl Agricultural Institute, which moved to Voroshilov (modern Ussuriysk)(Brief historical note No. 1. PSAA archive (Приморская Государственная сельскохозяйственная академия/ Primorye State Agricultural Academy)). Not only the housing problems, but also the lack of normal living conditions, the system of leisure and cultural life organization had a great impact on such positions of the seconded people.

Another, no less difficult problem was the issue of population growth in the region. In the second half of the 1950s, relations with China began to deteriorate, and the eastern neighbor began to have territorial claims against the Soviet Union. Therefore, the issue of relocation of Soviet inhabitants to the Far East became very important, since people were not only not arriving in the "Third Belt" from the western Soviet Union, but, on the contrary, were leaving for the European part of the country. The level of natural population growth could not cover the negative consequences of this migration. Therefore, the new construction of the largest

⁷ The *kommunalka* is a way of living, most famous in Stalin's time. It was a communal apartment with several rooms, in each of which lived one family. But there were different ways of living in such housing units. For more details in English see Katerina Gerasimova. Public Privacy in the Soviet Communal Apartment. *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds. Oxford: Berg. 2002. - p. 207-230. Semenova, Victoria Equality in poverty: the symbolic meaning of *kommunalki* in the 1930s- 50s. *On Living through Soviet Russia*. Daniel Bertaux, Paul Thompson, and Anna Rotkirch, eds. London: Routledge. 2004. - p. 54-67. Timothy Sosnovy. *The Housing Problem in the Soviet Union*. New York: Research Program on the U.S.S.R. 1954.

⁸ "Khrushchoba" is the sarcastic name for the houses built when N.S. Khrushchev was in charge of the country. This expression is abbreviated "Khrushchev slums" and appeared during the rule of Leonid Brezhnev, but, in our opinion, it has an obvious political aspect or order - in 1970 - 1980 - the new leadership of the USSR tried to discredit the success of Nikita Khrushchev. Therefore, during that period, the "Khrushchevs" were contrasted with the "significantly improved" houses of the period of Leonid Brezhnev. In fact, the "Brezhnev" houses were superior to the Khrushchev-era houses in terms of external design, interior layout, and the presence of a loggia instead of a balcony. These advantages were of great importance to residents.

But these houses had their own problems with soundproofing and heat protection. "Khrushchevkas" had thicker walls, which passed the sound much weaker and retained heat better. In addition, many classic Khrushchev houses had another advantage - two large courtyards on different sides, often fenced off from the roadway by rows of garages or sheds. These yards had playgrounds, arbors, wooden benches with tables, and there were both common (poplars and birches) and fruit trees (apples, pears), bushes (cherries, raspberries) and flowers. Therefore, many people preferred to rest in such yards in summer time (note - both these paragraphs are an insertion from the authors of this article).

⁹ We plan to examine this topic in more detail in the article "Changing the daily life during the period of N.S. Khrushchev".

¹⁰ A conversation with a relative of Alexandra Pavlovna Krinitsina's family took place in 2018.

city in the south of the Far East (later called the project "Great Vladivostok") had to solve both problems, as the plan was not only to radically solve the housing problem, but also to create the basis for the cultural life of the region, as well as improve industrial development by creating a large number of production facilities. All these activities were to make Vladivostok attractive in the eyes of immigrants and become a kind of anchor for local youth in the future.

First measures for preparations for Project

To solve all these problems, many architects and builders from western part of the country were brought to Vladivostok, Glavvladivostroy¹¹ (1960) and a number of design institutes (Anikeyev, Obertas, 2007: 78) were created in the city. All these structures were to facilitate the implementation of the project. "Great Vladivostok" itself was basically designed by Lengiprogor¹². The designers of this organization, besides their own development, took into account the experience and drawings of specialists who had planned the construction of Vladivostok in the pre-war period and at the beginning of the 1950s. They also took into account the already existing enterprises in Vladivostok, which could significantly help in the construction: for example, since 1953 an asphalt concrete plant (Vlasov 2010: 171) was already functioning. All this allowed the Leningrad specialists to create the general master plan for the city's construction for only half a year (Anikeyev, Obertas, 2007: 92) (it is also called the General Plan 1960). The project quickly passed all the instances, and April 4, 1961. Council of Ministers of the RSFSR approved this plan for implementation (Vlasov, 2015). Of course this did not mean that Lengiprogor had planned the whole housing reform of the city. A great number

of different organizations were involved in it, working on specific objects and structures (SAPK F. 1596. Opis. 1 D. 19.). Moreover the quickly made project had its shortcomings, many points of "Great Vladivostok" were changed more than once during the construction, there were often design flaws (SAPK. F. 1596. Opis' 1. D. 364; SAPK. F. 333. Opis' 1. D. 3. L. 5 - 6; SAPK. F. 1596. Opis' 1. D. 829. L. 82).

As a result, Lengiprogor was engaged in the correction of the project and in the 1970s (Anikeyev, Obertas, 2007: 100). Apparently, the geographical features of the city were not taken into account. Similarly, designs for buildings of 9 to 12 stories were considered as part of the discussion of the plan. They were not developed in the period of Khrushchev, but were included in the project later.

About serious intentions of the state about the building of Vladivostok testify a number of documents: first of all the Decision of the USSR Council of Ministers from January, 18th, 1960¹³ about building in Vladivostok. It was supplemented by the RSFSR Council of Ministers Decree № 156 of January 28, 1960 "On the development of Vladivostok"¹⁴. This decree was significantly supplemented by a document on the construction of Vladivostok on January 18 of the same year¹⁴. During the construction of the city it was planned to build and put into commission during five years (1960 - 1965) residential houses with a total area of 1,6 million square meters (4,14 million square meters in all according to the plan)¹⁵. Thus, the leadership planned to bring the area of the housing stock to 12 square meters per person. This exceeded the national (RSFSR) figure, which, apparently, was to become an additional incentive for the population to live in Primorye region. At that time there were 1,518 sq. m., of which 618 sq. m.¹⁶ were under demolition

¹¹ The Vladivostok Main Construction Directorate, it still exists nowadays and is the largest construction organization in Primorye Region. At the moment this institution also specializes in repair works.

¹² Leningrad Institute of Urban Design. This institution was created in 1959 by merging two structures - the State Institute of Urban Design (Giprogor) and the State Design Institute of Municipal Construction (GiproKommunistroy). It created the master plans for the construction and reconstruction of many cities. The institution is now called the Institute of Urbanism.

¹³ The authors have in their possession a copy of this decree, but a number of paragraphs of this document are not available, as they are marked as "secret". Since the material was obtained privately, the authors do not provide references to the data of the decree's location.

¹⁴ The final version of the plans for construction was approved by the Order of the Ministry of Construction on February 8, 1960 № 34. According to this it was decided to create construction factories also on the territory of Primorye Region (in particular, Spassk, Krolevtsy, Uglovoye village, the town of Iman) to support the development of "Great Vladivostok" Project (p. 6).

¹⁵ As a result, in general, during the period 1960 - 1985s. more than 8 million square meters of housing according to the work was built: Baklanov, Avdeyev, Romanov (2017).

¹⁶ Data on the housing stock before the start of the project were taken from the above-mentioned monograph by V.V. Anikeyev, Obertas (2007: 95).

or transfer, 20,100 additional places in schools (before the plan there were only 21.9 thousand school places), 13.5 thousand additional places for children (6.8 thousand places), hospitals with 2,100 additional beds (4,550 places). And that's not counting the large number of canteens, baths, laundries, cinemas (six in total) (Vlasov 2015), various types of stores, etc.

Besides, the participant of Soviet representatives' delegation at the International Exhibition of housing construction in New York in 1959 was involved in the discussion of Vladivostok building plan¹⁷. He gave the Far Eastern specialists extensive information on innovations in their fields of specialization in the world, and it should be noted that the material presented by him was really huge. After the discussion, the specialists who worked on the "Great Vladivostok" took a number of innovations for consideration (SAPK F. 1596. Opis` 1 D. 360). In particular it concerns the square of the kitchen, combined bathroom, ceiling height (2,7 m)¹⁸, the use of reinforced concrete, children's playgrounds, etc. All these nuances were introduced in the construction of the classic "Khrushchev" 1960s¹⁹. Therefore we can say that in the building of these houses in Vladivostok there is a foreign influence and use of the newest international technologies of that time. In our opinion, it is very important that the above-mentioned exhibition was held in 1959, and in 1960, the Soviet specialists not only analyzed and discussed the specifics of foreign construction, but also made efforts to introduce the most convenient and practical of them in the housing project on the example of "Great Vladivostok". But it is obvious that the project also used the experience from other countries, in particular from Western Europe. Most likely, it was the result of exchange programs on urban

construction between Great Britain and the USSR in 1957-1958 (Cook, Stephen V. Ward and Kevin Ward, 2014)²⁰.

It should be noted that housing construction in Vladivostok had one important feature - it combined the solution of housing problems with cultural and service needs of the population. The USSR Council of Ministers showed flexibility in this measure and granted the local authorities the right to make changes in standard designs and to decide how and where to locate "in the first floors [of commissioned buildings - author's note] public catering enterprises, stores and other institutions for cultural and household services for workers". Thus, the regional leadership was included in the development of the project to address many issues and was interested in its speedy completion. Therefore, various institutions related to cultural life (children's clubs, libraries) or service industries (hairdressing salons, workshops) began to operate in many of the buildings. In addition, the local authorities, in the case of successful construction of a multistory apartment building, introduced another rule on their own initiative - they did not inhabit one apartment in such a building to serve as a benchmark for construction. And in the stairwells, stands with explanations of the facility were installed (SAPK. F. 1596. opis. 1 D. 2. L. 40 - 41).

In terms of industry, the pace of development was even higher - according to the project builders were given 3 years to build and put into operation 4 plants of building materials in Vladivostok. Due to these accelerating plans for the construction of the city, the budget of "Great Vladivostok" also grew. In particular, in 1960, 2,5 billion rubles were additionally allocated to the project. Money from the Reserve Fund of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR was also used. But at the same time, the costs

¹⁷ Most likely, in this case, it was referring to the "Exhibition of Soviet Science, Technology, and Culture Achievements" in New York, June 1959. It was held with the aim to show the achievements of Soviet state. It had a "Housing Construction" department and a group of specialists from the Soviet Union attached to it. During the course of this exhibition, some of the Soviet participants had the opportunity to participate in various excursions around the country and to collect material. Given that the report mentions visits to Chicago and other American cities, the participants actively traveled around the country in order to exchange experiences and learn about American achievements in construction. This exhibition was held within the framework of the Soviet-American treaty on cultural cooperation. In turn, in July 1959, in Moscow Park "Sokolniki" opened the "American National Exhibition", which pursued largely similar goals, only for the United States.

¹⁸ Subsequently, the ceilings were lowered to 2.5 m for additional savings.

¹⁹ "Khrushchevka" refers to five-story apartment buildings designed and commissioned during the rule of N.S. Khrushchev, but since the 1970s the construction of such buildings was curtailed. In more detail we plan to consider this topic in the article "The struggle of "art-house" and economic trends in the project "Greater Vladivostok" of Khrushchev period".

²⁰ Ian R. Cook, Stephen V. Ward and Kevin Ward, "A Springtime Journey to the Soviet Union: Postwar Planning and Policy Mobilities through the Iron Curtain", in: *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 38, 3. - (2014)

of the project due to the receipt of a large amount immediately exceeded the previously indicated 2.5 billion rubles, allocated from the national budget. We shall consider the reasons for this fact below.

As we can see, Soviet government had interest to development of Primorye region. However, at that time USSR did not have financial support for full provide of building program e south part of Far East, therefore Soviet leaders used finance from population. In addition, many mistakes of specialists increased expenses for project. We shall consider it in another work – ““Great Vladivostok”: process and results”.

Conclusion

As we can see, after Stalin Soviet government understood problem of housing in the region. State prepared some measures for changing situation. Most important and great from it was project “Great Vladivostok”. However, thus project was very global for state in this time, therefore USSR used finance from population. 

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