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"Hanging Out," Creativity, and the Right to the City: Urban Public Space in Russia before and after the Protest Wave of 2011–2012[1]

Abstract
The article discusses issues of urban public space in Russian cities within the context of the 2011–2012 anti-electoral fraud protests. The role of urban public space and its contestation has been central to the debate around the worldwide Occupy movement, but it is important to contextualize the protest movements in terms of national and local developments in the uses of public space. Therefore, the article focuses on post-socialist transformations of public space in the Russian cities of Saint Petersburg and Moscow. Representations and perceptions of public space are examined via media analysis (including mass

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media reports, blog entries, and official documents). The analysis shows that public space was important for the Russian anti-electoral protests in 2011–2012: protesters attempted to reclaim central and symbolically loaded parts of the city and thus regain political power as well. Rallies and street protests have not been the only ways of reclaiming public space, however. A variety of direct actions have also been aimed at transforming urban space.

Keywords:
contested space, creativity in social movements, post-socialist transformation, public space, 2011–2012 Russian protest movement

Introduction

The recent worldwide wave of street protests, new features of grass-roots politics, and the difficulties of interpreting the outcomes of public protests have given new inspiration to writers on public space. People have appeared and remained in places where they were not supposed nor allowed to be, thus putting urban space on the political agenda. David Harvey, Richard Sennett, and other leading urban studies experts have commented on the Occupy movement as a key event for understanding contemporary developments in urban space, democracy, and political participation (Harvey 2011; Sennett 2012). The political component of the Occupy-like movements has been evident, but theorists of urbanism have drawn attention to the spatial dimension of protests, bringing the issue of public space and the right to the city to the top of the agenda. For David Harvey, the Occupy movement was a manifestation of one of the capitalist city's essential challenges: the fact that the access of city dwellers to decision-making has been limited and, thus, their right to the city has been violated. Harvey emphasizes the role of urban public space as the ultimate means of political communication: "It shows us that the collective power of bodies in public space is still the most effective instrument of opposition when all other means of access are blocked" (Harvey 2011). For Richard Sennett, the Occupy movement has exposed the core questions of urban public space: "The Occupy movements dramatized questions about public space—who owns it? who can use it?" (Sennett 2012). Sennett has raised the question of urban space's ambivalence as he addresses the new way the occupiers exist in public space: they do not just pass through it but also dwell there, fulfilling all their daily needs, as well as taking control of the space, cleaning and maintaining it. This tangle of political claims and habitation, as well as the international stature of this new mode of existence in public space, brings us back to the discussion of the right to the city and its role in contemporary civic engagement, but it

also gives us new inspiration to revisit the concept of urban public space itself.

The 2011–2012 protests against allegedly fraudulent election results in Russia can also be analyzed in the global context of the Occupy movement, although the occupation of public spaces was not the main mode of protest. Occupations did take place in a few Russian cities along with conventional rallies and protest demonstrations. However, the unprecedented presence of citizens on the streets and the harsh reaction of the authorities have stimulated a discussion on urban public space and the corresponding rights to it in the Russophone discourse. Before the protests, the term "urban public space" had been used only by a small number of urban planning and urban studies specialists, but it did not exist in the public discourse. However, the unprecedented occupation of open spaces in Russian cities by protesters has led to discussion of the concept itself, as well as of the limitations and possibilities for the use of urban space by city dwellers: the issue of the quality of urban public life, public gatherings, and spaces for them has been raised by the media and urbanites. Although Occupy Wall Street and the Russian anti-election fraud protests may have had different ideological backgrounds and participants (Occupy Wall Street was anti-capitalist, whereas the Movement for Fair Elections had no unified ideology apart from the desire to depose Putin and his party, with protesters hailing from all ends of the political spectrum), the importance of the form and the role of urban space in both movements cannot be denied. As happened with Occupy Wall Street in the West, the Russian public began asking the same questions: who owns urban space, and who can use it?

Conflicts over use of public spaces for different purposes during the protests (protesters were often accused of violating other people's rights to use public spaces "peacefully") also contributed to the discussion. After protests involving the occupation of open spaces, the idea of public space was discussed in the media, where it figured both as a space for free self-expression and a space subject to certain restrictions as to how it could be used because other people were present there. As a result of the protests and the government's reaction to them, possibilities for organizing events in public spaces have been drastically restricted. Under a new law passed by the State Duma (Russian Federal Law No. 65-FZ, dated June 8, 2012), the organizers of unsanctioned gatherings in public spaces are subject to heavy fines and even jail sentences.[2] Thus, public space is viewed as the space of possibility (there are several urban planning projects in Moscow and Petersburg for developing public space) and as a potential threat both to "average citizens" (who, according to this discourse, are not involved in

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[2] "Federal'nyi zakon Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 8 iiunia 2012 g. No. 65-FZ g. Moskva," *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, June 9, 2012. http://www.rg.ru/2012/06/09/mitingi-dok.html.

protests and prefer "stability" to "revolution") and the government (in early 2012, some media would reproduce this rhetoric, proffering examples of "good practice" from Paris, where rallies were said to take place inside a sporting facility so as not to disturb municipal authorities and other citizens).[3]

Although the reasons for comparing authoritarian and capitalist regimes (the latter are, all things considered, more respectful of freedom of assembly) might not seem obvious, they seem compelling when it comes to public space and the potential for protests: in both cases, occupations of space are declared illegal by the authorities and become the spotlight of political confrontation. In this paper, I will attempt to analyze the transformative role of public space in major Russian cities. While I will focus mainly on its discursive representations, I will also pay attention to diverse practices of being in public before and after the 2011–2012 protest wave. My analysis is limited mostly to findings from Saint Petersburg and Moscow. Understanding the contested public space of the 2011–2012 protests requires a broader outline of the concept of public space in the Russian urban context. I intend to conceptualize the protest movements of 2011–2012 partly as a reaction to the existing social agenda and public problems. As with the Occupy movement, a political clash has thematized the lack of space in the city and its excessive policing. After the protests, the struggle between conservative and emancipatory ideologies over this issue has continued.

I will now discuss, first, the conceptual framework of my study: the debate over the public sphere and public space.

Public Space: Representation and "Hanging Out"

The concept of public space is a core issue in the debate on the right to the city, as borne out by research into urban social movements and diverse initiatives by citizens looking for ways to impact the urban development process. Henri Lefebvre first introduced the concept of the "right to the city," which has received much attention from urban scholars in disciplines ranging from human geography and anthropology to social movements research (Harvey 2003; Mitchell 2003; Marcuse 2009). The "right to the city" refers not only to the right of the citizens to inhabit the city, but also their right to engage in decision-making regarding its future, to transform their own living environments. Most conflicts in cities can be viewed as a struggle for the right to the city, as different social groups try to influence the process of decision-making by entering public space. The connec-

[3] TV-Tsentr, "Moskovskie mitingi meshaiut normalnoi zhizni goroda" [Moscow rallies disrupt the normal life of the city]. http://www.mos-gaz.ru/press-service/publications/read18466.html.s

tion between the right to the city and public space is quite vital: it is only in public space that the right to the city can be claimed and realized. In this paper, I will try to establish the connection between urban public space and the broader issue of civic participation and representation.

There is no consensus in either the academic or public discourse on what public space is. One sometimes gets the impression the term has two completely different meanings, both empirically and ideologically. The first notion is rather practical and more design-oriented: "urban public space" is used to describe open spaces in the city, people-friendly, "inviting" spaces that encourage one to hang out outside, encounter strangers, and imbibe diverse urban experiences. This understanding of public space praises diversity, inclusion, and urban experience (Lofland 1998; Whyte 2012). In this sense, public space serves as a means for representing social diversity, as a way for urban dwellers to learn and accept this diversity.

The second interpretation has to do with the concept of right to the city in a more obvious way: it regards public space as an arena for the public representation of conflicts, political struggles, and acute social contradictions. As Peter Marcuse argued recently, the "best use of public space is illegal, and necessarily so" (Marcuse 2013). Marcuse expresses a vision of public space as political and contestable. Don Mitchell makes an important contribution to this definition of urban public space, emphasizing the difference between the "public" space permitted by the state and space that has been made public through the actions of citizens who occupy it: "[W]hat makes a space *public*—a space in which the cry and demand for the right to the city can be seen and heard—is often not its preordained 'publicness.' Rather, it is when, to fulfill a pressing need, some group or another *takes* space and through its actions *makes* it public." However, he goes on to argue, "the very act of representing one's group (or to some extent one's self) to a larger public creates a space for representation" (Mitchell 2003: 35).

There is, however, no contradiction between outdoor urban space and the politicized space of street protests: a group can represent itself in a space by the mere fact of its being there and seizing it in a way not envisaged by the administration or its proprietors. This presence can be organized in a more or less standard politicized form (such as rallies and demonstrations), or it can be manifested as an undesirable presence (for example, homeless people inhabiting parks). The Occupy movement found its place somewhere amidst these two extremes: it both raised political questions and seized spaces through actions not envisioned by the authorities.

We should now consider another important conceptual distinction, between the public sphere and public space. These terms are often used synonymously (Calhoun 2005), while sometimes they are invoked to distinguish between an abstract realm where opinions are formed and

exchanged (the public sphere), and the spatial component of interactions among strangers. When talking about the public sphere, we cannot avoid making reference to Jürgen Habermas, although his vision of the bourgeois public sphere was later criticized (Calhoun 1992; Fraser 1992). However, the definition of the public sphere given by Habermas is still important for the ongoing debate: “By ‘the public sphere’ we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body” (Habermas 1974: 49). Nancy Fraser has criticized this idealist vision by adducing examples of *counter-publics* that have been excluded from this sphere, such as women and members of other social groups. These groups have formed alternative public spheres, thus putting pressure on and, finally, transforming and expanding the “original” public sphere (Fraser 1992). The public sphere is where opinions are formed, where different and contradictory points of view must reach a sort of consensus. The concept of the public sphere accords more attention to actors and their opinions and expressions rather than the spatial context of their communication: the “public” is more important than the “space.”

For Don Mitchell, the concept of the public sphere seems insufficiently critical even in its modified and less harmonious reading. He argues the concept is too abstract to grasp the social and political contradictions in modern societies, unlike the concept of public space. The public sphere works to achieve consensus, whereas public space contains the potential for struggle and action instead of consensus. If, according to the theorists, the public sphere has nowadays become more inclusive (after its invasion by counter-publics), public space has been headed in the opposite direction: it has been subjected to increasing control and surveillance, “even though many cities are increasing their stock of open spaces and parklands” (Mitchell 2003: 143). A majority of researchers agree that urban public space is facing a crisis, a crisis caused by the increasing privatization and commodification of space, a growing fear of alien others, and so on (Low 1997; Mitchell 1995; Graham and Aurigi 1997; Allen 2006). A review of the literature on public space shows an alarming dynamic: urban public spaces (in Europe and North America) used to be open and democratic, but are now threatened by growing fears and encroaching private ownership and interests. In Russia, we have also observed increasing control over public spaces in cities, although in our case commodification and commercialization have gone hand in hand with political repression. Although the public sphere has also experienced certain difficulties, it is still impossible to impose the same level of control on online social media as has been imposed on public spaces in our cities (through, for example, aggressive crackdowns on political demonstrations in physical space).

Public space and the public sphere are global concepts, and so they must be contextualized when applied to Russia. In the next section, I will outline some features of the debate on public space in post-socialist cities.

How "Post-Socialist" Public Space Contributes to the Debate

Most researchers writing on the issue of public space in post-socialist cities inevitably accept the framework of social transformation, and consequently have investigated the transition from socialism to capitalism. Research has been done on the transformation of property rights, and meanings attributed to all possible aspects of the post-socialist transformation as reflected in urban space (Bodnar 1998; Andrusz 2007; Stanilov 2007b). There are numerous articles focusing on "post-socialist," "post-industrial" (Burgers 2006), and "post-colonial" urban public space. The political dimension of urban public space has been touched upon as well, e.g., in a study of Belgrade during 1996–1997 amidst the protests against Slobodan Milošević: they are analyzed in the broader framework of identity formation and a discussion of the spatial metaphors of "city" and "Europe" (Jansen 2001). The similarities of protest practices in the public spaces described by Jansen and those observed recently in Russian cities lead us to conclude that the specific characteristics of urban public space can produce similar practices and behaviors.

By "urban public space" I mean not only physical space itself but also practices of using that space, acceptable and prohibited forms of behavior as well as political and social constraints governing its use. Empirical case studies of public spaces in different cities and countries have shown that models of public space are quite varied, that they depend on the local public culture, on political and social factors, and so on (Mitchell 1995; Jansen 2001; Nielsen 2004; Engel 2006). Therefore, it makes sense to speak of different public "regimes" in different contexts. It would be wrong to judge and evaluate these according to a single set of criteria. I would suggest, rather, that there is a need for careful study with the goal of identifying the social and political circumstances that define the specificities of each case.

In academic texts, the "publicness" of a space is largely measured in terms of its accessibility, inclusiveness, and the freedom of expression possible there. "Publicness" can be threatened by increasing control (including repressive measures), commercialization, and fear. These terms can be easily applied to socialist, post-socialist, and western capitalist societies. A popular way of discussing public spaces in western capitalist cities is to address the limitations to access resulting from growing social inequalities and attempts by well-off publics to "segregate" themselves from undesirables (Low 1997; Mitchell 1995). Socialist cities were free

from these negative effects of capitalism. Public space, however, was controlled and policed by the state to a larger degree than was the case in Europe and the US (Engel 2006; Stanilov 2007a). Post-socialist societies now face both the new challenges of capitalist inequalities and the legacies of their totalitarian and authoritarian pasts. Such attempts to measure different cultural and historical realities on a single scale are not, however, sensitive to different regimes, patterns, and interpretations of public space. The post-socialist cases can help researchers elaborate a more sensitive tool for analyzing and understanding the role of public spaces in different contexts.

The Soviet idea of public space was incorporated in many planning concepts implemented in Soviet times. All urban space was public by default, in the sense it belonged to the state. However, only sanctioned activities were permitted and tolerated in central public spaces and crowded areas. The formal status of "common space" did not correspond with the actual functionality and use of most of these spaces: central squares and streets were intended for demonstrations and rallies initiated and choreographed by the state. A "public place," according to this concept, was meant to be a place for collective actions organized by authorities (Engel 2006: 167). Uncontrolled gatherings of people in central open spaces were undesirable, and everyday social interactions among city dwellers were pushed back into the private domain or "no man's land," into such places as kitchens, garages, backyards, and wastelands, thus establishing an alternative to state-dominated public life (Zhelnina 2011).

This led to a strict division of life in Soviet cities into public and private domains, a phenomenon that has been analyzed by historians and anthropologists (Boym 1994; Nielsen 2004). The Norwegian anthropologist Finn Sivert Nielsen has hit upon a spatial metaphor for this duality: the *prospekt* (avenue), a place that represents civilization, was well maintained and ordered, while the *dvor* (backyard) was the place where people actually lived and interacted. But the *dvor*, as a non-private place for interaction (the courtyards of residential buildings were not locked in those days), was not a fully open space; rather, it was a place hidden from the outsider, an "ungoverned domain" (Nielsen 2004). Therefore, the general division of life between private and public spilled over into the city, whose open spaces did not function as public places where substantive interactions among strangers and diversity were possible.

After the collapse of the Soviet system, the private-public balance began to change: the role of open spaces and backyards had to be reinterpreted. Global forces and the switch from a planned economy to a market economy caused these changes. The restructuring of cities was exacerbated by the new economic and political conditions, but the peculiarity of local policies and city image-making contributed to a heterogeneous reinterpretation of public spaces and urban identity in different cities.

In his work on the architectural preservation movement in Petersburg, Boris Gladarev also mentions the split among public, private, and "kitchen talk" regimes during the Soviet period. For him, the public regime is only possible when the rules of communication and relevant language are at the disposal of citizens (Gladarev 2011). Communication in public is thus a specific bodily and linguistic skill involving "proper" behavior. This skill was diminished by the Soviet state and ideology: since freedom of speech did not exist, meaningful communication was shunted into "kitchens" and other private, trustworthy domains. The public sphere was bureaucratized, offering a reduced set of public roles to citizens. Glasnost and perestroika made meaningful public communication formally possible, but it was extremely difficult in practice, since rules and codes for communicating in public had to be established and relearned. "Public order implies self-restriction and control over affects; it is maintained by publicly accepted rules distinguishing between 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' behavior" (Gladarev 2011). The public sphere requires compromise and tolerance or, at very least, politeness during acts of communication, which does not always happen in today's Russia: "unpopular" opinions and behaviors can be harshly rejected, while "acceptable" opinions and behaviors are praised as the only ones possible. A "polite" medium has been lacking in public discussion.

Artemy Magun, on the contrary, sees a different aspect of the Soviet model of public space. He has argued it was a "space of anarchic freedom, [whose] complete alienation was a guarantee of non-appropriation" (Magun 2011). And yet people were forced to live together in crowded communal apartments where the boundaries between private and public were reversed, and to come together in meaningless rallies and other public assemblies. This has led to a specific public regime that still shapes public culture in the post-socialist period: "The neglect and aggression in Russian streets and apartment buildings may simply mean that Russian citizens take other people for granted, as a foreground. It is the complete opposite from normal Western European behavior towards strangers, in which an encounter produces the shock of near-disbelief, and exaggerated rituals of politeness are supposed to mask the embarrassment of the encounter itself" (Magun 2011).

Gladarev and Magun may have different visions of public space (as absent and as empty, respectively), but they share a critical interpretation of the socialist (and post-socialist) public regime. And although it is rather hard to find works, in the academic literature, that do not criticize the state of public space throughout the world, the post-socialist analyses show a special kind of deviation from the open, equally accessible, and contentious environment for communication that is now the widespread ideal of public space.

The situation described by Gladarev points to the difficulties of verbal communication in the public sphere, the realm where opinions, posi-

tions, and ideas are formed and exchanged. This also applies to urban public space: the presence of diverse others needs to be tolerated, and citizens must learn public politeness and compromises (Zhelnina 2011), but the conservative state may present certain obstacles to this "learning" process.

Official discourse tends to avoid the notion of public space or to interpret it as a space that requires monitoring. For example, in official documents (such as the Saint Petersburg Strategic Plan) the term "public space" is replaced by the neutral term "open urban space," which has fewer social connotations, since the word "open" (in Russian, *otkrytoe*) refers to space that is uncovered rather than space for social activities. This interpretation of urban space not only relates to possible protests in squares and streets but also to the presence of citizens there in general. There had already been a growing discussion about what public spaces in Petersburg should be like before political demonstrations encroached on these spaces. In this earlier stage, the discussion focused more on the rules of behavior in public and actions that should be considered acceptable or undesirable in public spaces. On the one hand, Petersburg's squares and parks are crowded when the weather is warm, with people lying on the grass, eating and chatting. On the other hand, both city officials and certain citizens have often declared this state of affairs unacceptable, especially when it is manifested in the historic center of Russia's "cultural capital" (Petersburg's unofficial title). These discussions demonstrate the difficult beginnings of a public regime in which rules and acceptable behaviors have not yet been established.

The debate about "open space" is evidence of the conflict between the old concept and the new concept of urban space now emerging in modern Russia. The old official concept of open urban space sees it as a "postcard" that should feature not the living city and its people, but official and "picturesque" views. This is closely related to the Soviet idea of open urban space as a stage for official rallies and demonstrations organized by the Communist Party, a space that was under the permanent control of officials and did not belong to the city's inhabitants. The concept that has been emerging over the last decade is related to the humanist concept of the "city for the people." Although it is not referred to as public space, the idea of public places as spaces of interaction does occasionally appear in the media, and is often voiced by citizens. The latter development can also be viewed as a part of "Europeanization" or "westernization" process, since there are a number of grassroots projects aimed at improving public space that were inspired by similar projects implemented in European and North American cities. The 2011–2012 protests have contributed to the development of this new interpretation of public and urban public space, and to the emergence of this term in the discourse. The "post-protests" conception of urban public space in the Russian media has been similar to the one current in discussions taking place

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in other countries, and examples of how public space is organized in western countries have often been incorporated into this conception. I primarily have in mind the idea that open spaces should be accessible to people, and that people should be able to use these spaces for diverse activities including seeing other people and being seen by them.

The intricate division into public and private I have described, above, can help explain why post-socialist protesters have been so obsessed with taking over symbolically loaded central areas of their cities: it is these spaces, associated with state power, that must be occupied to reclaim political authority for rank-and-file citizens. Open urban space, deprived of public life, must be imbued with alternative meanings as well as alternative practices of civic involvement in political life: both street protests and the direct transformation of public space (a topic I will address later in this article) serve this end. It is no secret that open urban spaces are often controlled and maintained by public authorities or, in some cases, private owners in European and North American cities as well. Generally speaking, however, the use of these spaces by citizens is less of a problem in democratic regimes, and different activist groups can take over the spaces sequentially or share them. In Russian cities, however, some authorities interpret the emergence of citizens in open spaces as a challenge. The Occupy Wall Street movement took place in a "privately owned public space" (POPS), Zuccotti Park, provoking a discussion about the privatization of urban public spaces under neoliberal urban development policies. The conflicts over public spaces in Russian cities during the protests have raised a similar intrinsic problem. Although public space cannot be privately owned in Russia, in reality it has been appropriated by municipal administrations, and attempts by citizens to use it are interpreted as a challenge of the same sort.

I will now analyze how urban spaces have come to be appropriated by municipal administrations, focusing on Petersburg, and what particular social and political developments have framed this process.

The Background to Change in Petersburg: Europeanization

In the post-Soviet period, Saint Petersburg, like many other post-Soviet Russian cities, had to develop a new system of governance and new planning strategies. Under new regulations for registering domiciles, the *propiska* system, which had fixed people to a particular place of residence and made it impossible to move and migrate freely around the country, was abolished. The new law "On the Right of Citizens of the Russian Federation to Freedom of Movement and Choice of Place of Residence and Domicile within the Russian Federation" (Federal Law No. 5242-I, dated June 25, 1993) caused a significant growth in migration flows, transforming the populations of the ma-

jor cities. It was accompanied by an exacerbation of social ills: unemployment, a decrease in the quality of life, and marginalization of the population were symptoms of an overall crisis in the industrial and labor systems.

The early 1990s in Petersburg were marked by attempts on the part of the municipal administration to cope with these systemic problems: their solutions involved privatization, a search for strategic investment partners and resources for the funding the city budget. The policies of the first mayor of the new Saint Petersburg, Anatoly Sobchak, who held the office from 1991 to 1996, were focused on integrating the city into international business networks, with the goal of securing the city's financial independence from the Russian federal government.

After the abolition of the centralized planning system at the core of the planned economy, the national government lost its position as the only stakeholder and decision-maker in the process of urban development. The important feature of the post-Soviet period has been the emergence of a new agent—the investor. Major financial groups from different spheres of business who were willing to invest money in particular districts began making a significant impact on the Petersburg cityscape. The problem of the privatization of public spaces reared its head in the post-Soviet city for the first time: after several decades of being regarded as "no man's land" and a series of pretty "views," downtown Petersburg turned into a huge, uncontrolled commercial space: numerous kiosks, small shops, and street stalls occupied all available territory. In other cases, this privatization has been seen as a reduction of public space in the capitalist city (Stanilov 2007a: 272). In Leningrad/Petersburg, however, this logic was not completely applicable. There was no public space in the form of lively, interactive places in the central squares and streets: this space was not used as true public space, but only imagined and interpreted as a common symbol. In the 1990s, however, people began using it by engaging in street commerce and the processes accompanying it.

The 1990s have since come to be seen as a period of disorder and chaos as compared with the control and order of the previous era. This disorder was visible in the condition of urban spaces, with trade taking over public spaces, buildings deteriorating, and transportation systems collapsing. Attempts to civilize and clean up urban space in the late 1990s were thus met with approval by many city dwellers.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the first centralized attempts to create public places were made, although these were not completely deliberate and consistent. They were part of the reconstructions and renovations of central spaces and buildings undertaken in preparation for the city's tricentennial by Vladimir Yakovlev's municipal administration (1996–2003). The renovation and construction of pedestrian zones and public places were part of the city's "Europeanization," which was both an economic strategy and a new ideology of urban space and how it should be transformed at the turn of the century.

By the late 1990s, the city's infrastructure was in quite poor condition: transportation and housing were on the verge of collapse, and the historic city center, which had been made a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1991, was falling into decay and gradually losing its "postcard" look. The need to pay attention to the city's economy and municipal services were planks in the election campaign platform of Vladimir Yakovlev, who won the governorship by emphasizing his interest in the "routine work of improving the city"[4]. The improvement (*blagoustroistvo*) of the entire city was indeed the Yakovlev administration's main feature. In 1996 and 1997, a strategic plan for the city was drafted, which outlined the main principles of its urban development policies (Strategicheskii plan 1998). Among them were improving the quality of life and making the city more attractive to investors.

Attracting investments was viewed as one of the key conditions for shifting Petersburg onto a stable, sustainable development path. To reach this goal, "favorable economic conditions" had to be created, urban space had to be brought up to certain standards, better infrastructure had to be constructed, and potential investors had to be provided with an easy-to-negotiate, transparent real estate market. In general, the late 1990s witnessed the implementation of major projects for improving the city's infrastructure.

The most vigorous reconstruction work was carried out in the run-up to the city's tricentennial in 2003. This occasion was indeed a turning point for the city. Officially, the preparations kicked off in 1999, and over the following years many reconstruction and new construction projects were implemented. The reconstruction of physical space was accompanied by work on a new image for Petersburg as the "most European city in Russia," as the country's "cultural capital." This was part of an advertising campaign meant to attract international investment to the city, as stipulated by the Strategic Plan's exhortation to "promote the city internationally" (Strategicheskii plan 1998: 73).

The preparations for the tricentennial were financially supported by the federal budget, and it was promoted as an event of international scale. Among the biggest projects undertaken during the preparations were a modernization of Pulkovo Airport, construction of the new Ladozhsky railway station, restoration of the main landmarks in the city, and modernization of the road and transportation system (including the start of construction on a ring road around the outer reaches of the city). Numerous improvements were also made to open urban places, including the renovation of parks, streets, squares, and courtyards.

The reconstruction of physical space was accompanied by work on a new image for the city: the city's "Europeanness" (*evropeiskost'*) was

[4] "Vopros nedeli: Pochemu proigral Anatolii Sobchak?" [Question of the week: why did Anatoly Sobchak lose?], *Kommersant*, June 11, 1996. http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/12575.

meant to be the distinctive feature of Petersburg as compared with other Russian cities. The Strategic Plan included the idea of integrating the city into Europe as one of its guidelines. First of all, this meant integrating Petersburg into the European economy, turning it into a crossroads for trade between Russia and the European Union (Strategicheskii plan 1998: 46–48).

However, Petersburg's "Europeanness" has not merely been an economic strategy: it has also served as a guideline for the everyday life of city dwellers. The next governor of Petersburg, Valentina Matviyenko, referred in campaign speeches to the idea it should become a city with "European living standards." This idea was also included in the city's General Plan (adopted, 2005; amended, 2008): "The idea of the 'open European city' lies at the basis of the town-planning transformations outlined in the Concept of the General Plan of Saint Petersburg. Saint Petersburg must take up its proper place in the constellation of the great cities of Europe. The new General Plan of Saint Petersburg is focused on achieving European standards in terms of the quality of [its] urban environment"[5].

Authorities and residents have shared the idea of Petersburg as a European city. The goal of the "cultural capital" concept was to "elaborate a positive image of the city, attract tourists, and use the tricentennial as an occasion for receiving subsidies and loans from the federal center and abroad" (Chuikina 2003: 61). Moreover, "Europeanness" has been the standard that the realities of the post-Soviet Petersburg are measured against: "Europe" is invisibly present in all work related to transforming the city. The commonly used word "improvements" (*blagoustroistvo*) as well as all the innovations in town planning (for example, pedestrian streets, ball-shaped fountains, modern sculptures) remind people of the "European standard" (Chuikina 2003: 61). However, the Europeanization of Petersburg has been superficial. Or rather, as art historian Arkady Ippolitov has metaphorically argued, it has been a "Europe [based] on bullshit" (Ippolitov 2007). It has not involved measures to promote spontaneous and contentious public spaces, something that exists at least as an ideal strategy in European Union countries.

It is important to stress that the "European" image constructed in the Russian discourse is an ideal that most probably has never existed in European cities in reality. It is only recently that the international debate on human-friendly, accessible, and inclusive cities has gained popularity in Russia, and for some groups this new ideology goes along with the con-

[5] "Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva Sankt-Peterburga ot 7 maia 2001 g. No. 21. O konseptsii general'nogo plana sokhraneniia i razvitiia istoricheskogo tsentra Sankt-Peterburga i ego prigorodov, vkliuchaia dvortsovye kompleksy" [Saint Petersburg municipal government decree no. 21, dated May 7, 2001: on the concept of the general plan for preserving and developing the historic center of Saint Petersburg and its suburbs, including palace complexes]. http://www.lawmix.ru/spblaw/1326.

cept of Europeanization. In a sense, the problems Russian cities face are quite similar to the neoliberal transformations in western cities—privatization and commercialization of public spaces, and neglect of community and neighborhood interests in favor of the interests of developers and other big businesses. Although neoliberalism's challenge to western cities has been placed on the academic agenda (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Leitner, Peck and Sheppard 2007), Russian public discussions have not shown the same awareness of these ongoing transformations.

Public *vs*. Open Space

The development of public places in Petersburg is a good example of this discrepancy between, on the one hand, the city's "European" image and, on the other, changing interpretations of public space. As I have mentioned, above, Soviet Leningrad was split spatially, into official vistas and the everyday life within neighborhoods. This situation changed as a result of the "Europeanization" policies I have described and in keeping with the general logic of post-Soviet urban development, but both the Soviet and the updated ("Europeanized") interpretations coexist in the current discourse and use of public spaces, thus demonstrating there is still a conflict between transforming identities.

As I have mentioned, the notion of public space is often replaced by the term "open space." The notion of urban public space in Petersburg is cited and conceptualized in section eleven of Saint Petersburg Municipal Government Decree No. 1681 (On Petersburg's Cultural Heritage Preservation Strategy). This document contains two different approaches to urban space: first, the idea of public space as an important communicative part of the urban environment, which plays a significant role in the self-identity of city dwellers; second, the idea of the city's open spaces as an "open-air museum" that must be treated with respect: "The improvement of open spaces, and the museification of archeological sites and minor architectural forms improves the quality of life in the city in general." On the other hand, "they play the principal role in providing for the recreational and leisure needs of the urban community; they are important for social interaction. Open spaces are a reflection of the city's collective spirit; they are like Petersburg's public living room [*gostinaia*]. They have a commercial value, and contribute to the economic revival not only by generating jobs but also by increasing the city's attractiveness in terms of business investments and living."[6]

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[6] "Pravitel'stvo Sankt-Peterburga. Postanovlenie No. 1681 ot 1 noiabria 2005 goda. O Peterburgskoi strategii sokhraneniia kul'turnogo naslediia" [Saint Petersburg municipal government decree No. 1681, dated November 1, 2005: on Petersburg's cultural heritage preservation strategy]. http://old.gov.spb.ru/gov/admin/otrasl/c_govcontrol/proekt.

The logic undergirding the document is rather contradictory: the idea of the collective everyday use of open spaces and the idea of museification would appear difficult to combine in practice. The simple fact that conceptualization of the term "open urban spaces" and their social role are included in a strategic decree on the preservation of cultural heritage shows that the perception of those spaces as visual images, as "views" is dominant, rather than the idea of them as spaces for social communication. Likewise, the term "living room" could suggest a space that must be kept "tidy" for showing off to visitors, not a space for everyday routine use. It also tellingly employs the metaphor of an interior space, thus privileging the private and internal, rather than the public and open, type of space.

During preparations for the tricentennial, the open spaces of the city attracted the municipal government's attention: improving the quality of the urban environment included creating open spaces inspired by "European traditions." In the historic downtown and neighboring districts, a program for creating pedestrian streets was launched, and several such areas were indeed established. However, the program was not fully implemented, because in a city with growing traffic problems, closing streets to cars is a complicated task. Another argument against continuing the program was the cost of maintaining these streets, something paid for by the city budget. As a result, the construction of such public places in Petersburg went no farther than a few pedestrian streets (including Malaya Konyushennaya and Malaya Sadovaya, both of which are off the city's central avenue, Nevsky Prospect). Overall, public space in Petersburg has seemingly been imagined as an aesthetic and visual concept rather than as a functional one focused on providing an interactive and comfortable environment.

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Being Civilized and Being "European": Social Interpretations of Public Places

The "Europeanization" of open urban spaces has thus not been a consistent policy. After celebrating its tricentennial and showing off a renovated Petersburg to international and Russian visitors, "Europeanized" public places have not maintained their public character. A short while after the celebrations ended, some of the "improved" public parks were closed to the public: it was cheaper and more convenient to maintain them this way. There are only a few examples of this kind, but the conflict between different perceptions, between the city as museum and the city for people, is a quite characteristic feature of recent developments in Petersburg. Open spaces, the way they are equipped and used, are often an issue in discussions that bring together two opposite views of Petersburg. The first one is reminiscent of the Soviet model, which interpreted

open spaces in the city center as visual symbols. The second one is the updated version, which focuses on the use of open spaces as public places, places for interaction and leisure.

Those two points of view can be identified in the discussion surrounding the reconstruction of one of the city's most centrally located public gardens, the one in front of Kazan Cathedral, on Nevsky Prospect. This little garden, consisting of a lawn, fountain, benches, shrubbery, and flowerbeds, was renovated for the tricentennial celebrations, but was fenced and closed to the public soon after the festivities. The fences were removed only in 2007 after complaints from residents. However, in 2009, the fences were reinstalled, because people had begun lying and walking on the grass, thus damaging the lawn. The main opponents to this use of the space were clergy from the Russian Orthodox Church, the proprietor of the cathedral, who did not approve of its proximity to "miscreants."[7] Their position found support among certain citizens, for whom unrestricted use of the public space contradicted the image of Petersburg as a museum. Adherents of this position appeal to this "museified" image of the city and protest against violations of the rules of "public propriety" and restraint. Among these violations are lying on the grass, drinking and eating, and expressive communication such as kissing and hugging in public. It is important to emphasize that people expressing this opinion are not necessarily religious: their objections are mainly based not on religious norms but on a specific idea of how to behave in public, on the inadmissibility of engaging in private activities in public spaces that might damage the magnificent "postcard" views of "ceremonial" Saint Petersburg.

An interesting discussion regarding the closure of the public garden took place within the Petersburg community on the blog platform LiveJournal, the most popular in Russia.[8] The fact that people were relaxing amidst the cityscape displeased some city dwellers: "We'd better have a meter-high cast-iron fence there than all this flesh." To explain their dissatisfaction, people who were against this use of city gardens and lawns appealed to the idea of "civilization": "People who are civilized would never loll about near the avenue and swill beer."

Defenders of the opposite point of view, that people had the right to relax outside, invoked the image of the "European city," claiming that people lay on the grass in green areas in every European city. Thus, if Petersburg were a European city, citizens should have free use of its public

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[7] "Chtoby sokhranit' skver u Kazanskogo, ego reshili zakryt'" [In order to save the public garden next to Kazan Cathedral, it has been decided to close it], *Gazeta.SPb,* May 29, 2008. http://www.gazeta.spb.ru/49923-0.

[8] 7lifes, "Skver u Kazanskogo segodnia nachnut ogorazhivat'" [Enclosure of the public garden next to Kazan Cathedral to start today], June 9, 2009. http://community.livejournal.com/spb_ru/3367812.html.

spaces. Opponents of the garden's closure often drew comparisons with European and North American cities. "Petersburg is a window to Europe. So people relaxing on the grass is an ordinary European matter," wrote one such person. Another wrote, "People want to live normally. Living standards are growing little by little; people see how it is all done in the West, and it is understandable they want it to be just as good at home."

The European image of Petersburg is thus a common element in the media discourse and the way people perceive the city, but the idea of "Europeanness" among city dwellers is not uniform.

For people who supported closing the garden, "Europeanness" meant "civilization," that is, restrained behavior in public places. Petersburg residents were blamed for not being able to behave in a "civilized" way. According to this view, there was a need for formal restrictions and regulated access: "I'd like people to realize themselves that this particular Russian lawn is not for lolling about. But even if we are all such conscious people here, there are still some people who treat public places like hooligans and mere consumers. Evidently, we cannot change this, because even if there are normal people here, still there are always many more scum [*bydlo*]."

The personal qualities and behavior of the users of public places, and the visual image they generated, contradicted the image of the "cultural capital" and "Russian Europeanness." Supporters of this point of view preferred the image of "ceremonial" (*paradnyi*) Petersburg, an alienated official city that can only be observed from a distance, not used: "Many people would prefer to see the green grass, even if it were fenced off, than a dirty hangout, even if the latter is in the 'best European traditions.'"

This conflict between different images of the city, as illustrated by this controversy over a single public place, reflects the general contradiction in the post-Soviet view of Petersburg. The first stance is oriented towards a "European lifestyle," an idea that involves active communication and self-expression in public places, and prioritizes the interests and comfort of city dwellers. The opposite point of view sees open public space as an object of visual admiration, a manifestation of the city's cultural and historic heritage, not as a living environment. The latter point of view is typical of the conservative worldview now prevalent in Russia, but it also has deep roots in the Soviet tradition and that tradition's gap between public and private, its reading of urban space not as living space, but as a decorative and symbolic landscape, a representation of the state's power and glory. The Soviet concept of the public place (*obshchestvennoe mesto*) ruled out the confluence of public and private, permitting no expressions of individuality. It is the unacceptable (from the Soviet point of view) penetration of the private into the public that causes certain citizens to complain about picnicking on lawns in the city center. But they are also troubled by the creeping occupation of public spaces by people and practices "not provided for" in such spaces.

Another peculiarity is the perception of public places as dangerous. They are often regarded as being frequented by social outcasts: alcoholics, drug addicts, and homeless people. Strangers and "aliens" in the urban space evoke negative connotations. (For example, one discussion participant called the people on the lawn in front of Kazan Cathedral "scum"—*bydlo*—as we have seen. This is a common Russian pejorative for the lower, "uncivilized" strata of society, and use of the word implies the speaker's own superiority.) There is a lack of tolerance for diversity, and this leads to different lifestyles in public places automatically being perceived as alien and hostile.

The acuteness of the contradiction between interpretations of open urban spaces and the styles of behavior practiced there partly has to do with the novelty of the spaces themselves: pedestrian streets are a new phenomenon for the post-Soviet city. This stimulates a new type of being-there and communication that involves observing other people rather than just passing through the spaces. This type of behavior has gradually spread to other suitable areas—parks, lawns, and embankments. But the novelty of such use of the spaces provokes rejection on the part of some urban residents, while another segment of the population has appropriated the new spaces and models for behaving in the city, and has been testing the city's new "European" image.

The Spatial Dimension of the Protests

The parliamentary elections on December 4, 2011, provoked a massive increase of public life in Russian cities, especially Moscow, but Petersburg and many other cities also experienced a wave of various street protests. The spatial framework of the protests is an interesting subject for analysis.

The difficulties the protesters faced in their attempts to make their discontent visible by gathering in central urban places provoked an increased interest in public space in cities and the discussion of this issue. Though the connection between the discussion of public spaces in the post-Soviet city, which I have already described, and the recent protests may not seem obvious, the link does exist. After the protests, several important articles about "cities and protests" and the "urban revolution in Russia," as well as the right to the city, appeared in the mass media (Trubina 2012; Kurennoi 2012; Zhelnina et al. 2012). A general interest in urban issues has also grown: urban studies researchers have suddenly become highly sought-after specialists, regularly solicited for commentary by the press. The term "public space" has begun to be used more in the media and social networks to denote general problems of political inequality and political struggle.

The protesters organized "unauthorized" public gatherings on central squares in Russian cities. The arrests and trials of activists and rank-

and-file citizens accused of involvement in "unauthorized" public events have spurred a vigorous discussion of the right of citizens to use the city and of public life in general.

The media and bloggers discovered that citizens were not free to access and use city squares and, because of this, citizens' rights of public expression were limited.[9] The discussion about public space in Russian cities raised the question of priorities in using urban space. Was the right of citizens to express their will more important than "routine" practices (such as going out, shopping, and strolling in the city) that might be disturbed by protest actions? Another subject discussed was the "lack" of suitable places for large gatherings. The negotiations between protest rally organizers and municipal administrations over venues for rallies were marked by conflict and emotional recriminations. While protesters tried to claim the symbolically important central squares of cities (particularly in Moscow and Saint Petersburg), city authorities would not approve rallies in the core areas and tried to move them to the symbolic margins of urban space so as to make the protests less visible and accessible. When citizens refused to obey these restrictions and gathered in the central public spaces they had chosen anyway, police arrested the protesters.

It was not only the discussion of and discourses on public space that were important during the protests but also the spatial practices on display. A segment of the citizenry, unable to reconcile itself with the ruling United Russia party's declared electoral victory, took part first in spontaneous marches and gatherings in the central spaces of their cities. Emotional outrage compelled Muscovites to gather on Chistye Prudy Boulevard, and Petersburgers in the area outside Gostiny Dvor, a large, historic shopping arcade on Nevsky Prospect, the same place where Strategy-31, an unauthorized protest action that happens on the thirty-first day of every month to protect the constitutional right of citizens to freedom of assembly. We may assume it was Strategy-31 and this area's previous history as a protest space that made it a natural choice for protesters. The popular protests in Petersburg were leaderless and the outcome of organizing on social networks, whereas in Moscow the protesters had some-

[9] See, for example, "Gorod i politika. Kak mitingi i protesty meniaut obshchestvennye prostranstva Moskvy" [The city and politics: how the rallies and protests are changing Moscow's public spaces], *Afisha.ru*, May 29, 2012. http://gorod.afisha.ru/archive/kak-mitingi-i-protesti-menyajut-obshhestvennie-prostranstva; vg_saveliev, "Ulichnye protestnye aktsii—popytki liudei vernut' sebe gorod" [Street protest actions are people's attempts to reclaim the city], November 13, 2012. http://vg-saveliev.livejournal.com/548964.html; and Akunin 2012. I found the media articles and blog entries cited in this analysis during routine media monitoring in 2012, using the Integrum media database for print and electronic media, and the Yandex service for blogs.

one to look at: opposition politician Alexei Navalny had invited people to join him on Chistye Prudy.[10]

Movement and dynamism subsequently became an important feature of the street actions: the protesting public rediscovered marches, walks, and temporary occupations. Alexei Levinson has noted the interestingly "circular" character of protesters' spatial behavior: they used circular streets and boulevards running around the Kremlin, thus symbolically encircling the center of power (Levinson 2012). In Petersburg, neither protest movement leaders nor an evident stronghold of the regime that could be encircled were available. The city grid is not circular, either: protesters could move only between point A and point B, so to speak. However, the Petersburg protests would in a way attempt to copy Moscow's trendiest innovations, such as its Occupy camps, although on a smaller scale and with significant spatial limitations.

The protests included major rallies (on Sakharov Avenue and Bolotnaya Square in Moscow), which were the start of two practices that have now become routine among protesters—counting numbers of attendees and negotiating over space. The numbers of people attending protest rallies were a matter of debate from the outset: official police tallies were always many times lower than the numbers recorded by the opposition.[11] Specific means of counting (pacing off the amount of space occupied by people, looking at satellite snapshots, etc.) were developed, again putting the protests' spatial dimension at the center of the debate. The goal of negotiations with the authorities was to secure the most symbolically important and centrally located places for the protest rallies, something the authorities tried to avoid letting happen, giving all manner of excuses in the process. This also caused quarrels among opposition leaders, who were not able to agree on whether they needed permission and for what locations.[12]

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[10] Navalny, "Miting na Chistykh Prudakh. Segodnia. 19-00" [Rally on Chistye Prudy, today, 7:00 p.m.], December 5, 2011. http://navalny.livejournal.com/656297.html.

[11] Iuliia Kotova, "Oppozitsiia i politsiia razoshlis' v podschetakh uchastnikov mitinga na Novom Arbate" [Opposition and police diverge in their calculations of numbers of rally attendees on Novy Arbat Street], *Vedomosti*, March 10, 2012. http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/1530732/oppoziciya_i_policiya_razoshlis_v_podschetah_uchastnikov; Anastasiia Rodionova, "Test na protest" [Protest test], *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, March 11, 2012. http://www.mk.ru/politics/article/2012/03/10/679875-test-na-protest.html; "Miting protesta na Novom Arbate. Khronika sobytii (foto)" [Protest rally on Novy Arbat Street: a chronicle of events (photos)], *Rosbalt*, March 10, 2012. http://www.rosbalt.ru/moscow/2012/03/10/954531.html.

[12] "U organizatorov mitinga 10 dekabria raskol i panika" [Division and panic among December 10 rally organizers], *PolitOnline*, December 9, 2011. http://www.politonline.ru/comments/9980.html.

However important the rallies were, new spatial and communicational forms were also mastered by protesters, actually becoming symbols of the movement, especially Occupy Abai, the "Test Walk" with famous writers, and the "Big White Circle" protest action. Although the last two events were held only in Moscow, Occupy was also employed in Petersburg (at Saint Isaac's Square and a few other locations, which had to be changed after police shut them down).

Occupy Abai, which took place in May 2012, after the inauguration of the "newly elected" President Vladimir Putin, was an important development for the movement. It made the involvement and politicization of protesters more sustainable, since it offered an inclusive interactive space as an alternative to the one-way communication found at the rallies. After taking over the section of Chistye Prudy Boulevard near the monument to Kazakh national poet Abai Kunanbaev, the protesters organized discussions, workshops, and theatrical presentations, as well as carefully maintaining a common space complete with toilets, kitchens, and other infrastructure. This form of civic participation was unusual, and for some activists it was an important emotional and intellectual experience. It lasted for only a week (May 8–16, 2012), however, and was dispersed by police after alleged complaints by local residents were supported by a court order. Protesters moved to another part of the city (near Barrikadnaya metro station), and then to a third location (on Stary Arbat Street), but they were unable to keep the new camps up and running.

Occupy in Petersburg set up camp on Saint Isaac's Square (*Isaakievskaia ploshchad'*), where it held out for longer than its Moscow counterpart. Unlike Occupy Abai, Petersburg protesters used the benches on the square mostly for sitting, and did not organize a stable infrastructure of kitchens, toilets, and sleeping accommodations. Perhaps it was this fluidity and absence of relatively stable structures that allowed Occupy Saint Isaac's to last longer. Local activists and opposition politicians frequented both Occupy Abai and Occupy Saint Isaac's, although the names in Moscow were "bigger."

The prevalent atmosphere on Saint Isaac's was well described by a blogger on the web site of radio station Echo of Moscow, although the same epithets were used by numerous other commentators in the media and social networks: "People make their fliers and stickers, badges and T-shirts. It is entertaining, interesting, and creative at the camp. People of different ages are taking part in the protest: students, middle-aged people, and older people. Everybody is friendly, and open to conversation… Generally, most of them are young, modern, and brave."[13]

[13] na6ludatelb, "Protestniy lager; — okkupai #isaakievskaia" [Protest camp: Occupy #Saint Isaac's], Radio *Ekho Moskvy*, June 19, 2012. http://www.echo.msk.ru/blog/na6ludatelb/900510-echo.

Creativity and the youthfulness of protesters were the main characteristics reported by protest-friendly media, although the notion that the "creative class" was the driving force behind the protests appears to have been not much more than a media cliché. Sociological surveys, however, showed an interesting trend: the involvement of young and educated people seems to have been more consistent. As VTsIOM's surveys show, at the outset of the protests, young clerical workers, young "creative" workers, and students made up thirty percent of the protesters, but by the end of June 2012 they constituted fifty percent.[14] Furthermore, one cannot deny the creativity and innovative character of the activities the protesters organized in a repressive environment with relatively few resources.

Not only did the protests involve grassroots creativity: the creative turn was also actively supported by the members of cultural elite, who contributed to inventing a new spatial protest form, the "Test Walk" with writers, led by Boris Akunin and Dmitry Bykov, who were accompanied by Ludmila Ulitskaya, Viktor Shenderovich, and other members of the Russian cultural realm. The "Test Walk" (which took place on May 13, 2012) was interesting because it attempted to probe and negotiate the limitations imposed on the use of public space by the authorities: it was not advertised as a protest rally, but as a sort of guided tour aimed at finding out whether "Muscovites can walk freely in their own city, or whether they need to get a special pass to do it?" (Akunin 2012). In the event, the walk attracted thousands of people, who strolled down Chistye Prudy pretending not to be protesters; the event thus needed no permission from anyone to take place. This was an important development, from my point of view, since it succeeded in getting across three important points. First, public space is contested space under an authoritarian regime. Second, public space still belongs to city dwellers. Third, legal limitations on public space can be circumvented and negotiated.

Another spatial protest form invented during the period also employed dynamism and fluidity, as well as exploiting loopholes in regulations governing public space. The "Big White Ring," spearheaded by motorists, was a quite creative way of making the numbers and power of protesters visible without their actually being in one particular place. Motorists decorated their vehicles with white symbols of various kinds and drove in loops around Moscow's Garden Ring road, thus encircling the downtown. Pedestrians joined in the protest by standing along the road, holding hands and saluting the drivers.

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[14] "Press-vypusk No. 2056. Sotsialnyi portret protestnogo dvizheniia w Moskve" [Press release No. 2056: A social portrait of the protest movement in Moscow], *VTsIOM (Russian Public Opinion Research Center)*. http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=112859.

All the events described here shared a dynamic form that the authorities found hard to pin down. They all negotiated the limitations imposed on the use of urban public space by the regime, and encroached on the lacunas within this highly regulated space. They can be interpreted as spatial tactics in the sense meant by Michel de Certeau (1998), which are opposed to the strategies of control employed by powerful subjects.

Although the protests did not achieve significant political results, they did manage to trigger certain consequences for society: the authorities were forced to introduce new restrictions on public space, which became a hot topic of discussion in both the media and informal social networks. Having had to probe limits and deal with public space as an essential part of the protests, protesters have realized the importance of the topic to the overall democratization of the regime. Urban issues have become a popular topic not only in Moscow but also worldwide (Hollis 2013). Thus, in summary, we can say the experience of being in a public place, testing its boundaries, and communicating with others face to face, stimulates the ideological reinterpretation and discussion of urban life as such and public space in particular.

In Russia, this was quite timely, as the gradually growing interest in urban issues reached its peak during and after Occupy.

"Creative" Ways of Claiming the Right to the City[15]

In the preceding sections, I have described discursive transformations of public space, as well as the transformation of popular attitudes towards public space. There are, however, direct ways of making civic presence in public space more feasible, various projects for improving urban life, many of which are "grassroots." Since the protests did not really succeed in changing the political system in Russia, the idea of "small deeds" has become popular among younger participants in the protest rallies: they have turned their energies toward improving life in their own "backyards." I will look at how ideas for transforming the city have developed over time within the so-called creative class. It has been popular to imagine that this class, that is, people involved in immaterial, cognitive production, drove

[15] "Creativity" is one of the most contested terms in the social sciences. Applied to urban transformations, creativity can be interpreted as the capacity of groups and individuals to produce, recognize, and implement new ideas in urban space (often by means of art, but not necessarily). I do not use the term "creative class" as a theoretical concept here. I assume, rather, that it is a media construct with ambivalent connotations in the Russian discourse. Creative ways of claiming the right to the city, therefore, are understood as those involving the production of new ideas and artistic means of changing the environment, employed by groups of activists to transform urban space.

the protests.[16] Some sociologists have refuted this identification of the protesters (Bikbov 2011). An attention to public spaces and relevant urban issues has emerged, however, mostly among young cognitive and creative professionals working in the cultural, educational, and leisure industries.[17] Dominated by architects and designers, thematic discussion clubs and events regularly take place, attracting the wider "creative" public as well.

It is surely only one form of involvement in urban transformations, but it is nevertheless interesting to follow this fashionable trend of being an active urbanite, which has increased in popularity after the 2011–2012 protest wave.

Most projects involving the idea of public space have been implemented in Moscow and Petersburg. One of the most popular and vigorous pressure groups in the field has been Moscow-based Partizaning, which has spread now to some other cities including Petersburg.[18] The basic idea behind most of Partizaning's actions is the creative redesigning and reinterpreting of urban space in a "human-oriented" mode. Most of their actions are artistic and grassroots-activist, and they are not supported by governmental or commercial organizations. It is clear this kind of initiative is "western" know-how translated into a Russian context and trying to put down roots in Russian cities.

Western art projects are presented as good practice on Partizaning's web site as well as during numerous public presentations of the project, e.g., as part of the Delai Sam ("Do-It-Yourself") Urban Actions Marathons, which have been held in several Russian cities.[19] The objective of the mar-

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16 Ivan Preobrazhenskii, "Konets 'kreativnogo klassa'" [The end of the "creative class"], *Rosbalt*, December 20, 2012. http://www.rosbalt.ru/politrally/2012/12/20/1073949.html; Dmitrii Yakushev, "Neskol'ko slov po itogam protestov i o tom, chto nas zhdet" [A few remarks in the wake of the protests and about what we can expect], *Pravda-Info*, June 6, 2012, http://www.pravda.info/protest/102976.html.

17 See, for example, "'Auditoriia Moskva' budet stroit' publichnoe prostranstvo" ["Auditorium Moscow" plans to build a public space], *RIA Novosti*, September 16, 2011. http://ria.ru/weekend_art/20110916/438661035.html; Elena Krom, "Obshchestvennye prostranstva v Peterburge: piat' tipov, tri strategii i odno protivorechie" [Public spaces in Petersburg: five types, three strategies, and one contradiction], *Peterburg 3.0*, July 12, 2012. http://spb30.ru/news/obshhestvennyie-prostranstva-v-peterburge-pyat-tipov-tri-strategii-i-odno-protivorechie; "Obshchestvennye prostranstva i tematicheskie parki Moskvy" [Moscow's public spaces and themed parks], *Stroitel'naia orbita*, September 16, 2013. http://www.stroyorbita.ru/index.php/arkhiv/item/1214-obschestvennyie-prostranstva-i-tematicheskie-parki-moskvyi.

18 Partizaning's web site is http://partizaning.org.

19 Make Make, "Tretii 'Delai Sam' finishiruet v Sankt-Peterburge" [The third Delai Sam wraps up in Saint Petersburg], *Partizaning.org,* May 1, 2012. http://partizaning.org/?p=3250.

athons is to improve the quality of life in Russian cities by turning them into friendly, comfortable, and "human-oriented" spaces. A great deal of attention is paid, first of all, to the qualities of the public space and to public involvement in the process of shaping them. Delai Sam co-organizer Mikhail Klimovsky emphasizes the importance of "western" know-how to activists: "International practice during recent decades has shown a new model of development—creation of the environment for people by people themselves. The best cities in the world generate favorable conditions for experimentation and unite citizens interested in changing the space around them."[20]

Most Delai Sam projects and discussions show the growing significance of the term "public space." A new active public—activist artists, the so-called creative class per se—have now reinterpreted the post-Soviet relationship between "public" and "private," mentioned at the beginning of the article. Not only the way urban space looks and the opportunities it affords but also the more general issue of public participation has been raised. The ideas mentioned most often within the Partizaning group and at Delai Sam Marathons have been participatory planning and the "theory of small deeds." According to this new framework and new attitude to urban public space, city dwellers should care not only for their private worlds and apartments but also "step outside" these enclosed spaces and take care of squares, yards, and other public areas in order to improve life in their cities (and, consequently, throughout the country). Whether this plan could actually work is disputable, since many of the projects are targeted at the artistic community: for example, some amount only to brief interventions in urban space that are documented for future display on the web site. But the intention to provoke public communication in and about urban public space is obvious. The importance of the public-private balance (which is even expressed with the English words "public" and "private" instead of their Russian equivalents), the idea of what is important for the public and what is not, and the attitude to "European know-how" are tellingly reflected in this statement by art critic Valentin Dyakonov:

> It is pointless to develop public art in Russia for two reasons. First, in Soviet times, all urban space was public. Since 1991, its pieces have rapidly become private, but the legal mechanisms regulating it are either too few or easily avoided. So long as the scheme for the transition from public to private is not transparent, it is too early to talk about public art.

[20] Violetta Riabko, "Gid po marafonu gorodskikh deistvii 'Delai Sam' " [Guide to the Delai Sam Urban Actions Marathon], *The Village*, April 27, 2012. http://www.the-village.ru/village/city/chain-reaction/113145-v-nachale-maya-v-peterburge-proydyot-festival-delay-sam.

> Second, almost all projects in this sphere are demonstrative and pretentious ("finally we've taken up what they've had in Europe for a long time").[21]

The "pretentious" and elitist nature of many projects involving the words "public space" sometimes results from efforts by developers and investors to install a "European"-like lifestyle in Russian cities. One example of this is the recent redevelopment of the island of New Holland in central Petersburg.

The project is seasonal and relatively recent: the summer of 2013 was the second time the old island was open to the public thanks to private investor Roman Abramovich and the IRIS Foundation he supports. New Holland is an artificial island built during the early eighteenth century. For the summer projects, the island was outfitted with free Wi-Fi, a green lawn, various cafes, and tiny shops, as well as exhibition spaces for showing "contemporary art." As IRIS Foundation head Darya Zhukova put it, again using the term "public": "We realize how important this project is for city dwellers; thus, the summer program is the first step in studying the potential target group, its interests and wishes. First of all, our goal is to make the island a public place where everyone can see what is happening."[22]

The event has indeed been quite important: the city reclaimed an area that had been closed to the public for a long time. New Holland had always been symbolically and historically significant: many people saw it as having a mysterious aura. Now it has been reopened as a new, creative, "public" place. It has attracted a diverse public: young creatives, older citizens, tourists, and residents of nearby buildings. Enthusiastic reviews multiplied on the Internet, as witnessed by the following passage from the LiveJournal blog of a young woman. She refers (again) to "Europeanness" and characterizes fellow visitors as "normal," meaning that she saw no "others" there whom she did not like: "And you can see how cool Piter [Petersburg] really is (as someone once said, [it is] more European than many European cities). And the people INSIDE THERE are amazing. 'Somehow normal'."[23]

Similar descriptions of the public could be found in other reviews: the place became a magnet for a certain social milieu that could finally

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21 Igor Ponosov, "Pro 'pro pablik art,'" *Partizaning.org*, April 25, 2012. http://partizaning.org/?p=2268.

22 Artiom Ignat'ev, "Tainstvennyi ostrov: karta obnovlennoi 'Novoi Gollandii'" [The mysterious island: a map of the updated New Holland], *The Village*, July 15, 2011. http://www.the-village.ru/flows/spb/posts/108253-novaya-gollandiya.

23 backbone_flute, "Itak — eto pravda!" [So it's true!], July 17, 2011. http://backbone-flute.livejournal.com/128797.html.

come together and see "people like us." This was possible both due to a vigorous advertising campaign, which highlighted activities attractive to the "creative class," and because of the extremely strict security measures at the entrance: there was only one way to get onto the island, and it was equipped with metal detectors and manned by attentive security guards. The rules did not permit visitors to bring their own food and beverages onto the island: bags were checked by the security guards, who removed these items from visitors' bags, returning them when they left the island. Formally, the island was open to everyone, but the public was still screened: "hipsters," members of the "creative class," and other people who wanted to identify with them were admitted. In the end, they were all people who adhered to a certain lifestyle and were able to afford the levels of consumption on offer (the food in the island's cafes was relatively high priced), including the cultural goods.

The term "public space" was present, and it referred to fashionable, "western" ideas of tolerance and diversity, but the rules and activities on the island actually limited that diversity: the space was quite socially homogeneous. It was a "public space" for "people like us," not for *bydlo* ("scum") and alcoholics from the neighborhood. This interpretation of the space was quite popular in discussions, on the social networks Facebook and Vkontakte, on what urban public space should be like. One of the arguments in favor of the restrictions and rules on the island was that "if one [did not] prohibit all of it, we would have fights and hooliganism, because our people [i.e., Russians] cannot just sit peacefully outside."[24]

The content of such online discussions shows that the aim of educated and "cultured" visitors to this "creative space" was to keep out the *bydlo*. Thus, one segment of the citizenry had to pay with their freedom (it was they who were affected by the restrictions on admitting "others," that is, undesirable citizens, to New Holland) in order to achieve the desired outcome.

However exclusive such projects might be, progress is still evident: educated young professionals aiming to live a cosmopolitan, creative lifestyle have been trying to claim their right to the city by changing spaces and reshaping attitudes to urban life. The fact that these changes have focused on their own social milieu is easy to explain: new stakeholders in urban transformation have come into being along with their interpretation of what the city should be like, and they are trying to carve out their own space with the tools at their disposal, such as social and creative capital.

[24] "Backpack full of baby food (We are for the Real public space)," *Facebook*. https://www.facebook.com/events/222147384496176.

Anna Zhelnina

Conclusions: Urban Public Space after the 2011–2012 Protests

Open spaces in Saint Petersburg are rarely perceived by citizens as their own spaces, as places that can be freely used and appropriated. The city's image, its cultural heritage and historic vistas, on the contrary, are common goods of high symbolic value. The global trends of privatization and commercialization of public places are visible in Petersburg as well, but they are not what shape the way the city is seen by residents, for whom combining new uses of space and the city's heritage, its "Europeanness," has been the most pressing issue.

Nevertheless, public places do exist, and they are produced by what people do in them, even though they are not firmly established as a good and as something citizens possess by right. The ongoing discussions have evinced two contradictory points of view. The first, "post-Soviet" point of view does not admit the confluence of the private and the public in open spaces; it seeks to protect Petersburg's symbolic space from quotidian incursions. The second, emerging, "Europeanized" point of view assumes the everyday appropriation of public space to be the right of citizens. This shows that we are witnessing the slow transition from the Soviet model of the dual city, where private and public life were strictly separated, to a model in which public space is appropriated and used by people in their daily lives.

Interestingly, this situation differs somewhat from the observations made in Central European cities (Stanilov 2007a), where one feature of the capitalist transition has been the reduction and fragmentation of public space. Of course, there has also been a tendency to exclude and spatially segregate different social groups in Petersburg. However, it is possible to say that, compared with Leningrad, where public space was reduced in its functionality and repressed by state authorities, a new perception and interpretation of urban space has been taking shape in Petersburg, including the appropriation of open spaces by city dwellers themselves, who have begun claiming their right to it. The means of appropriation are different, from hanging out in open spaces to organizing thematic excursions, walks, and flash mobs. In recent years, however, the free use of open spaces has again been complicated by the political situation in the country: public gatherings and activities are often interpreted as a threat to public order and dispersed by police.

There is, however, another important question that has emerged in the discussions: the quality of public life and the "lack" of urban spaces for face-to-face communication, which has been replaced by online social networks. As one commentator has argued, the activists who came to the protest rallies constituted a "society of anonymous revolutionaries," people who had never met before and would never meet afterwards, because

the only public place they had claimed so far was the space of the Internet, whereas urban public space was not yet perceived as a real venue for communication.[25] The protests might thus cause a significant reinterpretation of urban space’s role as a space for public life, and serve further to transform the concept of public space.

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[25] Gleb Suvorov, “Obshchestvo anonimnykh revoliutsionerov” [A society of anonymous revolutionaries], *Slon*, March 20, 2012. http://slon.ru/russia/obshchestvo_anonimnykh_revolyutsionerov-765700.xhtml.

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