

Post-Soviet Settlement: Diseases of city-industrialization

Gleb Vitkov



Nadym, gate to the Nadym-Gasprom technical zone. Gas Icon City. Photo: Armin Linke

Studying the phenomena of Thinning we came to an understanding of a search for compromise and balance. In Russia the dilemma of industrial development and city improvement is one of the most crucial ones. How did the industrial chain in post-Soviet Russia adopted to new conditions? How has the settlement system changed? We've chosen three gas extracting cities for our fieldtrip in the far north region YANAO with a hypothesis that being mono-cities of the last soviet industrialization campaign and still having a market demand of gas supply they haven't fully revealed there weak points yet. We wanted to follow in our research two dimensions: one of politics and economy, another of social and cultural aspects.

Past time.

Central Planning Agency made a decision to set few cities in the north of the country for gas and oil extraction. The absence of infrastructure or conditions suitable for life wasn't a deterrent. With unlimited resources, the country can afford to inhabit any territory it wants with cities. A more modest and stern model of a rotational settlement method initially was not even considered. The only purpose of such an approach is to provide the maximum amount of product. The bowels of the country are enormous, and it's impossible to imagine that the gas may ever run out; or that everything will one day be automated. All inconveniences are perceived as temporary. Blinded by the enormous reserves they knew were beneath them, people

build a city from scratch, and gave birth to children. A whole generation now exists for whom these places are native land. Utopian master plans were created, rooted on illusory and baseless parameters of further growth. Planners create an abstract ideal model - provide convenient public spaces, a developed system of social infrastructure, but these plans are to far from reality not taking into an account the real economic and social matters.

Present time.

The past development has resulted in several new cities in the north three of which were visited. This region, according to every statistics, is the centre of contemporary Russian economy, and our hypothesis that cities here have lots of in common with the other parts of the country has appeared to be true as we've uncovered the facts. The life there is classical for mono-cities model and directly illustrates it.

Nadym is the first city of this gas wave. 39 years old, and with a declining population of 47 thousand people this city was once an ideal model of northern expansion. Its form of a compact plan together with the hierarchical society inside with Gasprom Idol on top, gas workers and finally common people is reminiscent of the Ideal City theories by Platoon. The unrealized concept of a cupola over entire city should fulfill the utopian image of a colony city and set the boundaries between artificial



Nadym, inner yard of a microrayon. Mosaics of 70-s. Cemented Temporariness with Gas development propaganda. Photo: Armin Linke

and natural. Mostly grey building of panel blocks of special northern series are offered a minimal decoration through small pieces of colored ceramics added in the concrete of walls. Being seriously isolated from not only the “main land” as locals call the entire country but even from the nearby archipelago of other settlements it has preserved the unique atmosphere of late Soviet stability and timelessness. Huge propaganda mosaics on the walls celebrate not Communism but the gas pipe construction. Gasprom is the main enterprise that runs the city: without it no life is possible - or needed, for that matter - in the region. After the completion of the city and collapse of Soviet Union, almost all enterprises that were involved in city’s maintenance were abandoned. A massive concrete-panel factory remained a silent ghost almost in the center of a city together with scattered sites of road construction companies. This created a strong devotion to Gasprom as a hope of guaranteed stability and prosperity on the part every dweller. According to collected interviews, almost everyone dreams of working for Gasprom and everyone who is not already working there recognizes that it’s impossible to be employed there. The mono-city system created a clan of gas workers, where only family connections are influential.

The second reason of a conflict is that as a business Gasprom isn’t interested in hiring locals for higher salaries and keeping the city in a good condition due to its high cost. Mono-country led to a broader desire to work for Gasprom – the most reliant and wealthy opportunity. Now a lot of temporary workers are standing in a queue all around the country to work on a temporary basis in the north. There is no place for city like Nadym in this system. This way Gasprom becomes a state on itself. The whole city is decorated with Gasprom symbols

and propaganda, even advertisement works for Gasprom: corporation as a feudal system. But for the entire country this means the Dutch Disease – the marginalizing and shrinking of manufacturing and the resource-based economy. At the same time city dwellers are waiting the resettlement from old housing, construction of new cultural facilities, new jobs.

Another Gasprom city - **New Urengoy** is an etalon of unconscious and is often called the Capital of Gas. Even when planning a city from scratch, compromises must be made. In this case motivated by the most ambitions to make housing closer to the gas extraction, which is important in the severe climate, led to setting of the city in the middle of nowhere around the grey sands and flat landscapes of tundra, but not



Nadym, bas-relief of city map. Compactness of Idiality. photo: Armin Linke

settlement 80km to the East in the Korotchaev - despite the fact that is closer to various types of transport infrastructure, better landscapes and a milder climate, and therefore obviously a better place for living. In the short-term this logic was effective, but today, gas extraction almost having moved to the polar north further and from this city, the logic that inspired it makes no sense and problems that were swept under the carpet begin to emerge. The city has scattered itself across a vast territory for more than 100km long, to the extent that it can't be truly called a city. From a definition of a city it took only the scale of buildings, the infrastructure and social welfare system. Its growing population of more than 120 thousand people including permanently floating number of about 35000 gas rotating workers is an absolute record for the north and this region particularly. The city perceives it as its own merit, preferring not to acknowledge it as a consequence of extensive and intensified gas extraction. For years this prosperous city has been unable establish a rapid connection with distant districts, or build a new train station, which now is nothing than a brick and wood barrack, or create pedestrian trading galleries and other attributes of a city. Even keeping in mind the possibility of temporariness of the city it's hard to understand why nothing is done to improve the infrastructure which is needed - in any possible scenario. The city itself blames its fate on the distant city of Sochi, where all the enormous revenues of the gas extraction are being spent on the preparation for the Olympic Games. Still, they continue building new real-estate projects.

Noyabrsk is the youngest city out of three, in that it is only 29 years only. It was created with a careful approach to



Noviy Urengoy, chief-architect's office. 100 km city. Photo: Armin Linke

planning that even preserved existing trees in the yards of new residential microrayons. It's far from gas fields, although it's still serving the pipelines and thereby keeping Gasprom as a corporate owner of the city. Noyabrsk is referred to as the Southern Gates of YANAO region, and is a logistical centre that provides region with goods and equipment. Having the minor dependence on Gasprom it managed to develop a better social infrastructure like music schools and learning centers. Still it remains a mono-city and almost every citizen out of 110000 population is imbued with a permanent "travel bag mood", ready to leave the city at any moment.



Noviy Urengoy, Leningradskaya Street. City in the north Desert. Accumulated dissipation and land abuse. Photo: Armin Linke

The attitude of local authorities and common citizens is also quite demonstrative. The worse is a situation in a city the less anyone wants to care about it. In Nadym, probably the weakest one due to its most isolated location, citizens prefer to speak about the picturesque landscape around and their explicit relation to the city, while government authorities try to postpone and diminish the scale and speed of upcoming threat like deteriorating housing or gas extraction that's moving far from the city leaving a lot of people jobless. In Noviy Urengoy we may observe dissipation and indifference. Actually it means not inaction but quite opposite – incredible activity but blind to the future consequences. Citizens of the city either don't care about the city's fate or remember the initial opportunity to establish the city in a more suitable place of Korotchaevo as mentioned already upwards. Noyabrsk, which seems to have more chances and potentials, founds itself with a desire to improve its environment, worrying about possible risks and has a lot of complains from the locals, despite having more opportunities to find a flat, or a job, or a cultural activity than in any other city in the north.

What is a mono-city?

Mono-city is a complete opposite to a contemporary city in that it totally depends on one specific occupation, making one dependent on a system it exists within. And if a system collapses so does the city. In the economic dimension mono means devoted to one single industrial sector; in the social dimension mono-city is a one devoted only to working, instead of living or social communicating.

Mono-cities are apparently a leftover of USSR's centralized system, or even the failure of the plan system, however, it was the macro-structure of USSR that linked all the mono-cities into a diversified network, which guaranteed the supply and demand of each mono-city through the central plan, and the "micro-society" model (the communism social welfare) set up by each city/enterprise was also a minimum compensation of the absence of modern services. Soviet model located the factory in a city mostly motivated by political reasons and ambitions. The culture of industrialization implied an industrial support to the city by locating there a factory. With no respect to such facts as logistical closeness to the raw materials or to a market made all the decisions priceless. Sometimes a factory could be in thousands of km to both (chemistry in Bashkiria). The extraction of resources was following the same logic and let the extensive colonization of extreme north regions. It was not the centralized system itself created mono-cities, but the risk of highly-centralized system created the possibility of being mono.

The change of a political and economical model has opened a new page in countries history, in that all the hidden risks and diseases of a closed system have emerged. New conditions of a free market and an open system have immediately resulted in the change of priorities and market demand. Since light industry was weakly developed and was not competitive with the outer market, it almost vanished for the first decade. USSR was based too much on heavy-military industry, but never on mono-economy. Still this over-heavy industrialization predetermined the vector of industrial re-structuring: after the collapse of the USSR, Russia turned into a resource-reliant economy – a mono-



Big Business Companies. Image: Independent Institute for Social Policy, 2010

country. Mono-cities were generated left without the support of an explicit system: the supply-demand chain was destructed, and communism social welfare abandoned.

The logic of USSR's centralized macro industrial structure and holistic spatial structure covering the east and west was absolutely relevant. The problem was that being supported by artificial methods it generated a system that was not able to survive in natural conditions of market economy. The spatial structure of a self-independence model is also different from that of an exportation-reliance model. And that are the reasons of a selective restoration of mono-cities in a new economy. Finally the special structure of a superpower at cold war is also different from that of a developing country in a multi-poled world. And following the words of Mr. Putin that gas is our new weapon we've explored that northern gas cities are more important for national security than any on the periphery or those with atomic stations and rockets, which still doesn't mean that living conditions there were improved in a better way.

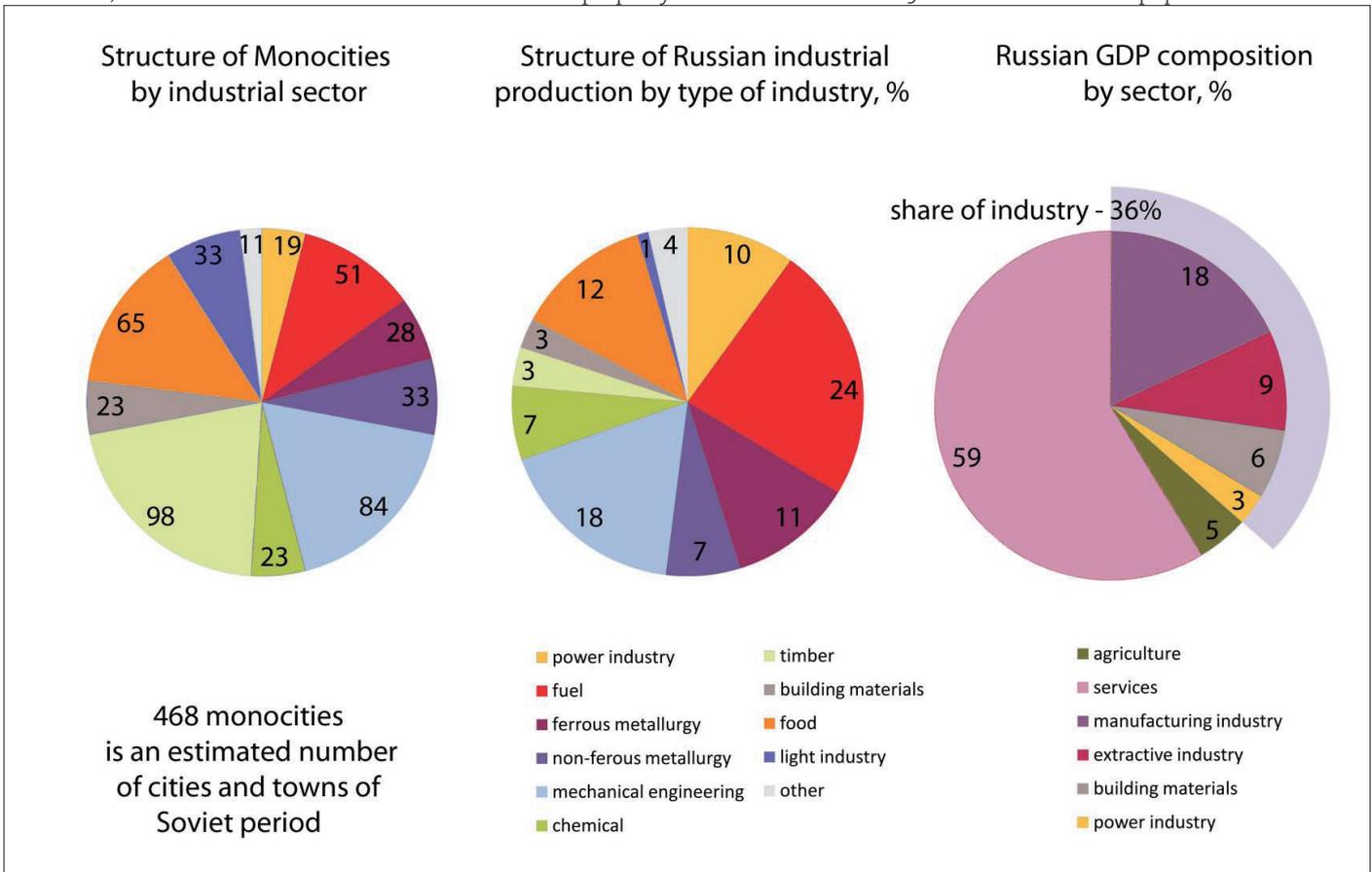
The first wave of re-structuring was based on a natural extinction and shrinking of non-efficient in market economy production and causing the same effect on the cities where it was situated. We can mention the Halmer-U town in Komi Republic based on coal mining which was immediately abandoned in 1993 – the extraction was simply so expensive making the cost of coal there uncompetitive with others.

The Privatization of 1991-93 gave rise to the formation of a new control system, creating an atomlike model of countless individual companies, which owned factories, stations, boiler houses and other former common property.

restore production itself based on the old spatial structure of factories. Partly it was the easiest and most common way and arrangement. New specialists were not required, basic equipment has been already installed. The development's priority was to restore plants, factories and opencast mines that supplied primary resources production. Meeting the demand of foreign market for resources was the line of the least resistance for the immature business. By 1996 a new specific order has been formed, with the key role of large, though yet politically weak holdings (examples) that managed to accumulate all more or less vivid and significant and competitive Russian productions as their assets. Every economic or social crisis led to disruption (numbers), and government control intensification of private business. Further followed of resources-reliant economy and control of stability (links to laws and years of adoption, to illustrate the chronology), recovery of State Corporations or government members involvement in boards of directors of private companies. The logic is clear, but destructive. (What to refer to?) So there was a transformation into a quasi-capitalism.

Scale of the phenomena.

On the moment of USSR collapse there were about 468 cities which can be considered to be mono according to different grounds. Today business has restored approximately 160 cities in Russia, which mostly "belong" to Big Business Companies. This is about 15% of all Russian cities. Majority of them consists of cities with the population from 20 to 250 thousand inhabitants. And that's about 13% of entire Russian population. And the



Structure of Mono-Cities by Industries and the GDP Level. Data: Rosstat

economic value of them is estimated as 36% of countries GDP taken as a share of industry in the GDP composition.

Although initially the struggle broke out not for improving goods quality and establishing new industrial chains, but for property redistribution. Step by step business started to

But no conclusions were done as the last economic crisis has proved. Thousands of people rioted when their factories have stopped. Significant is that workers were calling for help not

their employers but the government, that also can be considered as a mental addiction to old model of management.

Today government tries to influence the situation. The problem is that instead of creating conditions for business and civil society development by laws, and management it tries to interfere directly. All the programs it creates are hand tools that cannot help to improve the general state. It partly recreates inertial the common model of Soviet responsibilities and control. Should it intervene at all or maybe it's time now to leave the cities along giving them back not only responsibility but also right to manage budget and stimulate this way the interest to the city? The key role of a government is to provide the rules for a game and their respect.

City-factory.

when city was used as manufacture machine and citizens were compensated with free housing, medical services, and in special cases with objects of sport and culture. But never did citizens repine against the fact of industry recovery in the city. Decades of industrialization have formed concise mindset on industrial production as the only way of self-realization and earnings. "City has to produce something" - that phrase can be heard from locals. This is the traditional model. To some extent this is the reason why Russian cities are tearing away industrial areas with such a sorrow. Among the majority of population the industrial production is still associated with prosperity and growth. In reality the cities that were not lucky with the industrial recovery, are sometimes even in the more advantageous position. It happens if they are able to organize other income sources oriented on connection to adjacent cities or at least on service of neighborhood population. However



Nadym, Airport settlement. Permanent Temporariness. Photo: Armin Linke

Russian cities turned up to be hostages of their own manufacturing. Soviet system by locating a factory to every city has provoked the genetic mutation of city culture. Inherited together with the manufactures problems of ecology remain unsolved and don't contribute to the improvement of the living conditions and cause massive deterioration in the health of its citizens.

Business gradually and selectively returned to cities, suitable for participation in the new economic realm restoring their conventional occupation. Citizens were repining against the new owners: partly because of envy, partly because of incomprehension of their role. Basically business, the main and only goal of which is generation of profit, was blamed by citizens for not keeping the Soviet status quo. It was a model

it has to be admitted that most cities with 12000-250000 population and some exceptions like Togliatti with 720000 and Ulianovsk with 650000 citizens, appear to be weak against their stereotypes. They are ready to wait for years without any attempts for real changes, even understanding that every crisis can leave them without subsistence.

Lack of alternative management experience and a habit of life, and lack of financial and political power of Russian cities do not allow them to put a conscious goal to become an intellectual center or a local center, engaged in trade. It's not entirely clear, and what they could sell, because at the moment the light industry is still emerging from small individual entrepreneurs. While the state tries again to enlarge them and to present as a major controllable elements (numbers and laws). From this we can conclude that the issues of vitality of mono-cities model are not only economic and spatial reasons, but also much more

psychological, mental and deep cultural features.

One of the key features of mono-cities is its condition of **Permanent Temporariness**. Most of them were created as temporary settlements to maintain the factories. Their future development was occasional and undesirable in some cases or planned but not in an accurate way, when people settled in a temporary housing that has become now their permanent place. This kind of priorities influenced greatly the whole idea of city development and housing construction. The chosen type of industrialized massive panel housing was considered to be temporary and in a short term helped to settle a lot of people however it generated an aggressive and utopian city typology of microrayon. Later it became clear that government has failed in settling every citizen and no alternative sources of funding were able to appear. Now we have almost the same housing blocks of the same quality all across the country with the same set of problems. The only positive thing I find about them is that for fixing them we can also use very common and similar

The concept of a contemporary city.

It seems that processes, we are witnesses in like mobility of population, a loss of direct connection with one particular place, that is understood as relative or native land, the rearrangement of the whole system of settling – are just small bits of a greater process. Temporariness is replaced by mobility. Permanence is understood as permanence of change. One of the pioneers of a new paradigm was a Dutch artist, urbanist and philosopher Constant Nieuwenhuys. *“New Babylon, Constant wrote, does not stop anywhere (because the earth is round), no borders (because there is no national economies) or groups (because humanity is fluctuating). Any place is accessible to everyone and everything. The entire planet becomes the home of the inhabitants of the earth. Each change of place when desired. Life is an endless journey through a changing world so rapidly that every time seems different”*. This became a prediction of the main vector of a global urbanization. The deindustrialization process, that happens today in the developed countries, and level of technologies, that



Halmer-U, abandoned town.Call of Nostalgia Photo: internet fan-forum

solutions that will accelerate the process.

Is there an expiration period for a city? Is it 30, 50, 150, 300 years? What's the horizon of our understanding of decision making upon the performing action? How long should we keep the city in a living condition? During the last century we've studied how to generate a whole city from scratch in a year, seems today we need to develop a method of city erasure or transporting to another place.

let the minimum involvement of people to industrial sector, have almost generated the described condition. This statement was made in late 1950-s and became a focus of attitude of a European society later in 70-s. It would be definitely curious to compare this with what was happening at that time in USSR. As mentioned already above this moment for a shift towards a more humanized paradigm based on the question of what's the future of a city, was once again ignored and was followed with a new wave of communistic epic constructions and the main effort was spent on increasing the industrialization level and especially on conquest of nature and development of resources

extraction. The result of this approach is clear today: huge cities extracting gas and oil in the extreme living conditions of far north and a mentality addiction to industrial psychology.

“For us to more fully understand the impact of the digital and of globalization, we need, therefore, to suspend the category “city”. Rather, we need to construct a more abstract category of centrality and of spaces of centrality that, ironically, could allow us to recover the city, albeit a recovery as just one instantiation within a much broader set of issues”. Saskia Sassen

Comparing two models of developing the north region we can oppose “cities” with “infrastructure urbanism”. The first one’s being was an unnecessary imperial ambition possible to happen only in a closed system of enormous and priceless effort, while the second is simply an instrument of colonization of a territory. From architectural point of view this type of urbanism is very tight, developed in a very accurate logic, uses automatic mechanisms and needs a very low density and low population to maintain it. The condition we have now is a struggle between two models. Gas extracting companies tend to shrink their spatial structure to a more efficient type

production decreases. We can assume that it moves to other countries or becomes more autonomic and needs less people. Almost all the old cities remain but drastically lose their power.

Typology of a nation-state is extinct. The old model of a city was based on a city-centre and a land around it to supply its demands. In this way nearby land was constantly in the conscious of city’s dwellers. The state consisted of these pieces, and was the main element of world’s system. The global world implies a post-sovereign state. It created a model of new centrality when Global Cities as a place where’re concentrated the major intellectual resource and political power become even more influential to the global politics than a state. At the same time all the goods and basic resources for the cities are being shipped from somewhere else. A sort of a city that absorbs everything. Global is opposite to physical expression. This contrast of consumption and production is extremely high today and created a dangerous model of spatial vacuum of inattention to old cities where production was or is located.

We are used to understand these city-states as a critical centrality and concentration of power. But we let out of our



Nadym, abandoned concrete-panels factory. Industries move out of cities. Photo: Sergey Kulikov

of presence and action and that’s a reason they’re no longer interested in supporting the cities model. At the same time we already have the cities in the region. How should we appreciate them?

The industrial-cities shrinking process is happening all around. People move from over all England to Greater London in search of better living conditions and jobs. The same happens in Paris, Hamburg, etc. Although this doesn’t mean that industrial

conscious and focus the simple fact that without supply these main centers of consumption are weaker than ever. That means that small centers outside of our usual understanding of developed space are a significant component of a new spatial model that makes everything working. They have no less power and should be treated the proper way. We should rethink our inhabited environment and grasp the new type of geographical continuity.

Contemporary system of habitation is very mobile and flexible. People prefer better qualities of life and can probably even



Noyabrsk, inner yard of a microrayon. The new city was built with a respect to original nature. A tradition of humanising environment. Photo: Ivan Kuriachiy hypothetically should be done to develop and what exactly should not be reliant. The problems should be perceived as challenges to be solved and not suppressed.

choose between different types of density still being a part of urbanized world. The question that remains is how to find a balance for distribution of resources and priorities between production and the urbanized shape of civilization.

What is the future of cities as the phenomenon itself and Russia in particular? Following the current projections on the dynamics of internal migration (specify the link) we have to agree with the authorities declared (when and where) scenario where the bulk of the population will be living only in the 22 agglomerations with a population of many millions. The future of small towns relatively to this is bleak. Unfortunately, we must be serious and say that most cities will fade or disappear by forced or natural reasons. Every 5th city estimated would cease to exist (see link). This is due not only to migration in search of better conditions, but with the relocation of production to other regions, with cheaper labor, electricity, rent or where the method of rotational development is used and the automation of production facilities prevails.

Now It's the right moment to ask ourselves a question **if every city should grow and prosper?** Instead of a dream of a golden mine with eternally unsettled town around a supporting dream standing behind should become of an entirely different order: a comfortable and quality environment. Either way, it is about finding the right balance and finding sobriety, responsibility, and rigor with respect to the arrangement of life - without the epic Komsomol construction projects, and constant turmoil with dreams of heroism. My call does not refer to human qualities, but solely to approach to perception of purpose and character of the cities, especially small and modest.

Is there any need in a city in certain circumstances in which it exists now - no one will undertake to answer definitely. But we can with some confidence and hope assume what

We should use the opportunity of Russian *Thinning* as **a positive chance** to rearrange our settlement structure and probably cure all the inherited diseases of the previous ages and paradigms: to live where it's more suitable, to manufacture where it's more relevant.

3 cities – 3 scenarios.

Returning back to our example of three cities in the north of Russia and following our position we can now try to look at their potential. Compliance with which conditions guaranties the survival? **Nadym** city without connecting it by the infrastructure with Noviy Urengoy and Salekhard will keep its isolated condition of slightly fading nostalgic city. Since the gas extraction has moved far from the city and it's not needed to be a base for further north development it risks vanishing more than any northern city in the YANAO region. The new road which is planned will link Salekhard with Norilsk allowing having not only additional jobs in Nadym and cheaper products there but also to establish new economic and social relations on a regional level. Maybe this road will also allow collecting and moving all the enormous amount of garbage that has been accumulated in the tundra since the beginning of urbanization there and which is a real ecological threat now which at minimum is not possible to move out today. And this will also create new jobs there by the way. The problem of deteriorating housing can also be solved only by the construction of additional railroad infrastructure; otherwise nobody will simply continue to build there anything – too expensive and no reasons for. That's the reason why only Gasprom is able to build something for its employees in this city today. As we see the effort to keep this city is really high, but we should see it not as an independent goal but as a part of connection project of two regional centers.

Noviy Urengoy should stop its wasteful policy of extensive growth and to congest itself into a more likely place to live. It's hard to doubt that gas extraction there will last for next at least 50 years or even 100 and even then if there still will be the worlds demand for gas it has already become a base for polar north development. But it crucially needs to humanize and to correlate its plans for growth. Otherwise it will keep its unlivable and undesirable condition of a waste-city with dispersed housing and scattered neighborhoods, with public space everywhere and depressing environment that generates criminal behavior. One of the projects of the first priority should become the rapid train connection of isolated part of Korotchaevo where a big amount of people live and where's a more suitable place for living according to climatic and logistical conditions. Creation of this connection will give a chance and act as a catalyst to rethink the whole urban strategy of a city, which now follows the policy of extensive land grabbing around the old industrial zones multiplying the negative effects and not solving them. Since this city has almost no problems with jobs and money it's hard to imagine that they will try to turn to a long-term policy. But making conclusion present conditions of other Russian industrial cities like ones in the Ural should make the authorities more sober I hope.

Noyabrsk which doesn't have its own gas fields has the most prominent potential to become a local centre for nearby smaller cities. Located on the southern part of YANAO region it has a more mild climate and closer distance to the huge regional center Surgut in HMAO region. It has already started its transformation to a logistical and trading center. But it has all the classical problems of soviet urban planning: a microrayon structure and a division into two separate parts: residential one and industrial. The city should make the environment better, solve the problem of microrayons with the creation

of new roads and separating it into a very clear owner lots. It should find the method to incorporate small business activities in the first floors of a panel housing that will let them to create a prosperous and competitive environment serving all the needs of a population. It should clearer understand its priorities. The separate industrial zone should be perceived as a potential of not an industry of revitalization and creation there a multifunctional zone. The large zones of former industries give maximum freedom in rearranging a new urban grid, this territory already has all the engineer infrastructure that can save a lot of money and effort to build there anything. A middle position of a railroad dividing a city into two parts can also become a potential if there will be created a logistical centre right next to it connecting both parts and establishing a new city centre. Another important action that should be done to become an efficient centre is to overcome the monopoly in the air-transportation that exists in the city. This will improve the accessibility to the city.

Examples of successful restructuring. We haven't found any in Russia due it was not our goal. Still we have to mention that there are some ongoing processes in this direction in a natural way, although majority the official plans remain futuristic and there are no strategies yet. The most famous world's example is a German city of Ruhr, which after the industry has abandoned the city managed to revive itself as a scientific centre and a huge leisure and entertainment park (Zollverein) with a former factory converted to a museum and cultural centre. And even if this example is not relevant for Russian context due to some reasons like the fact that industrial landscape is everywhere and has no specific value anyway this is a visual example that problems can be solved and industrial mentality can be cured. But this is already a next theme.



Noviy Urengoy, road to polar circle along the gas pumps. Infrastructure Urbanism. Photo: Ivan Kuriachiy