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Workshop 06 Conversion and Revitalisation
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Processes of transformation in the New Cities of Siberia. Requirements and chances for a sustainable development in the city Angarsk.

The blue cities¹ of the Soviet Union

In the former Soviet Union there are cities, which were founded in a time of big industrialization in the time from 1955 to 1975 in the northern part of Siberia. They are located near to new transport lines and development axes, which lead from important cities along the Transsiberian railway toward North. Those cities were founded because of the industrial production nearby, big resources of raw materials or as scientist cities.

The word „blue cities“ is from the sixties and means new cities from Siberia and the Far East. The word 'blue' means 'unreal', 'dream like', first because the inhabitants, the founders of the cities interpreted their wishes and dreams and into those cities and second because they were secret, closed cities, and many Russians did not know those cities at all.

Changes since Perestroika

Because of the vast political changes since more than ten years, a big change had happened to those cities at many levels, according to their social, economical and spatial structure. In the communistic time those cities were supported by central led subvention of the Russian government, which nowadays because of the contemporary economical situation is not longer possible.

It takes time to change from a planned economy to a liberal market. The results are a low economy growth and a high rate of unemployment.

Requirements for a sustainable city development

The New Cities in Russia have – depending on the regional and specific situation - enormous potential, which could be further developed. A high level of education, well technology knowledge and developed infrastructure, decreasing population rate and young population structure are good requirements for the future of the cities.

Development of the city Angarsk

Angarsk, monofunctional city, is located in East Siberia, 50 km from the regional capital Irkutsk with an area of 1.143,78 km², between the two rivers Angara and Kitoi.

The main idea and motivation for the foundation of the city (1951) was the industry and the need of housing areas for the workers of the chemical enterprises.

¹ Vgl. das Lied aus dem Kinofilm „Zwei Sonntage“[]

The areas of industrial production with adverse health effects need big buffer zones to the housing areas: Angarsk develops with linear city structure with strictly divided functional zones, living, leisure and working areas. The industrial zone is located near to the water and prevents the access of the city to the river Angarsk, which gave the city its name.

The example of the first houses, which were built in the fifties, is St. Petersburg. Little districts (2-3-hectar) with two- or three-, later four-story-buildings, remind not just with their ensemble but also with the lovely details to the "big sister" of the country. They are followed by the industrial housing areas of the era under Chruschtschow, which have a well designed scale and open space. Today those houses are well popular housing districts. In the 70es and 80es the density of the housing area is growing with a size from 6 – 8 hectar and nine and ten-level-buildings. Huge areas of settlements had been developed within the open space.

Demographical and economical tendencies

In the year 2000 264.500 inhabitants live in the city Angarsk, tendency constant. The people don't leave the city at the moment. But also there are no people coming from other parts of the region to Angarsk; just a very few, who lived in provisional cities in the north, come to stay in Angarsk.

The statistics from this year make believe, that the bottom of the economical development has been reached, even if those statistics could not obscure the fact about the still dramatically economical situation in the country. The economical situation causes other problems according to the demographical development: A low birth rate and a high mortal rate and a low life expectancy because of the decreasing health facilities by the state and because of the worse ecological situation.

With the declining of the industrial production more and more space lie fallow. The industrial enterprises try to sell those areas to the city government in order not to pay taxes for those not used areas anymore. For financial reasons there are no developing perspectives for those areas.

In the meantime the city tries to change its monofunctional profile. There had been already established new further enterprises. The activities of little trade companies little and craftsmen enterprises are growing like furniture production, car-repairing as well.

Housing

Even the city Angarsk is not growing by their inhabitants, the city has an enormous demand of new dwellings. The demand to enlarge the area of the city is caused in several reasons: About 30.000 people live in dormitories or they stay in so called communal flats, where the people share kitchen and bathrooms or live with many persons in one room. On average the people live on a standard living space, ruled at sovjet times, of 9 m² which should now be 20 m². People need unexpensive dwellings, which is possible to pay, because the state can not afford enormous subvention like in sovjet times.

People who can afford it take more space. Many flats become one, which were 3 in former times.

One big problem is the increasing demand of single housing. Just in 1998 the rule from the Soviet times, not to allow to build single houses was repealed. But because it was not possible to integrate this new individual demands with in a whole concept, we now see the "chaotic" development of many new dwellings of the so called "New Russians" as a big problem with in the urban structure, without any basic planning law. Low density and individual dwellings is not supposed to be in the still existing general plan from the seventies. So one important task for the urban development in the future will be to think about alternative housing concepts for low income and rich people as well.

Transformed use and wrong use of public space

The new economical developments because of the political changes are also seen in the public space. The growing trade-market, the beginning of a liberal market system causes in first case – at bus stops, train stations and squares, temporarily buildings. But now more and more steel-glass-buildings are built instead of the former kiosks.

Former kindergarten, dormitories and cultural clubs are converted to offices. Also some dwellings are transformed into shops and magazines. At many facades of the dwelling houses you can see signs "rent" and "office" which shows, that rooms in the flats are used in a new way. First self-standing activities of enterprises start in the backyards of the dwellings.

The increasing demand of provisional buildings like gas stations, parking spaces, magazines drive out the well designed green public spaces of its territory. Spaces, which were supposed to be used as leisure space or for sports facilities are now used as parking spots or even built over night.

The city center has not been built yet. It is one of the most prestigious districts of the city, which should connect the two parts of the city, the northern and the southern parts. At the moment there are two sub-centers. The central street, the new center should become the Angarsker Prospekt. In the general plan and in some alternative results of an competition as well are – and we are lucky, that those ideas are not have been realized – huge and crazy ideas for those center of former times. At the moment the Angarsker Prospekt is like a bypass, on the one direction it ends up an housing complex, on the other side there are more than 1.000 garages, which were built by private initiative of the inhabitants. Just by its geometrical location this street is a central axis without any beginning and without any end.

Possible ideas for the future development of Angarsk: the public space

Angarsk has many problems, which are caused mainly in an ecological and economical way. The socialist ideas of planning a city from Soviet times with a just to industrial enterprises orientated and fixed city with equal conditions for all inhabitants has been lost its legal force.

But there exist also lost of potential like the location, the equipment of technical and social infrastructure, the landscape and a high educated and young population.

With its existing cultural activities and offers Angarsk, called by the inhabitants also the „Siberian St. Petersburg“ could become the cultural capital of the region.

One special characteristic of Angarsk is the building structure of the first construction stage from the fifties with very valuable typologies of buildings with a high quality standard of open

spaces, streets and squares. The variety of types of trees and their shape is a specific feature of this city compared to others in Siberia.

One particular quality of the Siberian cities is the surrounding environment, the landscape. The integration of the landscape within the city structure has been one central parameter in the city planning of Siberia. The green public spaces – the taiga as little decorated forests in the dwelling yards but in the parks connecting the districts as well – are used as leisure space for the inhabitants but also represent the specific image and identity of the city, which is an important aspect according to the future development of tourism enterprises. These green public spaces are used as leisure space for the inhabitants but also represent the specific image and identity of the city, which is an important aspect according to the future development of tourism enterprises.

The public space offers the chances to try out new forms of functional uses. The city government can not pay for running all the cultural facilities anymore. For long term view there must be looked for new kinds of public-private-partnerships.

By converting the big industrial area of Angarsk a former private area might become a public space. A good chance to develop further interests and different needs in the city. Like in the projects of IBA in Germany (IBA Emischer Park and IBA Lausitz), which were also established to support the transforming process of big industrial spaces, could be started the initiative for a sustainable development in this East Siberian city. The renaturing of the embankment of the river Angara and an improving of the ecological situation of the environment has to become one of the priorities of any planning issue. The existing ecological problems are moving to an ecological disaster, which has to be responded. An IBA-Project could also help to make sensitive to those problems and to start real projects.

Sustainable development of the public space might make necessary the reducing or privatizing of open spaces, if those are not needed anymore because of decreasing increasing population rate or new functional requirements. For the developing of the city centre in Angarsk this could mean, that it does not make sense to build in - at the moment empty space – a cultural public centre but to use this area instead for building new dwelling houses to prevent from further urban sprawl in the periphery of Angarsk.

Conclusion

Angarsk owns with its enormous open and public spaces a potential for the development of the city, which is not developed and used in its possibilities according to their social and economic value.

In contrast to often general conclusions, that Siberian cities were without any future the example Angarsk shows, that there exist beginnings for a sustainable city development, which are value to be continued. It is clearly required, that for sustainable city development there has to first to be developed political and economic requirements, incentives for investments and practicable laws have to be given.

But in any case, the public space, is a resource for the city development which should stimulate and impulse for launching the transforming process of the cities of Siberia towards sustainable cities in the future.