Fringe belts and the planning of Russian cities

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Discussion of the fringe-belt concept has hitherto taken place principally in relation to Western cities (see, for example, Conzen, 1960; Whitehand, 1988). Similar thinking about urban fringes and the phenomenon of fringe belts has, however, occurred in relation to Russian cities, and its history merits wider dissemination.

Planning by the Russian state essentially began in the sixteenth century, when Peter the Great founded the first Committee for Building Construction. Under this committee all planning and urban design was taken under state control. Formal planning came to the fore and had important effects on urban form. Indeed, for much of the period since then Russian historians, architects and builders have paid little attention to the principles governing organic city development. Interest has focused much more on individual buildings and the preservation of coherent parts of cities. However, since the 1960s there has been a major change, following the adoption by the state of a 'historical' approach to large-scale urban reconstruction. It was argued that all historical cities should be analysed. Perhaps surprisingly, a historical approach was developed in the search for the logical structure of the contemporary large city. Like other countries, Soviet Russia was involved in creating new models for the modern city. In particular, a solution was sought to one of the biggest problems of the twentieth century – preventing urban sprawl. This generated two rather different attitudes towards urban fringes.

The first related to official planning standards, especially concerning 'green belts' and the nature of suburban areas (Hauke, 1961). 'Suburban territories' in Soviet Planning Standards had two principal functions. The first was to provide a zone for second homes, summer gardens and summer housing for city dwellers, woodlands, areas for sport, open spaces, health centres, and similar uses. The second was to provide a 'buffer' zone that would mitigate city influences on natural and rural environments. Such zones had to minimize building density and maximize open space. However, planners are still arguing about the legal aspects of these zones, which actually contain a mixture of land uses and are subject to various ill-controlled development processes. A particular difficulty is establishing the boundaries of urban areas and 'suburban territories'.

The second attitude towards urban fringes was associated with a growing interest in the ways in which cities are changing their structures (Lavrov, 1966). There was a series of investigations into the morphogenetic and functional aspects of cities. Terms such as 'urban fabric', 'environment', 'landscape', 'genetic' and 'ecosystem', and others borrowed from the natural sciences, became prominent in urban theory. Researching into, and adopting principles of, biology and geography (including applied landscape geography) became familiar aspects of urban analysis, design and planning. During the 1970s and 1980s ideas relating to landscape unity and heterogeneity, and the nexus of physical, biological and social processes came into urban analysis from the theoretical works of Neef (1967), Solntsev (1960) and Troll (1971). The urban landscape has become of increased interest in the practice of design and building. Town builders understand landscape as a spatial unit – as an integral combination of urban form and landscape form. Issues relating to this were particularly explored in the Central Scientific Institute for City Planning and Urban Design at Moscow State University at the end of the 1970s, and more recently in the work of Tobilevich (1981), Gutsalenko (1984), Kukina (2006) and others.

The mapping of morphological units was part of the historico-morphological and landscape approach to urban structural analysis. Historical successions of forms in the landscape were evidenced in surviving forms. Such investigations in Yekaterinburg, Penza, Barnaul, Lvov and Kaluga reveal concentric zones within the city that mark former urban fringes. They are associated with phases of slow outward city growth, often related to physical obstacles, such as city walls, railways and natural obstacles (for example, steep slopes), and have been leapfrogged during subsequent periods of rapid residential expansion. These zones have clear affinities to the fringe belts investigated by researchers in the English-speaking world. The fact that these affinities exist despite more than 90 years of private property elimination in Russia suggests the need for a closer inspection of the relationships between process and form under different types of governance, especially under the contrasting

conditions of 'controlled development' and genetically 'natural' town fabric formation. It is evident that even 'controlled development' has not eliminated some fundamental aspects of uncontrolled development.

In the case of the cities of Yekaterinburg, Penza, Barnaul, Lvov, Kaluga and Krasnoyarsk, what in the West would be termed 'fringe belts' have been the subject of recommendations to the city authorities for their reconstruction, preservation and develop-ment. They were declared to be integral parts of contemporary cities.

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Revisiting Conzen's *Alnwick* data

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As interest in the work of M.R.G. Conzen has broadened (Evenden, 2004; Koster, 2001; Marzot, 2005), stimulated in part by the publication of many of his previously unpublished writings (Conzen, 2004; Samuels, 2005), so have questions arisen about his data and methods of working. Records of the field surveys that Conzen undertook in his classic study of Alnwick are held in the M.R.G. Conzen Collection in the University of Birmingham. Exploration of these, and some reworking of them, has prompted my own reflections on what they reveal.

In addition to the survey undertaken in 1953, in preparation for the publication of the Alnwick monograph (Conzen, 1960), a similar survey was undertaken in 1964. I shall confine my attention here to these two surveys, comprising two field-books.

In each field-book, plot-by-plot data on land use and building fabric are provided in columns. The notation system used consists mainly of two-letter codes in combination of upper- and lower-case characters. To process the data myself I converted them to a database. The structure of this database strongly resembles the tables in the field-books. Columns have been added to link the database to a map in a Geographical Information System (GIS). The handwritten entries in the field-books are not always entirely clear so the process of transferring the data from the field-books to a database could not be automated – everything had to be re-typed.

Conzen developed his own notation. The first key dates from his student days in Berlin in the early 1930s. References to a very basic key can be found in his *Staatsexamen* dissertation (Conzen, 1932). It is not completely clear how many different keys have been created, but the key Conzen used in the 1953 survey is noted by him as being the fifth. There are also a number of undated keys in the M.R.G. Conzen Collection. Some were clearly designed to be used for educational purposes; some are unfinished. I shall concentrate here on the keys numbered as fifth and sixth. It is known that the sixth key was designed for use in