

Late Soviet Village: People, Institutions, and Objects between „Rural“ and „Urban“ Lifestyles

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What made the late Soviet village a special historical phenomenon? How did the modernization and urbanization of the USSR in the latter half of the twentieth century influence rural areas and their residents? Did the advancement of the socialist lifestyle (*sozialisticheskii byt*) undermine the border between the Soviet city and countryside? Finally, how was the village imagined, filmed, and represented in late Soviet narratives and visuals? The three-day conference examined these and related questions during presentations and panel discussions. The conference gathered 36 participants representing universities and research institutes from Russia, Germany, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United States, France, Finland, Ireland, and Moldova.

In her introductory remarks, EKATERINA EMELIANTSEVA KOLLER (Zurich) set up the agenda of the conference and stressed that rural development has only been superficially integrated into the current debates on the late Soviet period. Recent models of late Soviet society predominantly focus on urban groups. One of the aims of the conference was to integrate late Soviet rural developments into the field of the late Soviet Studies and to take a more complex approach to late Soviet rural transformations than it had been done through a persistent narrative of moral, economic, and cultural decline of the Soviet countryside.

One of the central themes that emerged during all three days of the conference was related to the question of how the late Soviet village was imagined by Soviet elites and intellectuals, and how these forms of imagination influenced late Soviet and post-Soviet policies in rural areas. The tone was set already in the opening paper by NIKITA PIVOVAROV

(Moscow), who examined how agricultural expertise was institutionalized during the late 1960s and 1970s with an objective to introduce scientific forms of management in Soviet agriculture. Despite its claims for a scientific method, this expertise, however, combined empirical and hermeneutical elements, which made some of the projects developed by Soviet agricultural experts a priori unfeasible. ANATOLY PINSKY (St. Petersburg) focused on epistemological challenges that confronted Soviet intellectuals in their efforts to translate the realities of economic and daily life in rural areas into narratives. A similar perspective, but with a narrower focus – a case study of the rural diary of Yefim Dorosh, a prominent Soviet author of the postWorld War II-period – was offered in the paper of ALEKSANDR NIKULIN (Moscow). Dorosh conducted annual expeditions to the countryside near Rostov where for sixteen years (from 1956 to 1972) he meticulously observed changes in local communities caused by the permeating influence of the urban lifestyle. Another epistemology-related paper was presented by ALEKSANDR FOKIN (Chelyabinsk) who examined letters sent by Soviet citizens to the magazine *Sel'skaia zhizn'* (Rural Life) and glimpses into the realities of everyday life in the Soviet countryside that these letters offer.

Epistemology is inseparably connected with the questions of power and domination, especially in situations of symbolic inequality like the one between cities and villages. Several papers presented at the conference explicitly engaged this problem by showing how Soviet intellectuals tasked with preservation of local heritage objects, traditions, or ways of life became so invested in this activity that they invented new traditions and essentialized the Soviet village in imaginary forms. ULRIKE HUHNS (Bremen) examined how Ukrainian ethnographers in their quest to Sovietize local rural communities introduced new Soviet rituals that had to disrupt the religious calendar and immerse them into the socialist life cycle. ODETA RUDLING (Greifswald) and ALEXEY GOLUBEV (Houston) discussed the category of authenticity in late Soviet ethnographic and architectural preservation movements. The obsession of Soviet intellectuals with authen-

ticity produced new publications, exhibitions, and even museums, but also often resulted in a moral panic over the presumed „loss“ of traditional cultural practices in rural communities. As a result, the late Soviet period saw numerous projects that sought to preserve and revive elements of traditional lifestyle as a necessary precondition for a historical succession between the people’s culture of the past and modern socialist society. A side effect of this effort was an artificial archaization of rural communities in the late USSR. ERIN HUTCHINSON (Harvard) explicated this logic in her close study of several Soviet collectors of material objects of the traditional rural lifestyle. While initially driven by curiosity or fashion, collecting as a form of cultural production had its own logic of national essentialism, and collectors from among the Soviet *intelligentsia* became prominent advocates of national development during the late socialist period.

The persistent forms of political and social imagination of the late Soviet village became prominently reflected in media. TATIANA DASHKOVA and BORIS STEPANOV (both Moscow) focused on the genre of rural comedy, which had been immensely popular during the Stalinist era and then gradually declined during the late socialist era. The films produced in this genre could only very superficially engage the real problems associated with the rural life, and instead became engaged in intertextual dialogue with earlier comedy films, thus resulting in a close hermeneutic system that could not appeal to a broad Soviet audience. In his presentation, GÁBOR RITTERSPORN (Paris) examined a different visual form: Soviet paintings of rural life. Many of the Soviet artists who specialized in this genre saw the Soviet village as a refuge from the fast-paced, modernist, and allegedly spiritless urban life. As a result, their paintings often represented urban landscapes and their inhabitants in a mystical way – and portrayed them as the genuine keepers of the Russian national spirit and religiosity. However, some of these urban-rural differences were accurately captured in contemporary presentations, as SVETLANA ADONYEVA (St. Petersburg) argued in her presentation on historical photographs of So-

viet village families. These photographs reflected different, archaic forms of extended family intimacy that had been lost in urban communities by the second half of the twentieth century. At the same time, as GALINA ORLOVA (Vilnius) noted, these particular features of rural photography could just as well be a reflection of genre conventions – a property of form, rather than content.

Another key theme of the conference was the question of the border between rural and urban settings, subjectivities, and lifestyles. During the late Soviet period, as many conference papers argued, urbanity and urbanism were no longer restricted to the city limits, but rather made active incursions into the countryside. In fact, as ALEXANDER OSIPOV (Joensuu) showed in his presentation, many of the new working settlements built during the post-Stalinist era far from traditional urban centers in the distant regions of North Russia were designed as exemplary company towns, and it was only lived practices of their residents (for example foraging or hunting) that connected them with the countryside. In a similar way, SVETLANA BOLTOVSKAYA (Marburg) discussed how nuclear towns came to dominate local rural landscapes of Ukrainian Polesia, a deeply agricultural region that, nevertheless, experienced dramatic social changes with the construction three nuclear power plants. CAMILLE ROBERT-BOEUF (Paris) described how Soviet dachas (summer cottages) created urban-rural networks by placing urban dwellers in the rural settings and stimulating contacts with surrounding villages. According to LIDIA PRISAC (Chisinau), Moldovan weddings increasingly combined urban and rural features, while in the Crimean Black Sea coast countryside and suburban residents alike used a huge demand for beds among domestic tourists to create a de-facto private vacation rental market, as ALEXEI POPOV (Simferopol) stated. KIRSTEN BÖNKER (Bielefeld) examined the advance of the TV into the Soviet countryside; the introduction of the TV-set produced a revolution in Soviet rural interiors that immersed it in the national media space, thus erasing the very border between the rural and the urban. A dissenting opinion was voiced by NIKOLAI

MITROKHIN (Bremen) who suggested that a huge divide between rural and urban societies remained in the post-Stalinist period in terms of literacy, political attitudes, and cultural practices, and that the Soviet village was only superficially Sovietized even by the end of the Soviet Union. A lack of empirical evidence, however, left his main thesis largely speculative, and the general consensus at the conference was that the urban-rural divide during the late Soviet era, while remaining prominent especially far from Soviet urban centers, was nevertheless diminishing in most aspects of everyday life and state administration.

Finally, a number of articles discussed specific cultural and social practices of late Soviet rural communities. The question of the appropriation of the dominant language and ideology in the countryside became the focus of two papers: The paper by ANNA SOKOLOVA and TATIANA VORONINA (both Zurich) discussed the adoption of communist practices and speech formulas in the paperwork of rural Communist Party committees, while DAVID CELETTI (Padua) explored the aftermath of the Soviet recruitment campaign that brought Ukrainian settlers to the Kazakh SSR (the Virgin Lands campaign). Another cluster was formed by the presentations that focused on Soviet rural economies with ALEXANDRA OBERLÄNDER (Bremen) discussing the circulation of money in the conditions of commodity deficit, ISABELLE OHAYON (Paris) addressing the evolution and functioning of ritual economy in Soviet Kazakhstan, and MARIANA ARKHIPOVA (Moscow) showing how the established form of collective labor during the Soviet period was informed by much earlier practices of labor of the pre-1917 period. A peculiar aspect of rural economies was examined by VADYM STECIUK (Kamyanets-Podilsky), namely, the practice of producing do-it-yourself agricultural equipment and machines fueled by the non-existence of similar equipment (for example mini-tractors or motor ploughs) in the Soviet retail trade. The resourcefulness of rural communities was not limited to economy, but also stretched into the organization of leisure time and activities, and ANDREI TUTORSKII (Moscow)

showed how it was translated into the persistence of religious and quasi-religious rituals in the late Soviet village, while SIMON BELOKOWSKY (Washington, D.C.) discussed the persistent link between drinking and violence that haunted the late Soviet village despite all measures tried by the Soviet authorities and *intelligentsia*.

The concluding discussion mentioned that academic research of the late Soviet village is still pre-occupied with the questions of how the village was administered and imagined, thus representing a top-down approach to its studies. There is a need in more research on the actual practices, meanings, social relations, and political sentiment that characterized Soviet rural areas during the late Soviet period. The questions of modernization and urban expansion lead to a broader research problem, namely, what was the place of the village in the social, political, economic and cultural landscape of late Soviet modernity? Thinking along these lines opens new perspectives on the history of the late Soviet village and improves our understanding of the historical change in the late USSR.

Conference Overview:

Welcome Address / Introduction

Nikolaus Katzer (GHI Moscow) / Ekaterina Emeliantseva Koller (University of Zurich): Late Soviet Village: Narratives, Approaches, and Research Agenda

Panel I: Exports, Projects and Discourses on Rural Development

Chair: Alexandra Oberländer (FSO Bremen)

Nikita Pivovarov (Russian Academy of Science, Institute of World History, Moscow): Projects and Utopias: The Experts' views on agricultural development in the late Soviet period (late 60s – 70s)

Ulrike Huhn (FSO Bremen): In Search of a Usable Village. Ukrainian Ethnographers and the Invention of New Soviet Rituals in the Late Soviet Union

Aleksandr Nikulin (Russian Academy of National Economy, Centre for Agrarian Studies, Moscow): The „Village Diary“ of Efim Dorosh (1954–1968). On Rural-Urban Transformations in Rostov

Discussant: Katja Bruisch (Trinity College, Dublin)

Panel II: Ideology, Propaganda, and Late Soviet Rural Subjectivities

Chair: Nikolaus Katzer (GHI Moscow)

Nikolay Mitrokhin (FSO Bremen): When Did the Village Become „Soviet“? Some Remarks to the Level of Ideologization of Rural Communities in the Soviet Union between the 40s and the 70s

Aleksandr Fokin (South Ural State University, Chelyabinsk): Late Soviet Rural Daily Life in the Official and Popular Writings

Anatoly Pinsky (EU at St. Petersburg): The Empirical Imperative. How to Know the Post-Stalin Village

Anna Sokolova (University of Zurich) / Tatiana Voronina (University of Zurich): „To think like communists“. Productive Socialism in the Minutes of Party Meetings

Discussant: Sergei Alymov (Russian Academy of Science, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Moscow)

Panel III: Construction of Late Soviet Village in Visual Arts and Cinema

Chair: Kirsten Bönker (University of Bielefeld)

Tatiana Dashkova / Boris Stepanov (Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow): The Village Comedies: The Decline of the Genre

Gábor T. Rittersporn (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris): Between Soviet Stereotypes, Christian Symbolism and Russian Mysticism: Painting the Postwar Village

Odetta Rudling (University of Greifswald): Performing the Village. „Authenticity“ and Rural Aesthetics in the Soviet Lithuanian Folk Revival

Discussant: Anatoly Pinsky (EU at St. Petersburg)

Panel IV: Late Soviet Rural Everyday Practices I: Work and Economy

Chair: Ekaterina Emeliantseva Koller (University of Zurich)

Alexandra Oberländer (FSO Bremen): Of Hens and Eggs: Money in the Soviet Countryside

Isabelle Ohayon (CNRS, Paris): Subsidiary Holdings and Ritual Economy in Soviet Kazakh Villages in the 70s-80s

David Celetti (U of Padua): Living the Countryside in Late Soviet Kazakhstan. The Village of Tolbuchino as a Case Study (1970–91)

Discussant: Nikolay Mitrokhin (FSO Bremen)

Panel V: Late Soviet Rural Everyday Practices II: Networks & Modes of Socializing

Chair: Tatiana Voronina (University of Zurich)

Svetlana Adonyeva (St. Petersburg State University): The village in the Russian North in the 70s. The Close Circle and Other Forms of Solidarity

Mariana Arkhipova (Moscow State University): Work Collectives in the Late Soviet Village: The Example of the Russian North

Ruprecht von Waldenfels (University of Oslo/University of Jena) / Nina Dobrushina (HSE, Moscow) / Michael Daniel (HSE, Moscow): Reconstructing Linguistic Differentiation and Change in the Late Soviet Village

Discussant: Galina Orlova (EHU Vilnius/SFEDU Rostov-on-Don)

Panel VI: Late Soviet Rural Everyday Practices III: Leisure, Holidays & Soviet Rituals

Chair: Anna Sokolova (University of Zurich)

Kirsten Bönker (University of Bielefeld): Watching TV in the Late Soviet Village: Leisure Practices, TV Programs and Emotions

Simon Belokowsky (Georgetown University): A vin p'ie. Drinking and Violence in the Rural and Urban Chernozem

Andrei Tutorski (Moscow State University): Sviatiná. The Phenomenon of a late Soviet Holiday Village

Discussant: Ekaterina Emeliantseva Koller (University of Zurich)

Panel VII: Late Soviet Rural/Urban Divide I: Boundaries Vs Continuums

Chair: Sandra Dahlke (GHI Moscow)

Svetlana Boltovska (Herder Institute, Marburg): Nuclear Power Plants, Socialist Urbanization and the Ukrainian Polesia between „Rural“ and „Urban“ Lifestyles, 1965–1991

Aleksandr Osipov (University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu): The Settlement of Piaozerskii – A Model Boundary between the City and the Village

Camille Robert-Boeuf (University of Paris Nanterre): The Soviet Dachas in Kazan: A Case to Interrogate New Urban-Rural Networks

Discussant: Alexei Golubev (University of Houston)

Panel VIII: Late Soviet Rural/Urban Divide II: Boundaries Vs Continuums

Chair: Svetlana Boltovska (Herder Institute, Marburg)

Lidia Prisac (Academy of Sciences of Moldova): Between the Village and the City: The Wedding in the Moldavian SSR in the Late Soviet Decades

Aleksei D. Popov (University of Simferopol, Crimea): „To hold the holiday people“: Urban Tourists, Local People and Unorganized Sea Coast Recreation in Late Soviet Union

Discussant: Andrei Tutorski (Moscow State University)

Panel IX: Late Soviet Rural Material Culture: DIY Practices and Representations

Chair: Tatiana Voronina (University of Zurich)

Vadym Steciuk (University of Kamyanets-Podilsky): Homemade Agricultural Machinery and Material Culture of Late Soviet Village (based on materials from the Western Ukraine)

Erin Hutchinson (Harvard University): Collecting Material Culture from the Village in the Soviet Sixties

Alexey Golubev (University of Houston): Architectural Heritage Movement and the Reinvention of the North Russian Village in Late Soviet and Post-Soviet Periods

Discussant: Zinaida Vasilyeva (University of Neuchâtel)

Concluding Remarks and Future Research
Nikolaus Katzer (GHI Moscow) / Ekaterina Emeliantseva Koller (University of Zurich)

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