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Building Utopia in the Back Yard

Housing Administration, Participatory Government, and the Cultivation of Socialist Community

“For the Communist Way of Life!”

At a meeting of residents of a Moscow housing block in 1961 a pensioner exhorted those present: “At factories and plant ... many of you strive for the title of *udarnik* of communist labour and many have already achieved this honourable title. Why should we not, comrades, become pioneers in the competition for the communist way of life?”¹

A new front had opened up in the construction of communism: the home front. In the Khrushchev era, domestic space and everyday life (*byt*) became the objects of intensive public attention. To a large extent this focused on furnishing people’s material needs: providing them with housing, most significantly, through the mass construction of standard blocks of small, one-family apartments in new housing regions that mushroomed on the edges of Soviet cities in the late 1950s. But it also included concern with the quality of life and social relations in these residential spaces; and with home and neighbourhood as the nursery of the new communist society. “We conduct political, cultural and educational work primarily ... at places of work”, declared *Pravda* in 1961. “But man does not work 24 hours a day. He spends the greater part of his time at home where he rests, studies, and amuses himself. Can we be indifferent to the manner in which he conducts his everyday

¹ This paper was presented as part of a panel convened under the auspices of CREES (Birmingham) AHRC project, ‘Policy and Governance in the Soviet Union under Nikita Khrushchev’ at the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies Annual Convention, Washington, DC, November 2006. My thanks to Melanie Ilic, Choi Chatterjee and other participants for their comments there, and to Karl Schlögel and participants in the symposium, *Mastering Space*, Historisches Kolleg, Munich, July 2006. G. Ignat’ev et al, *Za kommunisticheskii byt*. (Pis’mo v redaktsiiu), in: *Zhilishchno-kommunal’noe khoziaistvo* (henceforth ZhKKh), no. 4 (1961) 13. I am indebted to the Leverhulme Trust for funding the research project “Everyday Aesthetics in the Modern Soviet Flat” on which this paper draws.

life?”² No less than the workplace, the place of residence – apartment, *dvor* (communal yard), neighbourhood – was a space where becoming a communist person began; an enclave within which to practice, on a small scale, living in the communist way.

The Khrushchev period is marked by the reinvigoration of ideology, a return to Marx’s writings, and a strong resurgence of utopian thinking. Utopia is a spatial model: it is a fictional island or enclave, embedded within, yet hedged off from, contemporary reality, enjoying good government and perfectly organised social community³. In many respects the utopian spirit was in contradiction with practice. Indeed, contradiction is the sign that hangs over the Khrushchev era. At the same time as the utopian thinking emphasized collectivism, the housing program gave many the privacy of their own separate apartments for the first time⁴. Without denying the significance of the tendency to “privatization”, my focus is on efforts to countervail it: on ways in which, even in the new one-family flats, housing was a means to mobilize active participation in socialist construction, and a site for organizing the population for the ultimate transition to full communism, promised to be imminent⁵. Residential neighbourhoods were to become enclaves of perfection and joy, where the exemplary social relations of “socialist community” (*obshchezhitie*) that would in future characterize communist society as a whole were already practised in microcosm.

The mobilization of ordinary citizens to engage in community activities was a characteristic and vital aspect of the Khrushchev regime’s effort to prepare for communism. The final transition to full communism was premised on the formation of individuals who would voluntarily regulate themselves, accommodate their own inclinations to the laws of “socialist community” (*obshchezhitie*),

² Pravda (6 Sept. 1960), cited by *Erich Goldhagen*, *The Glorious Future – Realities and Chimeras*, in: *Problems of Communism* 9, no. 6 (Nov.–Dec. 1960) 17.

³ *G. N. Garmonsway* with *Jacqueline Simpson*, *Penguin English Dictionary* (21969); *Jerome M. Gilson*, *The Soviet Image of Utopia* (Baltimore, London 1975). For examples of the utopian spirit see *S. Strumilin*, *Rabochii byt i kommunizm*, in: *Novyi mir*, no. 7 (1960) 203–220; *Oleg Nazarov*, *Nash zhiloi dom* (Moscow 1962); *Karl Kantor*, *Krasota i pol’za: sotsiologicheskie voprosy material’no-khudozhestvennoi kul’tury* (Moscow 1967); and the Third Party Programme, 1961, in *Grey Hodnett* (ed.), *Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, vol. 4: *The Khrushchev Years 1953–1964* (Toronto 1974) 167–264.

⁴ On the paradoxes of private life in the Soviet Union: *Lewis H. Siegelbaum* (ed.), *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia* (Houndmills 2006); *Deborah A. Field*, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev’s Russia* (New York 2007); *Marc Garcelon*, *The Shadow of the Leviathan: Public and Private in Communist and Post-Communist Society*, and *Oleg Kharkhordin*, *Reveal and Dissimulate: A Genealogy of Private Life in Soviet Russia*, both in: *J. Weintraub* and *K. Kumar* (eds.), *Public and Private in Thought and Practice* (Chicago 1996) 303–332, 333–363; *Katerina Gerasimova*, *Public Privacy in the Soviet Communal Apartment*, in: *D. Crowley* and *S. Reid* (eds.), *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford 2002) 207–230; *Vladimir Shlapentokh*, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia* (Oxford 1989).

⁵ Compare *Stephen Kotkin*, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley 1995); *Field*, *Private Life*.

and live “in the communist way”. That is, every person would be “friend, comrade and brother” to his/her neighbour⁶. One of the strongest manifestations of Khrushchev-era utopianism was the commitment to the withering away of the state, to participatory government, and “socialist democracy”. Khrushchev announced in an international forum in December 1961: “Our general course is to develop activeness, to attract all Soviet citizens into participation in and government of society’s affairs, and to invigorate and broaden the functions of social organizations.”⁷ The organs of state power were to be brought closer to the people, and state functions gradually to be transferred to non-state, social organizations and participatory bodies. These were supposed to play a central role in moulding the social and political structures of the Soviet community and in socializing citizens into the norms and modes of the Soviet regime⁸. The withering of central state administration was also to be accompanied and enabled by the massification of the party, an enhanced role for party guidance, and the activation of communist upbringing (*vospitanie*)⁹.

At the most local level, that of housing management, two bodies – one a professional administration, the other representing citizens – were together charged with bringing about the communist way of life in the early 1960s. First was the housing management office, the *Zhilishchno-ekspluatatsionnaia kontora* or ZhEK. Every apartment building or block of buildings in Soviet cities had a ZhEK, an organization that exists to this day¹⁰. Second, supposedly working in

⁶ For the “Moral Code” see *Hodnett*, Resolutions and Decisions 246 ff.; *James Scanlan*, *Marxism in the USSR: A Critical Survey of Current Soviet Thought* (Ithaca 1985); *Field*, *Private Life*; *Deborah A. Field*, *Communist Morality and Meanings of Private Life in Post-Stalinist Russia, 1953–1964* (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1996).

⁷ Khrushchev at the Fifth World Congress of Trade Unions in December 1961. Cited in editorial, “Domovyi komitet”, *ZhKKh*, no. 7 (1962) 1.

⁸ *George Breslawer*, Khrushchev Reconsidered, in: *Stephen Cohen*, *Alexander Rabinowitch*, and *Robert Sharlet* (eds.), *The Soviet Union Since Stalin* (Bloomington 1980) 50–70; *Theodore Friedgut*, *Political Participation in the USSR* (Princeton 1979) 9. On participation see also *Jeffrey W. Hahn*, *Soviet Grassroots: Citizen Participation in Local Soviet Government* (London 1988); *Jerry Hough* and *Merle Fainsod*, *How the Soviet Union Is Governed* (Cambridge, Mass. 1980) (an extensively revised and enlarged edition by Jerry F. Hough of Merle Fainsod’s, *How Russia Is Ruled*, first published 1953); *Howard Swearer*, *Popular Participation*, in: *Problems of Communism* 9, no. 5 (1960) 42–51.

⁹ Tsentral’nyi Arkhiv Obshchestvenno-Politicheskoi Istorii Moskvy (TsAOPIM) f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 7 (Stenog. otchet soveshchaniia ob opyte agitatsionno-massovoi raboty sredi naseleniia po mestu zhitel’stva, 4 Jan. 1961). Khrushchev assured the XXI Party Congress in 1959: “The passage of certain functions from state organs to social organizations will not weaken the role of the socialist state in building communism but will broaden and strengthen the political foundation of socialist society, ensuring the continued development of socialist democracy.” *N. S. Khrushchev*, *O kontrol’nykh tsifrakh razvitiia narodnogo khoziaistva SSSR na 1959–1965 gody* (Moscow 1959), translated in *Hodnett*, Resolutions and Decisions 131.

¹⁰ The most detailed English language account of housing management is provided by *Alfred DiMaio, Jr.*, *Soviet Urban Housing: Problems and Policies* (New York 1974) esp. chapter 6, 155–174. See also *Field*, *Private Life*, chapter 2. The ZhEK is sometimes known as the *zhilishchno-kommunal’noe upravlenie* – municipal housing board (ZhKU), or as the

cooperation with the ZhEK, was a voluntary, elected “social” organization, the house committee, the *obshchestvennyi domovyi komitet*, or *domkom* for short¹¹.

I will examine five interrelated categories of social activity in which the ZhEK and *domkom* were involved. First: fixing people to places: keeping tabs on them or, put in more positive terms, overcoming problems of flux and dislocation. Second, the related task of fostering an attitude of virtual or subjective ownership and responsibility for the material fabric of housing and its immediate environs. Third, we will look at the mobilizational role of the ZhEK and especially the *domkom* in co-ordinating and supporting the institutions of self-government, and “socialist democratism”. We will then turn to their involvement in delineating and upholding norms of public and private behaviour: how to deal with antisocial behaviour, bad neighbours, and with those who failed to contribute to the common weal? Finally we will consider the place of residence (*mesto zhitel'stva*) – home and neighbourhood – as a space for sanctioned and unsanctioned leisure, for cultural enlightenment, the fostering of aesthetic value, and the all-round development of the individual promised by communism. But first an introduction to these housing organizations is required, highlighting some key issues of interpretation of the Khrushchev era which they can help explore.

The birth of the ZhEK was associated with the enormous expansion of mass housing construction in the late 1950s, which ensued from the 1957 decree “On the Development of Housing Construction in the USSR”, and with the party-state’s increasing involvement in housing design, erection, and ownership¹². It was

zhilishchno-kommunal'nyi otdel. See *Irina H. Corten*, *Vocabulary of Soviet Society and Culture 1953–1991* (London 1992) 161. On the ZhEK see *Oleg Nazarov*, *Nash zhiloi dom* (Moscow 1962). The ZhEK and *domkom* were frequent topics of articles in the journal of the RSFSR Ministry of Communal Economy: *Zhilishchno kommunal'noe khoziaistvo*.

¹¹ On the *domkom* see *N. G. Dmitriev* (boss of a Moscow regional *zhilishchnoe upravlenie*), *Domovye komitety – bol'shaia sila: opyt raboty domkomov Moskovskoi oblasti* (Moscow 1960); *N. G. Dmitriev*, *V pomoshch' domovym komitetam* (Moscow 1963); *DiMaio*, *Soviet Urban Housing*, esp. 166–174; *Victor Buchli*, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford 1999); *Field*, *Private Life* 30.

¹² *T. Sosnovy*, *The Soviet Housing Situation Today*, in: *Soviet Studies* 11, no. 1 (July 1959) 9; *Postanovlenie Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS i Soveta Ministrov SSSR*, “O razvitiu zhilishchnogo stroitel'stva v SSSR”, *Sobranie postanovlenii Pravitel'stva Rossiiskoi Sovetskoi Federatsii Sotsialisticheskikh Respublikov*, Moscow, 31 July 1957 (Moscow 1960), article 102, 332–348; *Timothy Sosnovy*, *The Housing Problem in the Soviet Union* (New York 1954); *R. Beerman*, *Legal Implications of the 1957 Housing Decree*, in: *Soviet Studies* 11, no. 1 (1959) 109–115; *Steven Harris*, *Moving to the Separate Apartment: Building, Distributing, Furnishing, and Living in Urban Housing in Soviet Russia, 1950s–1960s* (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2003); *DiMaio*, *Soviet Urban Housing* 17–19; *N. Leбина*, *Zhil'e: kommunizm v otdel'noi kvartire*, in: *N. Leбина and A. Chistikov*, *Obyvatel' i reformy: kartiny povsednevnoi zhizni gorozhan* (St. Petersburg 2003) 175; *Gregory D. Andrusz*, *Housing and Urban Development in the USSR* (London 1984) 178, table 7.5; *Blair Ruble*, *From Khrushcheby to Korobki*, and *Aleksandr Vysokovskii*, *Will Domesticity Return?*, both in: *William C. Brumfield and Blair A. Ruble*, *Russian Housing in the Modern Age: Design and Social History* (Cambridge 1993) 232–270, 271–308.

In line with the Seven-Year Plan (1959–1965), 75 million Soviet people, nearly a third of the

the product of a restructuring of housing management and maintenance at that time, whereby the existing small, fragmented *domoupravleniia* (housing administration) were consolidated into larger, more powerful, and better equipped organizations dealing with bigger units of population and with more substantial total areas of living space (*zhilploshchad'*) and surrounding territory¹³. ZhEK No. 13 of Moscow's Oktiabr'skii raion, for example, was responsible for 13,000 residents, making it comparable to the local government of a small town or parish¹⁴. This ZhEK was located in one of Moscow's model sites of new urban construction, Leninskii prospekt, a road that in Soviet mythology of the late 1950s was the shining path leading out to the radiant future being constructed in Moscow's South-West region¹⁵.

The consolidation of housing administration into larger units was part of a renewed emphasis on local government, made necessary by the growth of the urban population and territorial expansion of cities, especially in light of the accelerated pace and modernization of housing construction since the 1957 decree¹⁶. The restructuring was also necessitated by the increasing technological complexity of modern housing and its infrastructure, which required expertise and mechanization¹⁷. The formation of the ZhEK thus marks the professionalization, special-

population, were expected to celebrate *novosel'e* in 6 years. Put another way, every day people moved into 8,500 new apartments. N. Kuleshov, 15 millionov kvartir, in: Sovetskaia zhenshchina, no. 9 (1961) 20–23; I. Shutov, Novosel'e, Zhilishchno-kommunal'noe khoziaistvo, no. 10 (1963) 7–8.

¹³ Thus in Moscow for example, 1,500 small, weak *domoupravlenii* were consolidated in late 1960 or 1961 into 270 ZhEKs representing 4,600 apartment buildings and responsible for over 21 million square meters. Nazarov, Nash zhiloi dom, preface. Lebina gives 1957 as the date for the restructuring of housing management. Nataliia Lebina, Entsiklopediia banal'nostei. Sovetskaia povsednevnost': kontury, simvoly, znaki (St. Petersburg 2006) 154. However, inconsistent nomenclature in the journal ZhKKh would suggest that the process took place unevenly across the country. On *zhilploshchad'* – living space – as a unit for quantifying per capita space entitlements and administering the population see Vladimir Paperny, Men, Women, and the Living Space, in Brumfield and Ruble, Russian Housing 149–170.

¹⁴ Nazarov, Nash zhiloi dom 32.

¹⁵ In particular, the experimental housing development of Novye Chermushki. On Chermushki see Ruble, "From Khrushcheby", 248; Iuri Gerchuk, "The Aesthetics of Everyday Life in the Khrushchev Thaw in the USSR (1954–64)", in: Susan E. Reid and David Crowley (eds.), Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe (Oxford 2000) 81–100. The experimental residential area even had an operetta dedicated to it, Dmitrii Shostakovich's *Chermushki*, premiered in January 1959.

¹⁶ Theodore Friedgut notes: "The search for effective political and social control of the urban community has become of growing importance to Soviet authorities." Friedgut, Political Participation 42. On local and municipal government see Timothy J. Colton, Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis (Cambridge, MA. 1995); William Taubman, Governing Soviet Cities (New York 1973); Ronald Hill, The Development of Local Government Since Stalin's Death, in: Everett M. Jacobs (ed.), Soviet Local Politics and Government (London 1983); Hahn, Soviet Grassroots.

¹⁷ As Nazarov explained, apartment block no. 82, Leninskii prospekt, built in 1959, was much more "technically saturated" and complex than apartment buildings erected in the 1930s. "Now an apartment block is a complex of technical equipment, heat-distribution sys-

ization and mechanization of the work of housing management. This corresponds to wider tendencies in the post-war period, characteristic of modern society in general: technological advance accompanied by the growth of bureaucracies and increased authority of specialists¹⁸.

This increased reliance on specialists and technology, along with the professionalization of the work of the ZhEK's paid staff, were accompanied and counterbalanced by the growing importance of activity "*na obshchestvennykh nachalakh*" ("on a social basis"), a phrase widely used in public discourse at the time to refer to a shift in Khrushchevist ideology towards the "state of all the people". A range of voluntary, elected, social organizations was supposed to supplement or eventually even replace the administrative and technical staff of the ZhEK, prefiguring the wider withering away of the state and transfer of its functions to social organizations¹⁹. One such institution of the "all people's state" at the most local level, the *domkom*, originating in the 1920s, was reinvigorated around 1960 by means of initiatives such as the one with which we began: rallying residents behind social campaigns for communist *byt*²⁰. The *domkom* was meant to collaborate with the ZhEK to which it was attached, to support and complement its work by mobilizing and organizing residents to participate in community life and in the maintenance of the house, yard and immediate neighbourhood²¹. It was intended

tems, boiler installations, powerful machines, lifts, and electric, radio and TV networks. To manage such a complex requires expert knowledge and technical expertise." *Nazarov*, *Nash zhiloi dom*. In addition, housing authorities were under pressure, in common with all aspects of Soviet labour and production in the late 1950s, to upgrade, modernize and mechanize housing and its maintenance: to introduce automatic light switches, machines for cleaning the yard and paths and hire points for vacuum cleaners to mechanise domestic labour. Resolution of USSR Council of Ministers, "O merakh po uluchsheniui ekspluatatsii i sokhraneniui gosudarstvennogo zhilishchnogo fonda", *Sobranie postanovlenii Pravitel'stva SSSR*, 25 March 1959 (Moscow 1959) article 39, 112–115.

¹⁸ Lebina also associates the formation of the ZhEK with the demise of the old live-in *dvor-nik* or janitor and the industrialization, professionalization and ideologization of housing management from the end of the 1950s. *Lebina*, *Entsiklopediia banal'nostei* 154–155. How well educated or trained the ZhEK's staff – including electricians, plumbers and bookkeepers – were in fact is, however, questionable.

¹⁹ On the restructuring of relations among groups of officials and between officialdom and the mass of citizenry, as a fundamental of Khrushchev's social policy, and on voluntary activity and social organizations, see *Breslauer*, *Khrushchev Reconsidered* 50–70; *Friedgut*, *Political Participation*; *Swearer*, *Popular Participation: Myths and Realities* 42–51; *Hough* and *Fainsod*, *How the Soviet Union Is Governed*.

²⁰ Women's committees (*zhensovety*) and parents' committees were also set up. In Moscow Region *domkomy* were set up in late 1959 and early 1960. *Dmitriev*, *Domovye komitety – bol'shaia sila* 3; *Povysit' role domovoi obshchestvennosti v ekspluatatsii zhilykh zdani*. (*Obzor pisem chitatelei*), in: *ZhKKh*, no. 1 (1960) 6; *S. Rozantsev*, *Pervye shagi raboty domovykh komitetov*, in: *ZhKKh*, no. 9 (1960) 4–5; *E. Vinokurov*, *V odnom iz domovykh komitetov*, in: *ZhKKh*, no. 8 (1960) 21f.

²¹ *N. Dmitriev*, "Razmyshliaia o rabote domkomov ...", in: *ZhKKh*, no. 2 (1963) 6f. Thus a secretary of the Party bureau of ZhEK no. 7 of Moscow's Proletarskii raion, one Gavrilov, noted in 1961 that the creation of the *domkom* had made an important difference to the work of the ZhEK. "Until recently there was no real [house] committee in the ZhEK. There was

to be an instrument of participatory government, self-regulation and popular mobilization at the level of the *pod"ezd* (entrance to one stairwell of a block of flats) and block. As Victor Buchli very aptly put it, the *domkom* "organised people to perform socialism according to local ambitions and requirements"²².

Unlike the ZhEK, house committees were *elected* bodies, composed of delegates from each entrance of a block of flats (*starshie* or *upolnomochennye pod"ezda* or *otvetstvennye po pod"ezdu*) of the house or block. Their members were socially active residents (*obshchestvenniki*). Further research is needed to establish systematically who was most likely to get involved, in terms of gender, generation and other social categories. Published sources suggest that they were composed largely of retired people who were still youthful enough to have energy to spare for voluntary community work, thus probably in their sixties. In one ZhEK, No. 12 of Moscow's Dzerzhinskii region, a large number of army officers on reserve or early retirement was found to live in the neighbourhood, whose involvement was actively sought. Anecdotally, women appear to have been particularly active in them, although not exclusively. (This may be partly explained by the demographic predominance of women in the elder generation.) "Housewives" (*domokhoziaiki*) and younger women who were at home with very young children also sometimes got involved. Efforts were made to draw men in too²³. The *domkom* included non-party as well as party members, although its head was normally a party member and retired party activists were prominent, or were expected to get actively involved in them²⁴. The reinvigoration of an elected body and of constitutional procedures is significant and typical of the time, paralleling

Ivanova, a good *obshchestvennik* with long experience, but she could only organize work on the *uchastok*, where [they set up] a red corner for 50–60 people. Now a new house committee has been elected of 25 persons, to which we have succeeded in attracting communists who are not in our [i.e. the ZhEK's] party organization." TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, ll. 37–38 (Stenog. otchet soveshchaniia ob opyte agitatsionno-massovoi raboty sredi naseleniia po mestu zhitel'stva, 4 Jan. 1961).

²² Buchli, *Archaeology of Socialism* 165.

²³ Interview with IMA (male), *starshii po domu* and chair of *domkom*, and OIM (female), boss of Municipal Management Company (*upravliaiushchaia kompaniia*, the present-day name of regional ZhEKs), who worked in the housing system since the early 1970s. Interviewed Kaluga, October 2006, by Alla Bolotova, under my project "Everyday Aesthetics in the Modern Soviet Flat", conducted with support of the the Leverhulme Trust. A. Raskin, V otstavke li on?, in: ZhKKh, no. 5 (1963) 12. Articles about *domkoms* in the journal *Zhilišchno-kommunal'noe khoziaistvo* regularly refer to pensioners and especially women. A 1961 report to the Central Committee "On some new forms of organization of educational work among workers in their place of residence in Moscow and Leningrad" noted the need to identify among the local population, and to involve in cultural enlightenment work, veterans of labour and local retired intelligentsia: doctors, teachers, lawyers and engineers. Retired service people were a particular asset, regarded as "politically mature". Rossiiskii gos. arkhiv noveishei istorii (RGANI) f. 5 (CC CPSU) op. 34 (Otdel propagandy i agitatsii po RSFSR), d. 95, ll. 36–54 [here 38–39].

²⁴ It appears that once the party organizations in ZhEKs were set up they applied pressure to communists in the neighbourhood to get involved, and thus reinvigorated local-level party activity.

other moves to develop the representative side of the state in preparation for its administrative aspects to wither away²⁵.

The ZhEK had a party organization within it. Thus it provided a foothold and two-way channel of communication for the party at the most local level. Indeed, with the massification of the party, the ZhEK could be used by the party and its *raiiispolkom* (regional executive committee) as their organizational base for bringing political and cultural enlightenment work to places of residence²⁶. The party presence provided for a measure of coordination between the work of the ZhEK and the priorities of the party-state.

But what was the relation between ZhEK and *domkom*, the dialectics of state and civil initiative, professional and amateur, of administrative and representative bodies? The *domkom* mediated between residents and the ZhEK. A good, active *domkom* was supposed to support the work of the ZhEK in maintaining order and rallying the residents. At the same time it could make representations from the house residents for improvements to be undertaken and, via the party organization within the ZhEK, it could put pressure on the ZhEK to meet residents' demands²⁷. It could also exercise "public control" over the ZhEK: checking that it carried out maintenance work properly and that resources were used for their designated purpose²⁸. Thus the *domkom* could, at least on occasion, act as an arm of

²⁵ By 1962–63 numerous articles appeared in ZhKKh dedicated to the *domkom* as the time came for their re-election e.g. L. Vedeniaev, Pora peresmotret' Polozhenie o domkomakh, in: ZhKKh, no. 7 (1962) 12–13; Domovy komitet pereizbran, in: ZhKKh, no. 2 (1962) 10–11. The *domkom*'s structure of representation echoed, on a territorial principle, the militaristic, hierarchical, pyramidal structures of all Soviet governance. Just as the Pioneers, for example, had links, brigades and companies, so too the housing community had a spatial hierarchy of representation: apartment, landing, *pod"ezd*, house, block (*stroenie*), and the group of houses to which it belonged administratively and territorially. This was then subordinate to the *uchastok* (district) and further to the *raion* (although the *uchastok* level presented a problem: Vedeniaev, "Pora peresmotret'", 12–13). Following this model, the organization of residents and their representation could begin with the micro-community of the shared landing. Thus the structure of this micro-community was supposed to be homologous with Soviet society as a whole: the pattern at the local level was reproduced on the large scale, like a cell structure or tessellation in which the shape and pattern of the individual pieces is reproduced on a larger scale by the whole mosaic.

²⁶ RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 95, l. 38.

²⁷ For example, a *domkom* member in Kaluga persuaded the ZhEK to lend a vehicle to move mature shrubs from his former garden to the new housing he had moved to. Interview with IMA, Kaluga, Oct. 2006. Compare: Nash dvor – sad, in: ZhKKh, no. 6 (1960) 20.

²⁸ Vinokurov, V odnom iz domovykh komitetov 21; P. Pradoshchuk (*upravliaiushchii domami*, Sevastopol'), Dom, v kotorom my zhivem, in: ZhKKh, no. 1 (1961) 5. Similarly, one of the other forms of local activism, the *zhensovet* (women's committees), were also to monitor provision in areas considered to be women's remit, such as childcare or conditions in shops: Pod kontrol' zhenskoi obshchestvennosti, in: Krest'ianka, no. 5 (1962) 21; Z. Bakhmach, Zhensovet deistvuet, in: Rabotnitsa, no. 5 (1958) 30. According to a 1963 article, "In recent times, the role of house committees has grown in control over the financial activity of the *domoupravlenii* [or ZhEK], and in cultural-mass work among the population, in the organization of children's leisure." N. Dmitriev, "Razmyshliaia o rabote domkomov ..." 6–7. Embezzlement was a topical issue not restricted to the activities of the ZhEK. Krokodil fre-

“people power”. As Jerry Hough and Merle Fainsod have proposed, involvement in *domkoms* or other local social organizations such as parents’ or women’s committees constituted, by the 1970s, a widespread form of political participation whereby Soviet citizens had at least “the potential of influence on some types of decisions”²⁹.

Although official accounts emphasized synergy, relations between the paid professional administration of the ZhEK and the social organization of the *domkom* could be fraught³⁰. Tensions over authority are reflected in reports around 1962–1963 from a Moscow ZhEK complaining that the *domkom* had got above itself and tried to command it³¹. A detailed case study of their relations would thus provide insights into the vicissitudes of the policy of withering away of the state, the mechanics of transfer of control from administrative organs to social, representative organizations, and the conflicts of authority that arose therein³².

The ZhEK and *domkom* have had a bad press. They are implicated in accusations that – far from being a period of liberalization as implied by the label “the Thaw”, and contrary to its own official rhetoric of “socialist democracy” – the Khrushchev era saw the Soviet party-state become not less but *more* intrusive and all-pervasive than under Stalin. According to this argument, the *domkom* and other forms of *obshchestvennyi kontrol*’, citizen self-regulation and mutual policing, such as vigilantes and comrades’ courts, extended surveillance and state intervention even into the “private” space of the home³³. Oleg Kharkhordin, for

quently published satirical articles and cartoons in this period about corrupt managers who syphoned off resources, construction materials, etc., to build themselves fine dachas.

²⁹ Hough and Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union Is Governed* 298–302.

³⁰ Dmitriev, “Razmyshliaia o rabote domkomov ...”.

³¹ The ZhEK sought the support of the regional council (*raisovet*) for a proposed amendment to the 1959 statute on house committees, because: “many points of this statute give the right to control, command, oblige [*kontrolirovat*’, *zaslushivat*’, *obiazivat*’] the directors of the ZhEK”. The elected *domkom*, as the representative of the local population, saw itself as having the prerogative to command the ZhEK. “All the work of the named *domkom* boils down to commanding on any pretext, the directors of the ZhEK, its technical supervisors, and chief engineers. These *domkom* chairpeople see their work as having purely a control function. Such a tendency to limitless power over the leadership of the ZhEK leads, as a rule, to arguments between the boss of the ZhEK and the chair of the *domkom*, which results in endless meetings to sort out these conflicts.”

The 1959 statutes also stated that, “the appointment of house managers and directors of ZhEK/ZhKO is to be conducted taking account of the opinion of the house committee”. The proposed amended document omitted such points and instead emphasized the *domkom*’s auxiliary relation to the ZhEK. It was to assist rather than to command, to mobilize the population to landscape yards, to conduct work among population to maintain the housing stock, to call individual slovenly residents to social and administrative account for damage to housing. Tsentral’nyi Arkhiv Goroda Moskvy (TsAGM) f. R-490, op. 1, d. 309, l. 12 (Spravka o kul’turno-massovoykh i drugikh meropriiatiakh domovoi obshchestvennosti v zhilishchno-ekspluatatsionnykh kontorakh za 1962 god). Compare Vedeniaev, *Pora peresmotret*’ Polozhenie o domkomakh 12–13.

³² On resistance from Soviet officialdom and attempts to limit and regulate the behaviour of non-official activists see Friedgut, *Political Participation* 276–277; Breslauer, *Khrushchev* 57.

³³ Buchli, *Archaeology of Socialism* 146–147; Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the*

example, asserts that under Khrushchev, systematic mutual surveillance was established, which erased the last spaces of uncompromised human dignity that even the “earlier uneven and frequently chaotic terror” under Stalin had supposedly still left intact. “The disciplinary grid”, he concludes, “became faultless and ubiquitous: any degree of freedom in private was to be paid for by an inescapable participation in the mutual enforcement of unfreedom and humiliation in public.”³⁴

There is no denying that the ZhEK was the state’s most vivid, immediate, unavoidable and intrusive embodiment in ordinary people’s daily lives. It mediated their everyday interactions with the state, especially those of women³⁵. It was (and is) the institution everybody loves to hate, the front line between ordinary people and state bureaucracy. It is notorious as an instrument of subjection and intrusion into people’s “private” lives, perpetrator of daily low-level bullying, petty humiliation, red tape, and of what Katherine Verdery called the “étatization of time”³⁶. If the ZhEK represented the state in the day-to-day management of everyday life, then in the early 1960s, far from withering away, it was consolidated, technologically armed, and empowered. Not only was it an instrument of micro-management of everyday life; it was also an ear to the ground, which could convey intelligence on public moods and attitudes upwards. Its surveillance and material maintenance functions were inextricably linked in people’s minds³⁷. The *domkom*, meanwhile, literally entered people’s homes and intervened in their house-keeping and childcare practices, or it sought compliance with an aesthetic standard at least as far as the publicly visible aspects of housing – yard, balconies and façade – were concerned, matters which we explore in more detail below³⁸.

Yet even as we must acknowledge the ways in which *domkom* and ZhEK, between them, involved ordinary people in mutual regulation and in the maintenance of societal norms and propriety, the question remains: to what extent should

Individual in Russia (Berkeley 1999) 279–303; Alexander S. Balinky, Non-Housing Objectives of Soviet Housing Policy, in: Problems of Communism 10, no. 4 (1961) 17–23. Friedgut describes such social organizations as house committees, *druzhiny* and other voluntary community groups as “the means by which control is extended down to the level of every Soviet citizen in his home”. Friedgut, Political Participation. For a nuanced and balanced understanding of the Khrushchev era interventions in the most intimate affairs of citizens and limits on their penetration see *Field*, Private Life.

³⁴ *Kharkhordin*, Collective 303.

³⁵ As in other welfare states, it was often women – as those who deal with housing issues along with other everyday matters (children’s welfare, schooling, health issues, and matters of consumption) – who most regularly encountered the state’s impact in the everyday.

³⁶ Katherine Verdery, The ‘Etatization’ of Time in Ceausescu’s Romania, in: Verdery, What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next? (Princeton, N. J. 1996) chapter 2, 39–57.

³⁷ “Ever since 1918 the party has relied heavily on housing managers for political surveillance of the population.”; Balinky, Non-Housing Objectives 22. During Perestroika the disappearance of the *babushki* who used to clear snow from the streets, was reputed anecdotally to result from the KGB’s withdrawal from “listening in”. On “listening in” see: Sheila Fitzpatrick, Everyday Stalinism (New York 1999) 168–172.

³⁸ Buchli, Archaeology of Socialism 165–171 and *idem*, Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight against Petit-bourgeois Consciousness in the Soviet Home, in: Journal of Design History 10, no. 2 (1997) 161–176, here 164; interview with IMA, Kaluga 2006.

this be demonized, in Kharkhordin's terms, as the "inescapable participation in the mutual enforcement of unfreedom and humiliation in public", rather than viewed as the ordinary mundane regulatory authority of neighbourhood that underpins all community³⁹? To acknowledge the latter possibility does not mean that we need agree unconditionally with Kharkhordin and others that the Khrushchev state was more rather than less repressive than its predecessor, or that it succeeded, in practice, in establishing a "faultless grid" of surveillance. Nor should we accept untested that voluntary organizations and participatory government were solely or primarily Orwellian instruments that extended state control into people's homes. Just such a one-dimensional understanding was a stock element of many western, Cold-War readings of Khrushchev era reforms at the time, which tried to press them back into the box of "totalitarianism"⁴⁰. It is surely time to re-open the case with new evidence and new thinking. We should also examine what these organizations of public administration *enabled and produced*, and ask questions about agency and motivation: why did people become involved in them; what did they get out of their involvement; and to what extent could these organizations serve as avenues of political participation and channels for ordinary people to influence decisions at the local level that most directly affected their everyday lives? The present paper is only a small exploratory contribution to such an investigation, which requires extensive further research both in local and regional archives and through oral history⁴¹. But we should at least entertain Hough and Fainsod's plausible suggestion that the voluntary social bodies "seem designed primarily to involve the citizenry in activities that would improve the neighbourhood or place of work, and they create the opportunity for some citizen input to local administrators"⁴², while considering, at the same time, the ways in which they served to socialize individuals and maintain social norms.

³⁹ The normative, regulatory effect of neighbourhood, paternalistic rather than totalitarian, is not exclusive to the Soviet Union and its social order as instituted under Khrushchev. Compare, regarding France: "The neighbourhood has an implicit but important legislative role: it operates like a regulatory authority, e.g. tempering consumption of wine." *Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard, Pierre Mayol, The Practice of Everyday Life*, vol. 2, Living and Cooking, transl. T. J. Tomasik (Minneapolis, Minn. 1998) 89, 47. Compare also Erving Goffmann: "Propriety is the symbolic management of the public face of each of us as soon as we enter the street." *Erving Goffmann, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London 1990, first published 1956) 17.

⁴⁰ According to Howard Swearer, popular participation in the Soviet Union was "a total inversion" of that in democratic countries and constituted, in the Khrushchev era, "an increasingly important technique of rule". *Swearer, Popular Participation* 42; *Balinky, Non-Housing Objectives* 17–23; *Goldhagen, The Glorious Future* 10–18.

⁴¹ Archival sources for the present account are primarily from Moscow, but provincial archives will likely yield useful material. High-level records such as those of the Central Committee are of limited use for a project such as this. Bodies like the ZhEK or *domkom* did not keep systematic records of day to day affairs, or if they did then these were not archived. Nor is this the stuff of memoirs. For further investigation of practice and what it meant to those who were involved, a source based needs to be produced by means of oral history.

⁴² *Hough and Fainsod, How the Soviet Union Is Governed* 302. Theodore Friedgut, while seeing such social organizations as house committees as an extension of control to the level of

We also need to get things in proportion: a knock on the door from the busy-bodies from the *domkom*, policing the norms of modern hygienic living in one's apartment, was not the same as a visit from the KGB in the middle of the night coming to take one to Siberia. Moreover, the intrusive state as represented by the ZhEK and *domkom* was all too human. It was embodied in local individuals, familiar, ordinary, their faces, flaws and foibles known. Proximity has a way of demystifying the most demonic power: better the devil you know. You could smell and touch this embodied "state"; its visceral, immediate presence in people's lives was a very different matter from the disembodied, unseen but all-seeing eye at the centre of the panopticon in Foucault's paradigm of modern technologies of power⁴³. And very far from Kharkhordin's demonic image of a suprahumanly faultless mechanism, it was notorious for its corruption and inefficiency⁴⁴. Its personnel might be unpleasant – venal, petty-bureaucratic, obstructive, and boorish – but you could do deals with them, buy them off with a bottle of vodka, negotiate.

The point is not simply to invert the "surveillance" model in a reactive way, by somehow redeeming the ZhEK and *domkom* as liberal institutions. Rather, we need to get beyond this inadequate and blinkering paradigm if we are to understand how neighbourhood functioned and everyday life was lived, how ordinary people exercised agency, and how these historical subjects experienced their situation. We must pose the questions differently to avoid the binary oppositions that are the legacy of Cold-War thinking: state versus people, repression and resistance, conformity or dissent, oppression and subjection, etc. As Alexei Yurchak has argued, these binary accounts occlude "the crucial and seemingly paradoxical fact that, for great numbers of Soviet citizens, many of the fundamental values, ideals, and realities of socialist life (such as equality, community, selflessness, altruism, friendship, ethical relations, safety, education, work, creativity, and concern for the future) were of genuine importance, despite the fact that many of their everyday practices routinely transgressed, reinterpreted, or refused certain norms and rules represented in the official ideology of the socialist state"⁴⁵. Without denying the normative and intrusive function of the ZhEK and *domkom*, I want to propose that they also played a vital role in simply making everyday life liveable and community possible, providing the cement that kept Soviet society together at a time of rapid modernization, urbanization and dislocation in people's way of life. They were not only, or not simply, repressive, but, being an ear on the ground, they were also responsive to pressure from below and attended to the mi-

the individual citizen in his home, also, importantly, considers the two-way communication whereby they serve, at the same time, as opportunities to exercise "citizen competence" and for citizens to make themselves heard in matters that affect them most closely, that is, as "signaling channels" for discontent. *Friedgut*, Political Participation 7–8.

⁴³ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Paris 1975).

⁴⁴ It is a commonplace that "only the worst people work for the ZhEK". Corten, *Vocabulary of Soviet Society* 161.

⁴⁵ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, N. J. 2006) 8.

nutiae of life neglected by hypercentralized planning⁴⁶. Rather than simply assume residents to be coerced into “voluntary” activity or controlled by it, we can then also ask about how they used these opportunities to take control of their lives and of their social and material environment. If only for a short period around 1959 to 1962 – but possibly extending into the 1970s⁴⁷ – there are indications that the people who volunteered and got involved were driven by a commitment to building utopia in the back yard.

In the remainder of this paper we will first briefly consider the ZhEK and *domkom*’s notorious role in maintaining order, moral and material: their invasiveness in people’s domestic lives, and how they subjected and kept tabs on people. We will then try to balance this aspect by turning to what these organizations enabled and produced.

The Work of the ZhEK and *Domkom*

Keeping tabs

The ZhEK was responsible for the orderly fixing of people to places. An important aspect of the ZhEK was its administrative, record keeping function in registering residents. If you needed a passport you had to apply to its *pasportnyi stol*, whereby the ZhEK exercised control and kept tabs on residents’ movements. Thus, while the ZhEK embodied the state in ordinary people’s everyday affairs, it also represented those people to the state in the sense that it made them “visible” (and thereby governable, in terms that James Scott calls “Seeing Like a State”) as statistics, names on lists with basic data attached such as place of employment⁴⁸. The three-dimensional grid of identical apartments expressed in the façade and floor plan corresponded to a chart or list held in the ZhEK mapping the occupants of each apartment. As head of a regional housing directorate (*raizhilupravlenie*) for Moscow’s Oktiabr’skii raion, Oleg Nazarov proudly claimed, “the ZhEK has all the details of all the individual tenants ... By looking [in the house books –

⁴⁶ Similarly, Hough and Fainsod argued that, without denying the centralized nature of the Soviet political system or the repression and rigidity of the regime, “if we are to understand correctly the nature and the degree of the change that occurred in the Soviet Union after 1953, if we are to understand the Soviet Union in comparative terms, it is vital that we be aware of the real life that words such as ‘centralized’, ‘repressive’, and ‘rigid’ hide, even in the late Stalin era”. Hough and Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union Is Governed* 191.

⁴⁷ The total membership of local organizations of public self-administration, including house committees, comrade courts, parents’ committees, *druzhinniki*, library councils, sanitary groups etc, was placed at 31 million in 1976. Hough and Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union Is Governed* 302.

⁴⁸ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven 1998); Kate Brown, *Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana are Nearly the Same Place*, in: *American Historical Review* 106, no. 1 (2001) 17–48.

(*domovye knigi*)] you find out about each one of 13,000 persons living in these big blocks.”⁴⁹

This function of registering residents made the ZhEK’s socializing and administrative functions something more repressive than the customary normative effect of neighbourhood, and rendered it most directly an instrument of central government and surveillance, subjection and control. Living space was not only shelter; it was also a means of mapping and ordering society. Thus the spatial organization of the population at the level of planning and of built structures – blocks, entrances, stairwells, landings and apartments – was reinforced as a social organization, so that the *pod”ezd* was not only a way into the building but also an administrative and mobilizational category. Administration of housing was also administration of those who lived there, defining those who belonged and those who did not. Having a legitimate place to live where one was registered, even if it amounted to no more than hostel bed (*koika mesto*), gave one social identity, civic personality. Conversely, lack of a legitimate place of residence placed one outside legitimate society, made one a marginal, potentially antisocial element, effectively a non-person. It was a form of disenfranchisement, stripping of identity⁵⁰.

The association between having a fixed address and social respectability will be clearer if we think about the symbolic and emotive significance of its opposite: vagrancy or being a person of no fixed abode (*BOMZh*). Thus a meeting in Lenin-grad in December 1953 between architects and workers raised the issue of how to do ideological work with the “unorganized population”: that is, with homeless people and unsupervised children and youth who, having nowhere to go, became hooligans. People who lacked the organizing structure provided by housing were clearly identified as undesirable and disruptive to Soviet society⁵¹. This spatial

⁴⁹ *Nazarov*, *Nash zhiloi dom* 10.

⁵⁰ This identification between housing registration or having a fixed address and identity is expressed by Nadezhda Mandelshtam: “the ‘I’, shrunk and destroyed, sought refuge anywhere it could find it, conscious of its worthlessness and lack of a housing permit”. *Nadezhda Mandelsham*, *Kniga vtoraia* (Moscow 1990) 13, cited by *Svetlana Boym*, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, Mass. 1994) 93. Rebecca Manley discusses how, in the post-war period, the ranking of claims on housing emerged as a site in which post-war hierarchies and categories of entitlement and exclusion were articulated. Moreover, “Housing was not simply a matter of shelter. For many Soviet citizens, it was also the space in which the return to normalcy transpired.” *Rebecca Manley*, “Where Should We Resettle the Comrades Next?” *The Adjudication of Housing Claims and the Construction of the Post-War Order*, in: *Fürst* (ed.), *Late Stalinist Russia* 233–246 (cited passage 233). On the objective and subjective dimensions of “living space” see also *Papernyi*, *Men, Women and Living Space*, and *Stephen Kotkin*, *Shelter and Subjectivity in the Stalin period*, both in: *Brumfield and Ruble*, *Russian Housing* 149–70, 171–210.

⁵¹ *Tsentral’nyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva Sankt-Peterburga* (TsGALI SPb) f. 341, op. 1, d. 357 (Soiuz sovetskikh arkhitekturov SSSR, Leningradsk. otdelenie. Stenog otchet vstrech. arkhitekturov, stroitelei i trudiashchikh o zastroyke Kirovskogo raiona, 3.12.1953) l. 32. BOMZh is the acronym for “bez opredelennogo mesta zhitel’sstva” or homeless person, tramp. According to Corten the term became colloquial in the late 1970s but Elena Zubkova suggested earlier coining: *Zubkova*, paper at “The Re-launch of the Soviet Project”, SSEES University of London, Sep. 2006; *Corten*, *Lexicon* 31.

organization of the population was not new, as Stephen Kotkin's and other studies of the Stalin era have shown⁵². However, increasing standardization of housing, large-scale developments and professionalization of the ZhEK may indeed have made it a more effective administrative mechanism, for which the grid which Kharkhordin proposes is an apt spatial metaphor. Recent research has shown that social disorder associated with „marginals“, homelessness, and hooliganism, was a matter of much concern in the late Stalin period. The picture of post-war Soviet society that emerges is of peoples on the move, in flux, characterized by social dislocation⁵³. We will return later to the perceived connections between space and antisocial behaviour, to the importance assigned to provision of sanctioned spaces in overcoming such problems, and to the *domkom*'s and ZhEK's roles in this regard.

Fixing and settling people: coping with flux and dislocation

In the late 1950s and early 1960s Soviet society was on the move once again. *Krokodil* compared this mass relocation to the “Great Transmigration of Peoples”⁵⁴. However, this new transmigration was distinguished from the earlier waves in that it was caused not by the loss of a home, but precisely the opposite. People were on the move because they had been allocated new homes, single-family flats. Thanks to the massive housing drive “some 100 million people – almost half the population of the country” – moved to new or renovated homes in the ten years following Stalin's death, according to one 1964 article⁵⁵. A new revolution took place in Soviet daily life in the late 1950s, as Svetlana Boym notes, “consisting of re-settlement out of communal apartments to outlying ‘micro-districts’ where people were able to live in separate, albeit state-owned, apartments – many for the first time in their lives”⁵⁶.

The rehousing represented an immeasurable improvement in many people's living conditions. But moving to the new regions, for all its advantages, could also be disorientating and traumatic. It entailed loss as well as gain: loss of old certainties and well-trodden paths, of amenities, and of familiar people. For those evicted from self-built wooden housing, it meant the loss of vegetable gardens along with the element of self-reliance these afforded⁵⁷. It was also de-skilling, leaving many

⁵² Kotkin, Magnetic Mountain.

⁵³ Brian LaPierre, Private Matters or Public Crimes: The Emergence of Domestic Hooliganism in the Soviet Union, 1939–1966, in: Lewis Siegelbaum (ed.), *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia* (New York 2006) 191–210. Compare on the “quicksand society”, as Moshe Lewin called Soviet society of the first Five-Year Plan period: *Moshe Lewin, The Making of the Soviet System* (New York 1985).

⁵⁴ I. Semenov, “Velikoe pereselenie narodov”, cartoon published in *Krokodil*, no. 22 (10. August 1964) 8–9.

⁵⁵ K. Zhukov, *Tekhnicheskaja estetika i oborudovanie kvartir*, in: *Tekhnicheskaja estetika*, no. 2 (1964) 1.

⁵⁶ Boym, *Common Places* 125.

⁵⁷ See Judith Pallot, *Living in the Soviet Countryside*, in: *Brumfield and Ruble*, Russian

people helpless in face of the sudden urbanization and modernization of their living conditions. They had to learn the norms of urban living and the rules of operating gas stoves and garbage chutes. Above all, the mass re-housing involved breaking up existing communities in older central neighbourhoods of the city, and the dispersal of their residents to new regions on the margins. Loss of community was compounded by the principle (if not always the practice) of allocating separate apartments to single nuclear families. While single-family occupancy was undoubtedly one of their enormous advantages – and richly compensated for the new apartments' shortcomings in other regards such as their tiny proportions and low ceilings – this could also be experienced as loss of community. Even the communal apartment or hostel could grow dearer with hindsight⁵⁸.

These losses were also exacerbated by a combination of planning neglect and of new urban planning principles. In the new regions there were few places to meet old friends or make new ones. Housing was often occupied long before the infrastructure was complete. The yard space was unusable because it was still cluttered with the debris left behind by the builders⁵⁹. Landscaping and planting it, providing benches and children's playgrounds were left to self-help and popular initiative, as we shall see. Moreover, the old form of the *dvor* (yard), enclosed in a cosy ensemble and providing an harbour for community, was opened up into the wider space of the city in the planning of new microregions, beginning in the late 1950s⁶⁰. Meanwhile, people relocated from the centre to the edge of city by the intensive housing campaign often found themselves cut off from amenities to which

Housing 211–331; *Charles Hachten*, *Separate Yet Governed: The Representation of Soviet Property Relations in Civil Law and Public Discourse*, in: *Siegelbaum*, *Borders of Socialism* 65–82. For the dire living conditions and very underdeveloped state of amenities and infrastructure in Soviet towns and cities see *Donald Filtzer*, *Standard of Living Versus Quality of Life: struggling with the urban environment in Russia during the early years of post-war reconstruction*, in: *Fürst*, *Late Stalinist Russia* 81–102.

⁵⁸ Interviews for, “Everyday Aesthetics in the Modern Soviet Flat”: EV, St. Petersburg, interviewer Ekaterina Gerasimova: 13.11.04; OK, female, Moscow, personal communications. The element of nostalgia in such recollections should not lead us to overstate the communality of the *kommunalka*. For strategies for isolating oneself see *Katerina Gerasimova*, *Public Privacy in the Soviet Communal Apartment*, in: *David Crowley and Susan E. Reid* (eds.), *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford 2002) 207–230; *Ilia Utekhin*, *Ocherki kommunal'nogo byta* (Moscow 2001). We should also not overstate the anonymity of the new housing however, since it was commonly provided by the workplace via the *profsoiuz*, many people moved in along with workmates or colleagues from their factory or institute.

⁵⁹ Nash dvor – sad, in: *ZhKKh*, no. 6 (1960) 20. On disenchantment with new housing see *Steven Harris*, ‘I Know all the Secrets of My Neighbors’: The Quest for Privacy in the Era of the Separate Apartment, in: *Siegelbaum* (ed.), *Borders of Socialism* 171–190; interview for “Everyday Aesthetics” with IMA (male), *starshii po domu* and chair of *domkom*, Kaluga Oct. 2006.

⁶⁰ According to Iurii Gerchuk, “the concept of the yard disappeared and the living environment was united and socialized, its firm inner boundaries and divisions removed. The yard dissolved into a residential quarter which, open on all sides, flowed into the general space of the urban region.” *Gerchuk*, *Aesthetics of Everyday Life* 86–87.

they were accustomed: shops, bars, even, for some, the telephone⁶¹. For the intelligentsia, the loss of the city centre with its cultural amenities and historical sites could feel like expulsion beyond the land of Gog and Magog⁶².

Giving a stake: fostering a proprietorial attitude (khoziaistvennost')

What talk could there be of “socialist community” in the new housing regions? Where was the new communist society to take root? A chance juxtaposition of households, fragments of community, quartered in separate apartments, the residents might share little apart from spatial proximity and the experience of dislocation. Others, housed by their factory or institute, might see each other at work but this did not necessarily make for neighbourly relations at home⁶³. How to integrate the disparate individuals and households into a collective? How to transform co-existence into neighbourliness, sharing the same public space around the apartment into “socialist community” (*obshezhitie*)? For this it was necessary to forge and maintain threads connecting individual family life in the separate flats with the social matrix.

Here, the ZhEK and *domkom* had a vital role to play. They were engaged, in tandem, in the essential task of making this inchoate society settle and cohere, attaching people to places. This was not only an administrative process: the bureaucratic fixing, registering and record keeping conducted by the ZhEK's *passportnyi stol*. It was also an affective project. It entailed bonding people to their new homes, giving them an emotional sense of attachment and responsibility not only for their separate apartment but also for the surrounding common spaces. The ZhEK and *domkom* were responsible for producing and maintaining correct relations among residents towards their home and neighbourhood: that is, both to the space and material fabric of housing and to the community of other residents. While avoiding a “my-home-is-my-castle” mentality, they tried to foster a sense of belonging and subjective ownership, and to inculcate *khoziaistvennost'* – the watchful, thrifty, responsible attitude of a good housekeeper, diligent in day-to-day care – combined with a duly grateful attitude toward the party-state that provided their housing.

People responded variously to the state's gift, however, lamented the women's magazine *Rabotnitsa*. Not everyone understood the slogan “Residents are masters of the house [*khoziaeva doma*]” correctly. “‘In my own apartment I can behave as I want to’, one type of resident loves to cry, beating his chest with his fists. This idea of ‘as I choose’ is the sum total of his concept of the role of being *khoziain*. He doesn't pick up a hammer to fix a window frame that has come away from the jamb a little. ‘There's a joiner for that.’”⁶⁴

⁶¹ Cartoon by A. Bazhenov, Krokodil (10 October 1960).

⁶² Personal communications, Nataliia Vinokurova, Elena Mikhailovna Torshilova, Moscow 2004–05.

⁶³ Interview with IMA, Kaluga 2006.

⁶⁴ M. Voskresenskaia, Dom, v kotorom ty zhivesh, in: *Rabotnitsa*, no. 8 (1962) 25.

The ZhEK and *domkom* had an important role in monitoring and preventing such behaviour and reforming its perpetrators. One of the most important tasks of the *domkom* was to check upkeep of apartments and use of balconies, as well as of common spaces. Thus, in the exemplary block on Leninskii prospekt, a hygiene commission was created within the *domkom*. “Its chair is the ‘terror’ of slovens [“groza” *neriakb*], of those indifferent to cleanliness.”⁶⁵ Here we get a glimpse of just how intrusive the *domkom* could be:

The members of the hygiene commission and entrance delegates [*upolnomochennye po pod"ezd*] systematically go round apartments to check up on the state of places of common use, and are not afraid to look into rooms too. Healthy *byt* is the friend of cleanliness. ... Let us be honest: many new occupants still bring to the new apartments not only their old furniture but also their old habits. Some through lack of culture, others considering it unnecessary to keep their home in order, breed dirt, damage the equipment. ... with those the *domkom* has waged a decisive struggle since the very start.⁶⁶

The results reported back to the *domkom* after one such “raid” in which scores of activists took part were largely satisfactory; most people lived tidily and cleanly⁶⁷. But when members of the *domkom* entered the apartment of the Kuznetsov family they were appalled to find: “Dirty, scratched walls, wallpaper that was peeling off like birch bark ... Daylight could hardly penetrate through the long-unwashed windows of the kitchen. Moreover, the kitchen was full of pigeons, because the son couldn’t find anywhere better to keep them and the dove cage stood on the floor.” “You might as well bring a pig in as well!” involuntarily exclaimed one of the *domkom*’s inspection committee. “So what, if we need to we will”,

⁶⁵ *Nazarov*, Nash zhiloi dom 33; interview with IMA, Kaluga 2006.

⁶⁶ *Nazarov*, Nash zhiloi dom 34. Buchli indicates that the *domkom* could inspect households at its discretion without hindrance, and implies that such interventions extended to matters of taste. *Buchli*, Khrushchev, Modernism 172–173, citing *A. P. Filipov*, *Kommunisticheskie nachaly v nash byt* (Leningrad 1966) 151–4; *Buchli*, *Archaeology of Socialism* 141, 167. I have found no evidence that interventions by the *domkom* extended to the aesthetics of interior decoration, although it is presented as a normal part of their role to intervene in issues that affected other neighbours, such as antisocial behaviour, noise and matters of hygiene, or that were detrimental to common property. The press reported examples of how *domkoms* brought social norms into the home and fostered self-regulation. To deal with a particularly stubborn household that systematically refused all requests to clean their apartment, one *domkom* had resorted to calling in a medical expert from an epidemiological centre: “And the people realized that the house committee is a force to be reckoned with. Now the occupants themselves invite social activities to come to their apartment.” *Vinokurov*, *V odnom iz domovykh komitetov* 21. In interview, the former chair of a Kaluga *domkom* firmly delineated the kind of matters in which the *domkom* or the higher level *uchastkovyi* committee might intervene, such as bad smells and cockroaches, and explicitly denied that it intervened in ‘private matters’ (*lichnye dela*). Interview with IMA, Kaluga Oct. 2006.

⁶⁷ “This autumn the *domkom* visited every apartment, looked into each room, kitchen, and bathroom. They noticed everything: cobwebs in the corners and dirty wallpaper, cracks in the ceiling, and the broken rim of a washbasin. ... In such cases conversations were conducted between the guests [i.e. the *domkom* representatives] and householders, as a result of which the residents usually gave their word to remove the shortcomings by a particular deadline: to replace the wallpaper or brush away cobwebs, to replace parquet tiles that had come loose, or to mend a casement hanging on a thread.” *Nazarov*, Nash zhiloi dom 34.

insolently declared Kuznetsov junior. "It's our apartment, we'll do what we want in it." "But no!", resolutely declared one of the *domkom*, "you are wrong there. No-one allows you to destroy the dwelling, to transform it into a pigsty."⁶⁸

*Citizens' initiatives and socialist competition for exemplary communist byt:
common spaces*

If slovenly tenants asserted the sovereignty of their home while refusing the custodial responsibilities of *khoziain* even within their own apartment, how much worse would they be in regard to common spaces? Such a person could "walk up the stairs in the dark for a week, stumbling over the steps and cursing, but doesn't think to check if the electric wires are in order"⁶⁹.

A number of decrees promulgated between 1959 and 1962, shifted responsibility for upkeep of the housing stock from the state to residents, and from ZhEK to the voluntary, social organization of the *domkom*. Indeed the *domkom*'s reinvigoration at this time was directly associated with this agenda⁷⁰. It also had the task of making tenants accept responsibility for common spaces. The exemplary householder (*nastoiashchii khoziain/khoziaika*) did not draw a line at the threshold between "my home" and common space, but voluntarily looked after the neighbourhood, including stairwell, landing, and yard, as if there were all his/her own.

In order to mobilize, inspire, or shame people into donating their unpaid time, labour and skills to the upkeep of common space, to forge community and to stimulate good neighbourliness, "competitions for the communist way of life" were launched, allegedly on the basis of spontaneous, citizens' initiatives. Modelled on the competitions for productivity already familiar in the workplace, such competitions obliged residents to maintain cleanliness and order both in their own rooms and in places of common use, "and not to allow children to damage and mark walls and windows"⁷¹. In one model apartment block where competition was launched, there was

exemplary cleanliness in every pod⁷²: such as even the best cleaner could not maintain. But that is the point: that order is kept here strictly by the residents themselves. Two years ago they took the entrance halls under their own protection and this meant that no-one forgave anyone for scratching the walls, breaking the glass, dropping cigarette ends on the floor: you broke it – you mend it, you made a mess – clear it up.

Last year the residents decided: why do we only take on keeping order in the pod⁷²? Couldn't we preserve and keep the house as a whole in a proprietorial way [*po-khoziaiski*]? They agreed and soon all the residents were undertaking running repairs in their apartments, painting balconies, and henceforth they will repair the dwellings carefully and in good time⁷².

⁶⁸ *Nazarov*, Nash zhiloi dom 36.

⁶⁹ *Voskresenskaia*, Dom 25.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 25: "O merakh po uluchsheniui ekspluatatsii i sokhraneniui gosudarstvennogo zhilishchnogo fonda", Moscow 25 March 1959.

⁷¹ *Nazarov*, Nash zhiloi dom 36.

⁷² *Voskresenskaia*, Dom 25.

Responsibilities were conventionally gendered. Women were to become housewives of the state's property: "Let us, women, fight together for exemplary order in our houses, declare war on slovenliness and carelessness!"⁷³ "*Khoziaiki* take turns each week to wash the floors in entrances from bottom to top."⁷⁴ Men, meanwhile, were to join voluntary *remontnye družiny* (repair brigades or maintenance patrols) to help the ZhEK's paid staff of housing maintenance workers. Thus, voluntary "joiners, carpenters, and metalworkers mended furniture in the communal Kindergarten, repaired workshops, painted the fence around the green plantings in the yard, helped the lads [i.e. the ZhEK's paid workforce] to mend the fence." The ZhEK was supposed to meet such spontaneous "popular" initiatives by organizing the voluntary labour, and providing the necessary material, equipment or spare parts – for example house paint and brushes, or saplings to plant⁷⁵. The ZhEK might also provide some basic training by "masters" on its paid staff to the unskilled amateurs⁷⁶.

Competition for communist *byt* was clearly a good way of saving money and work for the ZhEK! It was, in part, a matter of providing an unpaid reserve labour force, as Theodore Friedgut observed.⁷⁷ Nazarov acknowledged the essential contribution made by voluntary labour:

without the help of residents – constant, active help – it would be hard for the housing workers. ... How could they plant greenery in yards, what state would cultural mass work and work with children be in? And how much does the community do to establish truly socialist relations in *byt* among residents! The leaders of the ZhEK realize just how great is the role of *obshchestvennost'* and rely upon it in their initiatives⁷⁸.

Indeed, one has to wonder how these things would ever have got done were it not for social organizations and volunteers (*obshchestvennost'*). This was also a matter of identifying needs that might not otherwise receive official attention, having ideas about improvements, however small, that would make a difference to people's lives, and getting these prioritized and resourced by the ZhEK⁷⁹. For

⁷³ *Voskresenskaia*, Dom 25.

⁷⁴ Mobilization targeted, in particular, those who did not work: "housewives", mothers temporarily at home while looking after young children, and pensioners. *Rabotnitsa* discussed a house committee whose chair was a mother of five: "It is pleasing that in the struggle for maintenance of housing socially active women take active part. They put their whole heart into this big, troublesome matter". *Voskresenskaia*, Dom 25. Thus it socialized those who might otherwise remain isolated. This raises a question that lies beyond the scope of this paper concerning the relation between voluntary work and the antiparasite law, as well as issues of relation between generations.

⁷⁵ "Residents together paint the walls of stairwells themselves, and the ZhKO (*Zhilishchno-kommunal'nyi otdel*) only provides the materials." *Voskresenskaia*, Dom 25.

⁷⁶ *Nazarov*, Nash zhiloi dom 26.

⁷⁷ *Friedgut*, Political Participation 286. In the *domkom*, Buchli finds, "The Party had effectively revived an old self-supporting and self-financing institution that could efficiently service and maintain the housing stock, while simultaneously ensuring the realization of *byt* reforms". *Buchli*, Archaeology of Socialism 174.

⁷⁸ *Nazarov*, Nash zhiloi dom 32. See also *Pradoshchuk*, Dom, v kotorom my zhivem 5.

⁷⁹ Interviews IMA, OIM.

example, community nurseries “*na obshchestvennykh nachalakh*” compensated for the state’s failure to make good on its much-vaunted claims to liberate women from domestic duties so that they might fully engage in social and productive work, while red corners made up for the lack of planning of infrastructure of the new regions, in particular the failure to provide any clubs or entertainment spaces, a point to which we will return. Competition for the communist way of life also encouraged people to share skills and become good neighbours. To some extent this was a matter of putting the party’s imprimatur on established practices of mutual help and community self-reliance⁸⁰. But where community had to be built from scratch, such exchanges of services helped to establish social networks.

The yellow card

The trouble with utopia, of course, is that not everyone always wants to play⁸¹. What to do with the spoilsports such as the Kuznetsovs in their pigeon-filled pigsty? “How to deal with those who break the rules of living together [*obshchezhitie*]? For they will hinder us in future too”, residents worried at a meeting to launch competition for the communist way of life. They concluded: “it is necessary to re-educate such people through the collective power of residents ... to struggle for the soul of each individual through communist upbringing”⁸².

The continued existence, more than 40 years after the revolution, of individuals “who do not observe the norms of social behaviour, who appear in an inebriated state in public places, or who carry out acts of hooliganism and other crimes”, was noted. According to a 1959 decree, measures to deal with hooliganism, drunkenness in public and other unworthy behaviour relied too heavily on administrative and juridical organs, “without active participation of the population and social organizations”⁸³. It was necessary to make much fuller use of prophylaxis and, above all, to exploit the huge beneficial power that peer pressure could exert over the behaviour of such individuals by means of *druzhiny*, people’s militias. The censure and hostility of people one had to pass every day was usually enough to bring a negligent individual to heel. Rarely was it necessary to take matters as far as the *tovarishcheskii sud* (the comrades’ court, which dealt with quarrels among

⁸⁰ Compare, on the way Soviet legal discourse on property relations in the 1940s endorsed popular practice: *Hachten*, Separate Yet Governed 65–82.

⁸¹ On utopia and the conventions of the game see *Michael Holquist*, How to Play Utopia: Some Brief Notes on the Distinctiveness of Utopian Fiction, in: *M. Rose* (ed.), *Science Fiction* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1976) 136–138.

⁸² *Ignat’ev*, *Za kommunisticheskii byt*.

⁸³ Central Committee and USSR Council of Ministers decree, 2 March 1959, “On the participation of workers in keeping social order in the country” (“Ob uchastii trudiashchikhsia v okhrane obshchestvennogo poriadka v strane”) *Sobranie postanovlenii Pravitel’sтва SSSR* (Moscow 1959) article 25, 73–75. This was followed by a resolution, “O dobrovol’nykh narodnykh družhinakh po okhrane obshchestvennogo poriadka” approved by resolution of CC CPSU and USSR Council of Ministers, 2 March 1959.

neighbours, domestic abuse, ill treatment of children, and anti-social behaviour), although the mere threat of it was also effective in itself⁸⁴.

Other sanctions included public naming and shaming by means of “boards of dishonour” and wall newspapers (methods also used in workplaces). The party and Komsomol were directly involved in such measures. To conduct a campaign against “everything that prevented people living in peace”, the party bureau in the ZhEK on Leninskii prospekt launched a satirical newspaper *Shchelchok* (*The Fil-lip* – i.e. a snap of the fingers). Edited by an old communist, with a voluntary *aktiv* of correspondents, it became a “reliable helpmate to the party bureau”. *Shchelchok* exposed disorder and pilloried its perpetrators: teenagers drinking vodka in lobbies, tenants in arrears on their rent, residents who failed to look after their dogs properly, or who threw their rubbish directly into the stairwell instead of the garbage chute. It could also turn on the *domkom* itself; thus an ineffectual *otvetstvennyi po pod"ezdu* might find himself caricatured. It also printed venomous caricatures of residents who made various excuses not to do their share⁸⁵.

Shchelchok's public pillorying was complemented by another local wall newspaper, *Kul'tura – v byt*. This celebrated and reinforced good practice, published results of competitions for communist *byt*, and disseminated exemplary initiatives and acts of good neighbourliness⁸⁶. The title *Culture into Life* is very characteristic of the ethos of the period, with its resonances with the mass cultural mobilizations of the 1920s. In the final section we turn to efforts to build communist culture in everyday life, and to foster all-round individuals and community [*obshchезhitie*] through cultural enlightenment and the organization of “cultured leisure” in the residential neighbourhood.

Home as a Site of Cultured Leisure and Aesthetic Value: making *byt* according to the laws of beauty

The organization of “cultured leisure” (*kul'turnyi otdykh*) was a vital aspect of housing management, for home was a key site of leisure and recreation: a large proportion of time off work was spent there. Increased leisure time was supposed to be a characteristic of advanced socialist society, being part of the promise of communism as well as, more broadly, of progress and the pursuit of happiness since the Enlightenment. Leisure was required for the formation of the fully

⁸⁴ Interview with IMA; RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 95, l. 43. The *domkom* could, on behalf of the community, impose sanctions on individuals believed to violate norms of “socialist community”, such as imposing fines or taking offenders to the comrades’ courts. *Buchli*, *Archaeology of Socialism* 170.

⁸⁵ Nazarov found proof of the wall newspaper’s authority and effectiveness in the fact that one issue was torn down just 40 minutes after being pinned up. A duplicate was soon put up to replace it. *Nazarov*, *Nash zhiloi dom* 48 ff.

⁸⁶ *Nazarov*, *Nash zhiloi dom* 36.

rounded individual, harmoniously developed in mind and body, who was to be the future citizen of communism. In accordance with Marx's vision, the end of the division of labour and the growth of leisure time were supposed to enable the working people to realize their full human potential and cultivate their aesthetic sensibilities and creative powers. Thus measures were taken under Khrushchev to reduce the working week, and further reductions were promised in future⁸⁷.

However, leisure was also a matter of anxiety and contention in this period⁸⁸. What would people do with their increased leisure? Would they spend it in appropriately rational, cultured ways, consonant with the communist way of life, or would they squander it? "With the transition to a six or seven-hour working day, adults have a lot of free time but they don't always know how to use it", worried a delegate to a conference on agitation *po mestu zhitel'stva* (in places of residence) in 1961. "Not all have ... books or TVs ... at home. And housing conditions are not so good that you can invite friends and sit and play chess."⁸⁹ As late as 1982, an account of the "Soviet Way of Life" still found that "improvement in the structure of free time is a very important condition for the perfection of the Soviet way of life." "Rational use of free time depends on the cultural level of the individual and on political-educational work among the population. Shortcomings in this matter [the organization of leisure] result in alcoholism, religious faith, aimless entertainment [*razvlecheniia*], hooliganism and other manifestations of the antipodes of the socialist way of life."⁹⁰

Anxieties about leisure focused on young people. Since the post-war period there had been a moral panic concerning indolent and disaffected youth⁹¹. The "unorganized", unproductive leisure of young people hanging out in the *dvor*

⁸⁷ "Program of the CPSU", *Hodnett*, Resolutions and Decisions 231; *S. Strumilin*, Mysl' o griadushchem, in: *Oktiabr'*, no. 3 (1960) 140–146.

⁸⁸ In discussion of the draft Party Programme, one Central Committee member challenged the emphasis on leisure rather than work: "The building of communism requires work and more work, discipline and more discipline." Cited by *Erik Kulavig*, *Dissent in the Years of Khrushchev: Nine Stories about Disobedient Russians* (London 2002) 76 and note 5.

⁸⁹ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 7 (Stenog. otchet soveshchaniia ob opyte agitatsionno-massovoi raboty sredi naseleniia po mestu zhitel'stva, 4 Jan. 1961).

⁹⁰ *Vl. Kas'ianenko*, *Sovetskii obraz zhizni: Problemy issledovaniia* (Moscow 1982) 129. Numerous sociological and time-budget studies were undertaken concerning how people spent their leisure time, e.g. *Boris Grushin*, *Problems of Free Time in the USSR: a Sociological Study* (Moscow 1969); *Boris Grushin*, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii. V zerkale oprosov obshchestvennogo mneniia. Epokha Khrushcheva* (Moscow 2001) 431–508.

⁹¹ On the youth problem: *Merle Fainsod*, *How Russia Is Ruled* (Cambridge, Mass. 1956) 255–261; *W. Laqueur* and *George Lichtheim* (eds.), *The Soviet Cultural Scene 1956–1957* (London 1958) 202 ff.; *A. Kassof*, *The Soviet Youth Program* (Cambridge, Mass. 1965); *Elena Zubkova*, *Obshchestvo i reformy* (Moscow 1993); *Mark Edle*, *Strange Young Men in Stalin's Moscow: The Birth and Life of the Stiliagi, 1945–53*, in: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 50 (2002) 41; *Juliane Fürst*, *The Arrival of Spring? Changes and Continuities in Soviet Youth Culture and Policy between Stalin and Khrushchev*, in: *Polly Jones* (ed.), *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era* (London, New York 2006) 135–153; *Juliane Fürst*, *The Importance of Being Stylish: Youth, Culture and Identity in Late Stalinism*, in: *Fürst*, *Late Stalinist Russia* 209–230.

with nothing to do was associated with delinquency, hooliganism, social parasitism and other un-Soviet behaviour. Among the sites of such misspent leisure, the yard and entrance lobby or stairwell featured prominently⁹². We have examined ways in which the wider domestic space around the apartment was to serve as a site of communist upbringing. The place of residence played a particularly important role in keeping young people in line, both prophylactic and reconstructive. However, the *dvor* could just as easily socialize them into bad company and bad habits: drinking, smoking or vandalism. On one hand a supposedly sheltered place for children to play and old people to take the air, it was, at the same time, the terrain of just such “unorganized” elements of society that were associated with disorder: unattended children, homeless people, alcoholics, unemployed, “social parasites”, and “hooligans”. It was an edgy space where people with nothing better to do hung out and where gangs contested their territory⁹³.

The measures the party and Komsomol adopted to tackle the social alienation of the young were typically contradictory, combining nurture with mistrust, re-education and punishment, integration with exclusion⁹⁴. But in the early 1960s it was emphasized time and again that the best way to deal with undesirable cultural manifestations, such as young people’s attraction to western popular culture, was not by driving them underground, but through integration and competition. Leisure facilities for the young were especially urgent. Sufficiently attractive, sanctioned alternatives must be provided for example youth cafes with fashionable “contemporary” interiors and newly invented Soviet dances in order to keep youth leisure within the public eye and (above all) away from the allure of western mass culture, and, at the same time, to enable the young people to become fully-rounded individuals⁹⁵.

⁹² The problem of leisure facilities for young people was of concern to the Komsomol and was regularly discussed in Komsomol’skaia pravda, for example: *Zabota o byte i dosuge molodezhi*, in: Komsomol’skaia pravda (2 Aug. 1952); *P. Bondarenko*, *Trudno otdokhnut’ v Kamenskoe*, in: Komsomol’skaia pravda (16 July 1952); *Vospityvat’ ideinuiu molodezh’*, in: Komsomol’skaia pravda (8 Oct. 1959). See also *B. A. Grushin*, *Ispoved’ pokoleniia* (Moscow 1962) 194–198.

⁹³ *O. Ivanova* and *N. Sergievich*, *Pustoi dvor*, in: Komsomol’skaia pravda (19 July 1952); *Na nashei ulitse my khoziaeva!*, in: Komsomol’skaia pravda (16 July 1959); *Mariia Osorina*, *Sekretnyi mir detei v prostranstve mira vzroslykh* (St. Petersburg 2000) 148–149. On the *dvor* as a space of horizontal social control and a space for self-determination or *Eigensinn*, see *Monica Rüthers*, *The Moscow Gorky Street in Late Stalinism*, in: *Fürst*, *Late Stalinist Russia* 244–245.

⁹⁴ *Zubkova*, *Obshchestvo i reformy* 154–155; *Susan E. Reid*, *Modernizing Socialist Realism in the Khrushchev Thaw*, and *Juliane Fürst*, *The Arrival of Spring. Changes and Continuities in Soviet Youth Culture and Policy between Stalin and Khrushchev*, in: *Jones*, *Dilemmas* 209–230 and respectively 135–153. Much archival and published material is to be found concerning how to combat the seduction of western culture (including music, dance and dress, and abstract art), with special attention to youth.

⁹⁵ *TsAOPIM* f. 4, op. 139, d. 54 (*Sektsiia ideino-politicheskogo vospitaniia molodechi*). On mass cultural enlightenment work: *Anne White*, *De-Stalinization and the House of Culture: Declining State Control over Leisure in the USSR, Poland and Hungary, 1953–89* (London 1990).

But in the new residential regions on the edges of cities there were few cafes, dance halls, or other amenities. What to do with young people who found themselves “all dressed up and nowhere to go”? As festival designer Mikhail Ladur challenged in 1966 regarding the geography of leisure in Moscow: “Let’s face it, comrades: it is boring in the evenings in our capital.”⁹⁶

ZhEK, *domkom*, and other local social organizations such as parents’ committees were closely involved in finding solutions to the problem of disaffected, indolent youth. Again, their role was largely compensatory. “But where are kids to go, where to dance?” asked one Moscow schoolteacher reporting to a meeting at which ZhEKs exchanged experience in mass agitational work in January 1961. “Our region, near Metro Sokol’niki, is far from the centre. There’s nowhere much to go. ... All around are small half-derelict little houses and kids have nowhere to go apart from the cinema and club.” Meanwhile, “In the clubs everywhere you have to pay, everything is for money, it is terrible.”⁹⁷

In the absence of places for young people to go, the ZhEK at Sokol’niki had found a strategy – and a space – for drawing kids off the street, away from hooliganism. “For five years we have used the school building ... It became known as the Komsomol Youth Club. Kids can come to the school just to relax. They even have a chance to dance here.”⁹⁸ While providing a place for young people to meet and simply hang out, and thus keeping them off the streets by presenting an attractive alternative, the Komsomol Club also pursued a cultural and ideological agenda. This it did not by thrusting improvement down the young people’s throats, but by making it attractive and fun.

We don’t say “today you will take in a lecture”. They can simply come and play billiards, draughts, or chess, and there are always fresh newspapers and journals. ... Every evening there is a short talk – we try to make it interesting, [although] it is hard to ask anyone to come and speak on Saturday evening unpaid – it costs so much energy and enthusiasm. ... During the talks the kids may be playing but then they start to listen and some sit and listen open-mouthed⁹⁹.

Younger children’s leisure was also a matter of great concern. Since, in most families, both parents worked, unless retired grandparents were available to care

⁹⁶ Leisure and entertainment facilities were also too centralized. As new residential quarters mushroomed, the geographic and demographic growth of cities and shifting balance between centre and periphery made it necessary to decentralize and expand the provision of culture and entertainment. But such developments lagged far behind the construction of new microregions. This was a problem even in Moscow. *M. F. Ladur*, *Iskusstvo radosti*, in: *Sovetskaia kul’tura*, 1 May 1966, reprinted in *M. F. Ladur*, *Iskusstvo dlia millionov* (Moscow 1983) 105. On the decentralization of Moscow in the new twenty-year city plan, 1960–1961, see *B. M. Frolic*, *The New Moscow City Plan*, in: *M. F. Hamm* (ed.), *The City in Russian History* (Lexington 1976) 276–288.

⁹⁷ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35 (Stenog. otchet soveshchaniia ob opyte agitatsionno-massovoi raboty sredi naseleniia po mestu zhitel’sva, 4 Jan. 1961).

⁹⁸ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 45. A similar instance is described in a report to the CC CPSU, RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 95.

⁹⁹ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35.

for the children they roamed the streets and *dvor* unattended after school. This was an issue both of space and of supervision or “organization”. Residents at the 1953 meeting with architects in Leningrad cited above lamented that although, before the war, children’s playgrounds had been laid out, they were now closed off, or asphalted over, leaving nowhere for children to run about. They had to hang around in stairwells. “Apart from green plantings we just need spaces for children to play ball.”¹⁰⁰

Here another neighbourhood social organization established in this period under the auspices of the ZhEK, the parents’ committee, was particularly active. Parents’ committees served as a liaison between the school, the housing authorities, and the general body of parents and worked in conjunction with the ZhEK’s party bureau and *domkom*¹⁰¹. They might provide needy children with free breakfasts, dinners, and clothes, or organize trips to sanatoria. Parents’ committees also worked together with the *domkom* and ZhEK on getting young people into education, or might help older ones to find work – whether they wanted it or not. “When we got to know our young public through red circles we found that nineteen of them neither worked nor studied, and some just liked doing nothing (fed by their parents), some could not find work where they wanted, and some just earned pocket money.”¹⁰² Parents’ committees also organized children’s leisure, undertaking to attract local children off the street by setting up red corners¹⁰³. In one red corner a parents’ committee run by a mother of three organized activities for children – including amateur art clubs, a string orchestra, reading groups, English language classes, chess, handicrafts – and in summer they took children to the countryside. They also set up a sport ground where children could play games¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰⁰ TsGALI SPb f. 341, op. 1, d. 357, l. 43.

¹⁰¹ Parents’ committees would establish close links with the local school, usually involving the school director. Consisting of 3 to 5 people they operated under the supervision of the local Soviet. In Moscow’s *Oktiabr’* district they were first established in 1955 and spread by 1965.

¹⁰² TsAOPIM, f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 13. The way housing, school, and workplace needed to work together was also exemplified in the journal *Zhishchno-kommunal’noe khoziaistvo*. It told of Sergei, a good-for-nothing hooligan, the object of numerous complaints from residents to the *domoupravlenie*. Even the militia could do nothing about him. But then the communist activists of the house committee took an interest and succeeded in reforming him. “One loafer less in the mikroraion ...” *Za kommunisticheskii byt*, in: ZhKKh, no. 2 (1962) 8.

¹⁰³ The press reported a similar case: a woman became concerned at how uninterestingly children spent their leisure time. So she organized Timur Teams (*timurovskie komandy*) named after popular children’s author Arkadii Gaidar’s boy hero Timur) of 40–50 children each. The children elected commanders and signed up for clubs and sport sections. Help was received from the trade union committee which gave funds for acquiring sports equipment, books for the peripatetic library, chess sets etc. *A. Vengerov, I zakipela zhizn’ vo dvore*, in: ZhKKh, no. 2 (1963) 6–7.

¹⁰⁴ *Ignat’ev, Za kommunisticheskii byt* 13. Similar initiatives are described in the report to the CPSU, RGANI f. 5 op. 34 d. 95, ll. 40–42.

Red Corners

Many red corners appear to have been established in the late 1950s or early 1960s under the auspices of ZhEKs. Originally, in the 1920s – in which decade, like many of these phenomena, their roots lay – red corners had an explicitly agit-prop function as the locus of anti-religious campaigns etc. In the early 1960s, their primary function was to provide a social space where residents might meet and enjoy “cultured leisure”; they might include a small library, billiards, and television, as well as providing premises for various clubs. They appear, in general, to have resulted from public initiatives and were staffed by volunteers. For resources and equipment they were dependent on the ZhEK and on residents’ donations¹⁰⁵. A Leningrad party secretary and house leader (*upravdom*) reported: “The party organization and house committee of this ZhEK organized the cultural rest of residents in the red corner. Twice a week a library operated there: seven hundred books were donated by residents.” The library was run voluntarily by a pensioner who organized groups of young pioneers to act literally as *Kulturträger*, delivering literature to the homes of the elderly and infirm. The house committee also ran lectures and discussions on international, scientific and other themes. Discussions, events and lectures for the general public were held in the evenings in red corners or schools, ranging from instruction in how to lay a table and cookery competitions to discussions of political issues. The main thing was to be interesting, to attract an audience and bring them back¹⁰⁶.

Like those offered by the Komsomol Club, these events were not free of ideology; they might also engage in political education and include talks on “the international situation”, a topic that would inevitably include large doses of Cold-War rhetoric¹⁰⁷. The potential of red corners to serve as a key site for “communist education” or mass agitational work with the population *po mestu zhitel'stva* was discussed at a conference on this topic, on 4 January 1961. Their advantage was that, being located directly in the place where people lived, they were “much closer and more accessible to residents” than theatres, clubs, or palaces of culture. Rather than expect people to go to special sites of communist education, red corners brought it to them. They were part of people’s everyday environment, a familiar space where they might drop in at any time¹⁰⁸. This was in line with the reinvig-

¹⁰⁵ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 7 (Stenog. otchet soveshchaniia ob opyte agitatsionno-massovoi raboty sredi naseleniia po mestu zhitel'stva, 4 Jan. 1961).

¹⁰⁶ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, ll. 46–47.

¹⁰⁷ Nazarov described four red corners in his ZhEK: in one a discussion of the international situation was under way, in another there was a club for car lovers, in a third members of DOSOM (voluntary association for supporting the greening of Moscow) was meeting, while at the same time, in a fourth young people were just having fun. *Nazarov*, Nash zhiloi dom 16.

¹⁰⁸ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 7, 16. In the 1920s the creation of children’s corners played a part in rooting out old religious spatial customs, as a way to fill the “semantic void” left by the elimination of the sacred or red corner where the icons traditionally hung. Buchli describes how children’s corners were conceived as exemplary revolutionary spaces, set up in conscious competition with the older order represented by adults: “when parents did not re-

oration of ideology, the massification of the party, the search for more effective, accessible and everyday forms of ideological education, and the emphasis on participation: "It is necessary to bring mass agitational work to every worker."¹⁰⁹ All the better, then, to bring it to them at home.

The presence of unsupervised children in the *dvor*, which red corners helped to address, also served to identify "problem families"¹¹⁰. Conversely, the presence of children in a household allowed the authorities (parents committees, *domkom* etc), a route into the home and familial affairs (as it does in any welfare state) and drew antisocial parents into society. Parents' committees ran parenting classes in order to inculcate a "conscious" approach to children's upbringing¹¹¹. Family affairs were particularly a matter of concern when they impacted on the welfare, behaviour and learning of children and spilled out into communal affairs. In such cases, "it is necessary to combine forces of all our cultural institutions for work with children, headed by the school, and with house committees and ZhEKs"¹¹². This involved usually benign, paternalistic intrusion into affairs that might be considered "private": "At the beginning of the school year members of the parents' committees went round all the apartments where there are children to find out how their studies were going and whether they needed help. The *obshchestvennitsy* were interested not only in how the children study, but also in their family life." "We also got to know parents through our involvement and help. Sometimes it is important to help and advise them."¹¹³ One case concerned a "heroine mother" who neglected her eleven children. The social organizations ended up looking after the children in place of their mother, because the children were "dirty, barefoot, and ragged", while at home there was "drunkenness, hooliganism, and debauchery"¹¹⁴.

Drunkenness was a frequent theme of neighbourhood disorder narratives¹¹⁵. If parents drank this caused problems for society via their children. "The drunkenness of parents reflects to a large degree on the children. I consider these children unfortunate because they do not have normal human conditions of life. They said

move their icons, the children responded with 'let them stay up, it doesn't matter, our corner will defeat theirs'." *Buchli*, *Archaeology of Socialism* 45–51.

¹⁰⁹ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 40; RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 95, l. 36.

¹¹⁰ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 3.

¹¹¹ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 3; *Field*, *Private Life* 83–97.

¹¹² TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 36.

¹¹³ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 13.

¹¹⁴ In this case it was proposed that house committees and school should have the authority to say whether a woman with many children deserved the award of heroine mother. The measure of her maternal heroism should not be her prodigious fertility but the quality of her parenting. Only if her existing ten children were well brought up should she receive the award for having an eleventh. TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 13.

¹¹⁵ This was also treated as a problem of the family or household: "In families where there is drunkenness they gather on Saturdays in twos and threes and drink spirits." TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 7. Compare report to CC, "O nekotorykh novykh formakh organizatsii vospitatei'noi raboty sredi trudiashchikhsia po mestu zhitel'stva v Moskve i Leningrade", RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 95.

to one Kolia Subbotin 'look how you behave. But isn't your father a colonel?' He answered: 'it would be better if I didn't have a father at all!' And there are so many cases where you ask a pupil why they did not do their homework. 'I couldn't do it' he replies 'because dad came home drunk and fought with mum.'¹¹⁶ Lectures were held concerning the harmful effects of alcohol, but some social activists felt that it was time to shift to sterner measures: to oblige the party organs, by means of Central Committee resolutions, to discipline parents at party meetings, and alongside educational work, to call on the government to curb the production and sale of vodka¹¹⁷.

Cultural enlightenment: aesthetic education and amateur creativity

To drink away one's leisure time was, of course, the path to self-destruction and oblivion and not to self-realization and communist consciousness, nor to good neighbourly relations. The residential organizations worked hard to ensure that time off was not squandered but was used for "all-round development". Cultural enlightenment and moral improvement were not discrete paths toward communist society. On the contrary, the encounter with great art and literature was supposed to effect moral uplift, and aesthetic education was considered no less important than ethical upbringing. In true intelligentsia tradition, familiarity with the classics of Russian culture, in particular, was supposed to educate the sensibilities, provide models of high conduct, and inculcate moral values. But as Khrushchev declared, Soviet people should not only absorb the aesthetically and morally beautiful through the *contemplation* of art, but should become active *creators* of beauty¹¹⁸. Moreover, involvement in amateur creativity kept people off the streets, away from the bottle, and out of trouble. Reviving the spirit of the *Prolet-kults* (the Proletarian Culture movement) of the 1920s, amateur artistic activity blossomed in this period, alongside other aspects of mass cultural enlightenment. Amateur orchestras or folk bands, theatres, art, art appreciation and photography clubs were set up or expanded¹¹⁹. Home and neighbourhood, as the space where most people spend the largest part of their time off work, were a key site for such cultural enlightenment work and amateur artistic activity. This, too, was an important aspect of the work of the ZhEK and *domkom*.

¹¹⁶ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 34; RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 95, ll. 43–4.

¹¹⁷ "They love our vodka abroad. They say capitalists buy our vodka and it costs a lot, so let's export it. We won't talk of removing vodka from sale but it is necessary to reduce it gradually. On every counter there is above all Stolichnaia, Petrovskia: they think up different names in order to attract people to this vodka." TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35.

¹¹⁸ N. S. Khrushchev, Sovetskoe iskusstvo obogashchaet dukhovnuiu sokrovishchnitsu vsego chelovechestva, in: N. S. Khrushchev, Vysokoe prizvanie literatury i iskusstva (Moscow 1963) 155, 160–161; Programme of the CPSU, Hodnett (ed.), Resolutions and Decisions 248f. The *Znanie* society for popular enlightenment began courses in aesthetic education around the time of the Party Programme or soon after c. 1962.

¹¹⁹ Susan Costanzo, A Theatre of Their Own: the Cultural Spaces of Moscow and Leningrad Amateur Studios, 1957–1986, in: Canadian Slavonic Papers 36, no. 3–4 (1994) 333–347.

The place of residence was, alongside the workplace, supposed to become a site for the production of aesthetic value. Not only the domestic interior but also the common space around the apartment was to be the object of aesthetic attention. Efforts to surround oneself with beauty included the *blagoustroistvo* campaigns to landscape and plant the yard, and work on ordering the appearance of façades by having balconies cleared of rubbish and planted with flowers. “Residents want to beautify their everyday surroundings” was the slogan of neighbourhood campaigns¹²⁰. Participating in such campaigns, residents contributed to the effort to produce their material environment in accordance with the laws of beauty, which, for Marx, was the essence of unalienated, truly human labour.

Cultural enlightenment and amateur creativity were fostered by the ZhEK and *domkom*, often in the red corners. A representative of a Moscow ZhEK, reporting to a meeting to exchange best practice, stressed the social-educational importance of cultural enlightenment work *po mestu zhitel'stva*. It was vital to develop residents’ desire to read books, she said, but she regretted that it was hard to take them to the Conservatoire or Tret'iakov Gallery. Such cultural work could even help to re-educate former hooligans, although she was modest: “Our experience is worth looking at, not that we can claim to have transformed anyone from bandit into non-bandit.”¹²¹ In another ZhEK, where needlework, fine art and English language clubs and a house library were set up. “It was hard – we had to fight for a room, beg the joiner to make easels for the artists in his free time, find teachers of English, collect books for the library. But we did not give up. And great was our joy when we saw boys who had hitherto hung around aimlessly in the *dvor* sitting properly at the new easels, and girls at their embroidery frames!”¹²² As this indicates, conventional gender roles were among the norms of social behaviour into which amateur cultural production socialized young people.

Archival reports on the activities of other ZhEKs around 1961 depict similar scenes of a population eagerly involved in self-improvement and in local community life. One ZhEK organized an exhibition of houseplants: “Even *we* didn’t expect it to play such a big role. That day the population had an especially festive mood. With a few plants we were able to unite the residents. They enjoyed taking part. Specialists spoke about houseplants’ benefits for health and their aesthetic significance. In the evening a concert was held. One hundred and forty people came to the exhibition.” Such comments as “down with paper flowers!” indicated that viewers had appropriated the prescriptions of good taste widely disseminated

¹²⁰ There were many articles on *blagoustroistvo* greening and landscaping campaigns in ZhKKh e.g. Z. Lysov, *Preobrazhennyi dvor*, in: ZhKKh, no. 4 (1959) 20–21; The *domkom*’s role in maintaining the aesthetics of the façade by making sure residents did not fill their balconies with junk is discussed in interview, IMA, Kaluga 2006.

¹²¹ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 46.

¹²² TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 51. The 1961 report to the Central Committee cited above notes that the voluntary organization of children’s clubs had had the effect of eliminating instances of children and adolescents being detained by the militia in 1960. RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 95, l. 41.

in the media and, no doubt, reiterated in the talks given at the exhibition. Following this successful event it was planned to hold an exhibition of amateur artists living in the territory of the ZhEK and an exhibition of the work of a carpentry club¹²³. In another ZhEK, the secretary of its party bureau reported, they had decided to set up a “house university of culture” (*domovyi universitet kul'tury*), which opened in 1959 with the aim to “raise the cultural level” of the population, to acquaint them with music, literature and art. Activities included amateur concerts and lectures on themes such as “how we will live in 1965” (that is on completion of the Seven-Year Plan). “We were afraid people wouldn’t come, but there were 150–170 at each lesson.”¹²⁴ Clubs aimed at various groups and constituencies among the residents, seeking to integrate into the micro-society of the neighbourhood people who might otherwise be isolated, such as the elderly, young mothers, and single men. In one ZhEK they included a radio club where one could make one’s own receiver; a *baian* ensemble; a photographic circle led by Komsomol members from Mosfil'm (the Moscow State Film Studio); and a carpentry club for adults. There, each member began with repairing his furniture, making small things such as shelves, bedside cabinets, kitchen tables, and then moved on to making more complex items such as bookshelves, TV tables, sideboards, etc. The members got so keen that they began to spend all their free time there¹²⁵. “Thus the circle distracted people from useless ways of spending time and they found new interest in working not only for themselves but also for the common good, i.e. for the red corner.”¹²⁶ Such clubs particularly aimed to attract men. Not only did they keep them away from the bottle; they also sought to engage them in activities associated with the home, fostering a pride in creating something for their domestic space or for the neighbourhood¹²⁷.

Space and Resources – Human and Material

While the activists invoked valorized concepts of socialist community, aesthetics, mass enlightenment and productive leisure to promote such ventures, their activities do not in any straightforward way constitute the realization of a master plan, nor exemplify the centralized state’s micromanagement of localities and everyday life. Rather, the activities of *domkom* and other local voluntary organizations the ZhEK was supposed to coordinate were, to a large extent, ways of mitigating the

¹²³ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, ll. 12.

¹²⁴ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, ll. 12, 16. On neighbourhood clubs and universities of culture, see RGANI f. 5 op. 34, including f. 5 op. 34 d. 95, ll. 36–54.

¹²⁵ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, ll. 8–12.

¹²⁶ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, ll. 8–12.

¹²⁷ Women mainly worked with fabrics and fibres, and men with wood and metal. See also Kelly on efforts to engage men with domesticity, especially in the Brezhnev era. *Catriona Kelly, Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford 2001).

shortfalls of state provision and compensating for oversights of planning; they were ad hoc, local responses to local circumstances and everyday needs. This element of compensation was noted by Friedgut, but he reinscribed it into the model of an all-powerful, central manipulative state, treating it as a cynical ploy to offload financial and labour burdens onto citizens¹²⁸. However, to see the mobilization of citizens' voluntary activity *solely* as cynical economies and exploitation is to ignore the utopian impulse of the Khrushchev era; this consisted of both the commitment within the leadership to the ideal of the "all people's state" and a self-regulating society, and of a grass-roots urge to make life better. The latter set of ideals may have overlapped and shared terms with the former, but they were not necessarily coterminous.

However well meaning and high minded the kind of activities we have described were, and however promising in terms of establishing the communist way of life, the organizers were often overstretched and under-resourced. It is in regard to the struggles for support and resources that we can best see the level of personal energy, dedication and commitment to an ideal that was involved in getting neighbourhood initiatives under way and sustaining them. This was anything but a path of least resistance, nor does it fit a model of passive conformity to externally prescribed behaviour. A Moscow ZhEK party secretary complained: "But we also have red corners in cellars with no light or furniture. It is all a matter of money." They had wanted to equip a cinema studio from Mosfil'm but this would cost 10,000 rubles. "What is more important: 10,000 rubles or 145 human souls? We could have drawn 145 people away from bars and streets."¹²⁹ The effort to conduct such work with the local population and to build a sense of community was also a problem of spatial priorities. In conditions where built space was at a premium, the allocation or withholding of physical space was a powerful means of social and cultural control, as Susan Costanzo has discussed in relation to amateur theatres¹³⁰. But local projects were not automatically or universally accorded the recognition or priority resources their initiators might think that, as essential building blocks of the larger national project of saving souls and building communism, they deserved. To get space or resources assigned, the *domkom* and other social organizations had to turn to the ZhEK, and this often entailed a struggle for what they believed must be done. While the press is full of celebratory narratives of popular initiatives being met and facilitated by the authorities, and while interviews also indicate that the ZhEK could be supportive, archival sources (as well as some discussions in the press) also contain tales of initiatives frustrated by lack of suitable premises such as the one above¹³¹.

The need for spaces to gather individual residents and construct them into a community was not a new problem. It had already been raised, for example, at the

¹²⁸ *Theodore Friedgut*, Political Participation in the USSR, as above.

¹²⁹ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 17.

¹³⁰ *Costanzo*, A Theatre of their Own 333–347.

¹³¹ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, l. 17.

meeting in Leningrad between architects and workers in 1953 cited near the beginning of this paper, where the need for red corners to conduct work with the population was discussed. “But where is it to be done with the unorganized population? It is necessary to plan for premises where one can undertake this work.”¹³² The provision of public spaces for sanctioned gatherings had grown worse not better in the new housing regions, because they had been overlooked by the architects and planners, noted the Moscow teacher cited above: “But the new housing stock is a disaster. The housing does not have rooms that can be converted into red corners.” There were only cellars, but it was impossible to attract people to those. “It is incomprehensible why, in the new apartment houses, they still do not plan for rooms for red corners and such rooms where one can invite people and where it is pleasant to sit.”¹³³

These tales of woe, on one hand, make clear the link between the ordering of space and the organization of people. This was not just a matter of individual citizenship and registered *zhilploshchad'*. To organize residents of a block or *uchastok* into a public (community – *obshchestvennost'*) it was necessary to find legitimate public spaces – red corners or meeting rooms – in which to gather them together. In the absence of appropriate, adequately large, warm and inviting spaces it was very difficult, in a cold climate, to organize the population. This absence was seen to leave elements of the population “unorganized” – hooligans, vagrants, or homeless children¹³⁴. At the same time, however, these problems also exemplify the contradictions, in the Khrushchev era, between central planning and what was needed on the ground to build utopia. It was the local organizations working “*po mestu zhitel'stva*” that had to address this gap.

In addition to space, money and equipment, local initiatives also required human resources to carry them through. Being reliant on unpaid voluntary work could present problems, for there were so many calls on people's time – especially those with needed skills – in addition to the demands of the workplace and the sheer arduousness of everyday existence¹³⁵. In response to a sociological questionnaire about leisure, a village school teacher complained that he was overburdened and pulled in all directions by multiple community obligations at the expense of his private life¹³⁶. As the discussion concerning local leisure facilities above indicated, it could be hard, even in Moscow, to find people to give up their time, unpaid, to give lectures at “people's universities” and red corners in unheated basements in outlying regions of the city. “With great effort we got a television presenter, a correspondent of *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, workers of the district party committee, and a festival participant to come. We also try to get mums and dads to offer their

¹³² TsGALI SPb f. 341, op. 1, d. 357, l. 32.

¹³³ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35, ll. 37–38.

¹³⁴ TsGALI SPb f. 341, op. 1, d. 357, l. 32.

¹³⁵ *Filtzer*, Standard of Living 81–102.

¹³⁶ *Grushin*, Chetyre zhizni 442.

services. We found that in one family there was a city-level propagandist – a revolutionary of 1917.”¹³⁷

What drove those people who initiated and got involved in voluntary schemes, who gave up their time to plant shrubs in the shared yard or to run activities to keep children off the streets, or who provided breakfasts to those whose homes failed them – and to do all this *against the odds*, in spite of planners’ neglect and lack of resources? Can the dedication and persistence this entailed be explained solely in terms of compulsion or compliance? We do not need to resort to a notion of an exceptional, “totalitarian” Soviet state, in which people were forced into supposedly voluntary activities through fear and conformism, in order to find explanations. Much work remains to be done on popular participation in the Soviet Union from the point of view of agency and motivation. One place to start would be a comparative look at voluntary activities that are fundamental to civil society elsewhere, such as, in contemporary Britain, for example, the people who run parent and toddler groups or who give up their Saturdays to coach children’s football teams.

Involvement in the *domkom* or other social organizations provided an avenue to a certain status and power within the neighbourhood, and this may be what appealed to many and kept them involved. It was also, as Hough and Fainsod indicate, a way to take control over one’s immediate circumstances and make a difference, to make one’s voice heard and one’s will felt. It may, additionally, have given lonely people company and a sense of being needed. And we should not, of course, discount the sense of duty enthusiasm and commitment to public ideals as articulated by the party. But their utopia did not necessarily look identical to that envisaged by Khrushchev and his ideologues. The party’s high flown rhetoric and future-oriented ideals could be appropriated in terms of a personal ideal of good neighbourliness, community, humanity, social conscience, and commitment to make life better, not only for themselves but for those around, and not in the distant future but now: to organize a New Year’s party for the neighbourhood children, for example, complete with fir tree and Grandfather Frost¹³⁸. Alexei Yurchak argues of a later generation (specifically urban intelligentsia) that they “became actively engaged in creating various new pursuits, identities, and forms of living that were enabled by authoritative discourse, *but not necessarily defined by it*. This *complex relationship* ... allowed them to maintain an affinity for the many aesthetic possibilities and ethical values of socialism, while at the same time interpreting them in new terms that were not necessarily anticipated by the state – thus avoiding many of the system’s limitations and forms of controls.”¹³⁹ We need to consider how local, micro-utopias reproduced, reworked, or co-opted, on their

¹³⁷ TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 139, d. 35; *Field*, Private Life. This problem is also evident in archived discussions of the popular enlightenment society *Znanie*, which ceased remunerating its lecturers at this time and went over to a system of voluntary contributions. Gosudarstrennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF) f. 9547, op. 1.

¹³⁸ Interview with IMA, Kaluga 2006; RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 95, ll. 40–41.

¹³⁹ *Yurchak*, Everything Was Forever 32, emphasis added.

own terms, the official utopia of the party-state: how the people who got involved and devoted their time and energy to it did so for their own ends, not necessarily coincident with those of the regime.

We should be careful not to read back into this period the jaded attitudes and apathy that are now routinely taken to sum up the later, Brezhnev era, nor should the hindsight of the Soviet Union's ultimate collapse occlude the complexities and possibilities of the late 1950s and early 1960s¹⁴⁰. We cannot dismiss a priori the level of conviction and commitment to achieving the speedy transition to communism, either among the leadership or at the level of the activists on the ground, simply because history proved them wrong. Looking at reports from ZhEKs and *domkoms*, it is hard to see how these institutions could function solely on the basis of coercion or even of moral obligation, political orthodoxy or passive acquiescence¹⁴¹. The demographics of *obshchestvennost'*, especially the widespread involvement of pensioners, whose youth had coincided with the years of revolution and the cultural revolution of the first five year plan, may partly account for this zeal; as claims for the restoration of "Leninist principles" indicate, the utopianism and ideological reinvigoration of the Khrushchev era drew extensively on the campaigns of the 1920s although they did not exactly replicate them.

Although published accounts clearly have to be taken with a large pinch of salt, their emphasis on a kind of elementary democratic process, where proposals are put forward, discussed, elaborated and voted upon, tells us something about the ideal way in which socialist democracy was supposed to function, even if other types of sources are required to measure this against practice¹⁴². Should we reject without further evidence to the contrary (perpetuating assumptions based in Cold-War, anti-communist ideology), the possibility that ordinary people tried to "make fairy tales come true" in their own lives, to construct the communism they were promised, on their own terms, on a small scale, in their own immediate locality and social environment? Should we not entertain the possibility that local initiatives, residents' discussions, and the constitutional structure and grass roots nature of the elected *domkom*, might represent the micro-functioning of [proto-] democratic decision-making institutions, indeed the incubator of future "socialist democracy"¹⁴³?

¹⁴⁰ John Bushnell, The "New Soviet Man" Turns Pessimist, in: Stephen Cohen, Alexander Rabinowitch and Robert Sharlet (eds.), *The Soviet Union Since Stalin* (Bloomington 1986) 179–199.

¹⁴¹ Nor should we overstate the apathy of the Brezhnev era. Can we assume that all the 31 million people involved in local organizations of public self-administration in 1976 were simply going through the motions? Such participation in social organizations, Hough and Fainsod argue, was an avenue for citizen participation in decision-making "much more widespread than the earlier images of an 'atomized society' suggested". Hough and Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union Is Governed* 299, 302.

¹⁴² Nazarov, *Nash zhiloi dom*.

¹⁴³ For ordinary people learning the procedures of democracy see Hahn, *Soviet Grassroots*, esp. 285; and Friedgut, *Political Participation*, on "citizen competency".

The ZhEK and *domkom* may well have been intended as an instrument of micromanagement of everyday life, “by which control is extended down to the level of every Soviet citizen in his home”, as Friedgut put it, or by which it was attempted to introduce normative behaviour and aesthetics into neighbourly relations and everyday material practices. If we focus, however, on what they produced rather than what they prevented, there is same evidence that the ZhEK and *domkom* together provided the glue to bind individuals or households together into a community¹⁴⁴. To whatever limited extent, they also represented an element of local initiative, “people power”, and “socialist democracy” in practice. Neighbourhoods may never, in the end, have turned into perfectly functioning enclaves of the new communist society, as envisaged by party ideologues. But the activities of the individuals and organizations involved in neighbourhood relations in this period were driven by their own commitment to building utopia in the back yard.

Summary

In the Khrushchev-era Soviet Union, domestic space and home life became a locus of intensive public attention. This focused in part on furnishing people’s material needs: providing them with housing through the mass construction of standard blocks of small, one-family apartments in new microregions that mushroomed on the edges of Soviet cities in the late 1950s. But it also included concern with the quality of life and social relations in these residential spaces; and with home and neighbourhood as the nursery of the new communist society. No less than the workplace, the place of residence – apartment, *dvor*, neighbourhood – was the primary space where becoming a communist person began, an enclave within which to practice, on a small scale, living in the communist way. Residential neighbourhoods were to become enclaves of perfection, where the exemplary social relations of ‘socialist community’ [*obshchezhitie*], which would in future characterize communist society as a whole, were already practiced in microcosm. A close link was assumed between the ordering of space and the organization of people. The chapter examines the most local level of government, that of housing management, and the role of two linked bodies which were together charged with bringing about the communist way of life in the early 1960s: one a professional administration, the housing management office or ZhEK; the other representing citizens, a voluntary, elected ‘social’ organization, the house committee or *domkom*. It considers the ZhEK and *domkom*’s notorious role in maintaining order – moral and material – their invasiveness in people’s domestic lives, and role in subjection and keeping tabs on people. It balances this aspect, however, by attending to what these organizations enabled and produced. The chapter argues that they

¹⁴⁴ Even allowing for an element of nostalgia, this emerges strongly from oral history interviews conducted for “Everyday Aesthetics in the Modern Soviet Flat”.

played a vital function in simply making everyday life liveable and community possible, providing the cement that kept Soviet society together at a time of rapid modernization, urbanization and dislocation in people's way of life. Being an ear on the ground, the *domkom*, in particular, was not only a means of surveillance but was responsive to pressure from below and attended to the minutiae of life that were neglected by hypercentralized planning. Moreover, if only for a short period ca. 1959–1962, they were driven by a commitment to building utopia in the back yard and there is some evidence that residents rallied around them and the tasks of building community in the new neighbourhoods.



