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The Experience of the Place. How Territory Image Can Help in Studying Cross-Ethnical Urban Communities

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Abstract. This article seeks to answer the question of whether the reconstruction of proper for citizens place image and place experience can work in the study of a city as a cross-ethnic community. Relying on Z. Bauman's understanding of a city, statistical data, and empirical research of Novosibirsk, the author proves that the outsider cultural groups in a modern city carries both a development potential for itself and its localised spaces and communities, as well as the risks of public opinion shift, defined by E. V. Tyrykanova as the new xenophobia. The theoretical and empirical material shows that using the image and experience of place can be perspective in assessing the state of cross-ethnic relations in localised city spaces and integration of outsider cultural groups into urban communities. This article confirms that a method of group social mapping (even in its preliminary form) can be a useful tool of data gathering and analysis. Its employment allows to understand the peculiarities of the city's image construction by outsider ethnic groups. In addition, the author has established that the constructed image does not rely on universal cultural symbols adopted by the city dwellers, but on the symbols that reflect diaspora's interests and values. In conclusion, there is a proved connection between the weak "imagining" of a place and a weak access to it, which, in turn, acts as a barrier to associating new citizens with local places and community. Moreover, the members of new diasporas are more likely to adapt to their urban surroundings rather than to the community, which can be seen as the first step towards their integration into the city's space.

Keywords: city, local space, urban community, cross-ethnic community, space image, space experience, territory image, group social mapping, map, diaspora.

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If our urban landscape was imagined and made,
then it can be imagined differently and redone.

D. Harvey

INTRODUCTION

Being a dense and complex area, the modern city is filled with various social relations, tensions and dramatic changes. Their significance for social development is so great that E. Soja, following H. Lefebvre, concluded: human society and, in fact, all forms of social life arise, develop and change in the materially real and socially imagined context of the cities [12, p. 133].

One of the most important fundamental differences between a modern city and a premodern one is inherent alienation within its inhabitants. It is expressed, according to Z. Bauman's figurative remark, in the abundance of "permanent strangers" and those with no permanent bonds who stay close to each other, continually interacting and yet remaining strangers. It is their presence that creates a favorable city environment for inventions and innovations, reflexivity and self-criticism, dissatisfaction, disagreement and striving for the future [1, p. 26-27], but at the same time it makes the city a "dumping side for anxieties and apprehensions generated by globally induced uncertainty and ambiguity" [1, p. 52].

However, having a powerful segmenting and differentiating effect and being filled with contradictions in the course of the struggle "for meanings and identities" between the global and the local, the city retains its stability. It simultaneously remains a space of diverse local networks and local meanings thereby forming a sense of belonging even among strangers, creating an indirect connection between them, uniting them not only with space, but also, paradoxically, communal habitat.

Being a part of the lived space of any citizen, even those who consider themselves alien to the dominating urban culture, living communities are carefully woven into the social fabric of the city, directly or indirectly affecting it. Acting as the place of residence of an individual, such community participates in one's being, occupies a place in the reality one constructs forcing him/her to be aware of and experience it. The essence of this connection between the social and physical space of the city was well formulated by Henri Lefebvre: social relations remain abstract and unrealized until they get a concrete expression and fit materially and symbolically into the inhabited space [cited by: 12, p. 133].

Therefore, internalizing reality, an individual is forced one way or another to gradually and selectively assimilate the symbolic images and values, norms, "intersubjective" beliefs and values inherent in the community and externalize them in private and public activities. This process of continuous changes can be perceived only through the understanding of the individual's image of a place as well as studying the experience of the place. We are talking about "local practices" placed in a specific socio-cultural and spatial context in which this image is formed.

The study of the image of the place is of particular importance and interest when it comes to "new" city dwellers—representatives of foreign cultural groups. Their

presence makes the city community cosmopolitan. Being those “outsiders” as in Z. Bauman, they bring different cultural traditions and other social practices to the modern city creatively processing and influencing the symbolic and normative culture of the city and community. Due to the innovative potential, their presence in the city simultaneously increases the insecurity and uncertainty inherent in the community of “strangers” and the risks of this insecurity spilling out into the city space through hostility, spontaneous aggression, and conflicts. However, if city dwellers see each other in the streets, talk with each other, establish cooperation, and work out living-together “rules”, this “local preparation” reduces anxiety and fear at a more global, civilizational, level [1, p. 52].

To get a little closer to the understanding of how foreign culture and duration of staying at a place affect the perception of the city and the community, how involvement in social practices of the city is connected with shaping the territory’s image, we conducted empirical research in the city of Novosibirsk in 2016/17 within the bigger studies of the inter-ethnic character of the urban community.

NOVOSIBIRSK INTERETHNIC COMMUNITY: TOUCHES TO THE PORTRAIT

Exploring the city, one needs to recognize that ethnicity as a property of community is not the only parameter of the urban space and community analysis. However, in certain cases it can be the main one. Its main difference from other diagnostic criteria of the urban relations and environment is its continuously changing weight in the confrontation between the local and the global. Ethnicity as a fundamental feature of the local is characterized by belonging to a group that is identified by both the in-groupers and the outsiders [2, p. 11]. Therefore, ethnicity has consistently acted as one of the most important components for the self-identification of communities and marking of cultural borders. This is of particular importance today, when polyethnicity becomes an objective characteristic of any city. In the case when ethnic identification manifests itself not only at the individual but also group level, it makes sense to talk about the presence of inter-ethnic communities in the city. The city can be considered an inter-ethnic community if its ethnic communities reached the most developed “advanced” form. Such community is characterized by spatial integrity due to the presence of ethnic groups capable of self-organization and socio-territorial identification. An important feature is the nature of inter-ethnic interaction. Yu. V. Popkova and E. A. Tyurgashev’s definition of an inter-ethnic community fits to this context: “This is a historically established socio-anthropological community of interacting ethnic groups occupying certain social niches (same-type positions, roles, and places)” [9, p. 8].

From this point of view, Novosibirsk, despite its high ethnic homogeneity (86.2% of the population identify themselves as Russians) [7], can be viewed as an emerging, but still differentiated, inter-ethnic community with its own specifics.

Being a large center of regional importance, the city of Novosibirsk (its population stood at 1,619,826 people by estimate as of 1 January, 2018) demonstrates high migration dynamics. Over the previous decade, it first witnessed active migration

which began to slow down after 2013. The decline was particularly obvious in 2017. At the beginning of 2018, Novosibirsk had the lowest migration rate since 2007: +8,447 people. The intraregional migration rate was especially low (-1,338 people).

In the face of a small Russian interregional migration increase (+1,616 people), the growing migration flow from the CIS countries (+8,691 people) looks unusually high. Although it corresponds to the long-term trends, in combination with the falling figures for other indicators, this leads to a change in the share of migrants from the CIS countries in the overall structure of migration. In 2006, their share was 11.8% of the total immigrant flow; in 2017 it was already 34.5% (2016—31%). The counter flow to the CIS countries in 2017 amounted to 51.5% only of all the emigrants. This suggests that some of the incomers use Novosibirsk as a transit point or become included into the already existing ethnic communities. Obviously, in the coming years, the ethnicity factor will manifest itself more actively in Novosibirsk, especially with the increasing outflow of migrants [7].

The transformation of the city's ethnic picture is influenced both by quantitative and qualitative composition of the arriving foreign cultural groups. Ethnocultural groups from the Central Asia, Caucasus, and Asia-Pacific region dominate among the immigrants.

The studies conducted under the supervision and with the participation of the author of the article in 2014–2016¹ suggest that during active migration the distribution of ethnic groups in a large city is uneven. They mainly concentrate on the periphery of the city, in those areas where large regional markets are located. They create local centers of tension between the migrants and the local population exacerbating the inter- and intra-diaspora competitive interactions [8].

In general, our results agree with E. V. Tyuryukanova's conclusions about a different nature of the tension in the host community of the modern Russian city. She defined it as "new xenophobia". Its source is not so much the typical problems of the material resource and power distribution (which manifest themselves, for example, in permanent inter- and intra-diaspora territorial disputes, still active in the city), but rather in the cultural gap between the local population and the incom-

¹ The researches were carried out in the framework of two projects. The first project: *Interethnic tensions and conflicts in the city of Novosibirsk* (2014–2015) was commissioned by the Mayor of Novosibirsk (7 focus groups; it was used the method of large-scale social mapping, with the leaders of national-cultural autonomies (NCAs) of Central Asia and the Caucasus, as well as representatives of local authorities—the bodies whose duties include control over the ethno-social situation in the territory). The second project: № 16-03-00144 RFBR (RHNF) *Socio-cultural monitoring of interethnic community: building a system of indicators and its approbation in the municipal administration of the city of Novosibirsk* (headed by Yu. V. Popkov) (6 group interviews with the method of draft social mapping among the authoritative representatives of diasporas and local residents living in the places of high concentration of representatives of Central Asia and the Caucasus, 48 expert interviews).

ing cultural groups [13]. Expectedly, the highest level of interethnic tensions and conflicts was recorded in the local communities of the “new strangers”—residents of the newly built residential areas with limited social resources (schools, kindergartens, and outpatient clinics, etc.). These attract new socially and economically active layers of population. They usually have no previous experience of cross-cultural interactions on a daily basis. Here what Z. Bauman called mixophilia and mixophobia¹ manifest themselves in the most bizarre form when the eternal, albeit unconscious fear of the unknown is looking for an outlet [1, p. 43].

At the same time, the city is facing a gradual emergence of new diaspora communities, mainly people from Central Asia. These communities are characterized by heterogeneity, differentiation not only according to ethnic, but also microregional, generational, and economic characteristics; and such structuring affects both intra- and inter-diaspora relations [11].

THE IMAGE OF A PLACE AS A CITY DWELLER'S LIVING SPACE — A DIAGNOSTIC COMPONENT FOR THE INTERETHNIC COMMUNITY

In these circumstances, an important sign of the formation of both local interethnic communities and the urban interethnic community is the acceptance of the discourse of ethnicity by their residents. If ethnicity as a living space component for the locals becomes a natural part of their local or urban landscape, we can speak of an established community. If the factor of ethnicity is rather problematic, the community is in the early phase of formation. Both community statuses are always unstable and will change depending on a whole set of socio-cultural, socio-economic, and political factors at the local, regional or federal level.

In this regard, a periodic analysis of the image of the living space, the space of a localized community, transmitted by people of different ethnicities, can help to investigate this process. Let us appeal to some theory.

In itself, the image study today is a part of spatial research, especially in its postmodern version. There are two traditions of such analysis.

The first belongs to the tradition of spatial research developed in French-European geography, anthropology, and sociology. It is rooted in the regional studies of the place and tensions caused by the mutual influence of people and their environment founded by Paul Vidal de la Blache's geography and in the anthropology of the 1980s influenced by J. Derrida and R. Barth. There was a growing interest in visuality as a primary measure of social reality. This tradition gave birth to the currently popular concept of ‘living space’ and analysis of its components: living space (territory, activity zones), social space and values associated with them [15,

¹ By these terms, Z. Bauman refers to the concept or rejection of the diversity (mixing) of human types and lifestyles found on the streets and in residential areas of modern cities. If mixophilia presupposes accepting differences, otherness, and multilingualism, then mixophobia implies a focus on the similarity, “such as they”, local communication and, as a consequence, segregation.

p. 130]. From the point of view of its theorists, a place can “explicitly exist only in the discourse of its inhabitants and the rhetoric that produces it” [17; 18, p. 3]; but it is born in the situational real practice. It is practice that creates the image of a place from the experience of a place [22].

The second theory is the American tradition of a place analysis. It was formed as a response to the social challenges that required solution to social-design problems. It was influenced by the Chicago school of the 1920s, spatial research and mapping by S. Milgram and K. Lynch in the 1960s with their concept of the role of the individual in “image formation”, and P. Gould and R. White in the 1970s – 1980s. Within this tradition, much has been done to analyze the place as a socially constructed understanding of the spatial parameters of relationships and identification: commonness of place, sense of place, place of identification, and place of dependence, etc. In this tradition, the sense of place arises in the dialectic of the quality of place and the attitude of people to places [23]. Therefore, the active participation of residents depends not only on their socio-demographic characteristics, but also on the general perception of the place. The sense of place consists of cognitive, affective and motivational components: identification with place, dependence on place and attachment to place [16, 19, 10] can be both unconscious and future-oriented if individuals or groups have practical goals [21].

The experience gained in the above-described traditions shows that the analysis of the image of a territory can sometimes be independent, but it can also become part of a more extensive study of the socio-territorial space, its living communities and meanings. In this case, researchers turn to the analysis of four types of factors: the interpretation of the image of a place, the analysis of local practices of social participation, spatial activity and demographic background [16, p. 116].

In our case, considering the above-mentioned theoretical background, we will focus on the analysis of social maps and the accompanying discussion of several parameters that may be relevant to the analysis of the image of the territory in the context of ethnicity:

1. Imaginability (K. Lynch, M. de Soreto, A. Lefebvre), representability (S. Milgram) of space, its boundaries and information density. It is important to understand what “holds” the space and constitutes its stable symbolic core, around which a settlement and the whole community is organized and whether it contains iconic images [5, p. 142].
2. Experience of the place. How familiar are the residents with the public space? Is it associated with the personal positive and negative practices of the group mapping participants?
3. Grouping [3, p. 100]. Awareness of oneself as a group in relation to “others”. Identification of the session participants with the local community.
4. Identification with the place. The feeling of being at home. Identification with one’s dwelling place: “Comfortable, familiar, and really mine” [1, p. 113].

JOINT SOCIAL MAPPING AS A METHOD OF STUDYING THE IMAGE OF A TERRITORY AND COMMUNITY

The method of joint social mapping is a tool of the image research in our research [4].

For more than a century, mapping has been used to understand urbanism and inequality, processes of the changing urban environment, spatial aspects of grouping, and the nature of the social life of various groups, including marginal.

Since the 1960s, various mapping methods have been used to deconstruct the existing images of space, collecting both visual and narrative material. A city map can be built both by analyzing individual images of the urban environment through the isolation and comprehension of mental maps as did K. Lynch, S. Milgram, P. Gould and R. White, and/or through the reconstruction and analysis of the zones of collective consent—conventional social images of the city—with the help of a group interview [4].

The method of joint social mapping is a method of group interviews with a procedure for constructing a map aimed at collecting socio-spatial data about the community and territory in order to diagnose the situation and involve the participants in the territorial development projects. It is based on the social constructionist methodology, the methodology of action research (AR), and participatory action research (PAR). Depending on the tasks, the joint mapping procedure is a focus group or workshop. Describing their living space, residents tell about the territory, routes, favorite places, and possible threats, people living there, their daily interactions, existing traditions of joint activities; they also share their observations and personal stories.

For this study, its most arbitrary option was chosen: sketch mapping. In this case, territorial space is portrayed by informants arbitrarily, from memory, from scratch, which expands the grounds for analysis. Cartographic symbols are introduced by agreement between the participants with the help of a specialist—researcher or designer. In our case, researchers use interpretive information, which represents a unique view of the territory, community, and interethnic relations constructed by the group while map creating.

THE IMAGE OF THE TERRITORY AND COMMUNITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ETHNICITY: RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

The study of the image of localized territories by the method of joint social mapping was undertaken in Novosibirsk in 2016—early 2017.

Several localized territories and representatives of various types of communities were chosen as an empirical object of research. We selected local residents representing different types of local territories and most culturally diverse communities:

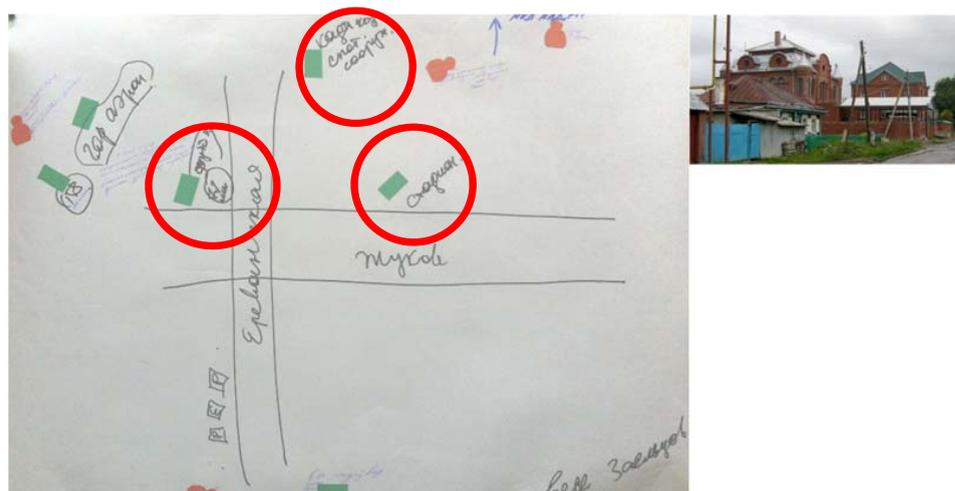
1. The *Rastochka* residential area is an old depressive territory with a high crime rate and original architecture (Florentine Renaissance), which was formed in the late 1940s—early 1950s. It is the place of residence of the people historically associated with *Tyazhstankogidropress* industrial enterprise. The session participants included active local residents, members of

3. The residential area *MZhK*. The session participants were local residents— influential representatives of the Kyrgyz diaspora (Fig. 3).
4. The district of Zhukovsky Street, Yerevanskaya Street, and the territory of the private housing and low-rise buildings. Since the late 1980s, it has been actively settled by the Yezidi ethnic group, which was new to the city. The session participants included local residents, influential representatives of the Yezidi diaspora (Fig. 4).

Fig. 3. The *MZhK* residential area. Kyrgyz community living space



Fig. 4. St. Zhukovskiy — Erevanskaya zone. Yazidis' living space



The study resulted in the participants' maps of territories and communities shown above (Fig. 1-4). Their analysis was carried out in accordance with the grounds outlined above. Due to length restrictions, its results will be shown only selectively.

The maps demonstrated that the boundaries of the territory identified as "one's own" are only determined for the historically formed "old" territory and they coincide with the generally accepted and well-established borders (*Rastochka* residential area (Fig. 1)). In all the other cases, they are more or less determined by personal experience and preferences of the participants. The nature of the boundaries is supported by the imaginability of the territory. Structurally, roads define the boundaries or limit the lived space on all the maps. However, if we compare the maps, only the old district map possesses information density and iconic images (well-known and recognized objects according to A. Lefebvre) (see *The Efremov community center* and *The Efremov factory* marked with red circles) (Fig. 1).

The session participants constructed an image of the community of the old microdistrict excluding residents of new high-rise buildings or foreign migrants whose number is rapidly increasing. Traces of their presence appeared on the map after direct questions from the moderator. In the future, all currently "invisible strangers" with the right to a territory may become "outsiders" for the indigenous population, especially if they manifest their presence through new norms, rules, and infrastructural changes.

Nevertheless, at present, the stylistic unity of the place ensures the imaginability of the place ("it was a fabulous town"). It is saturated with unique though decaying objects and preserved only in the mind of its indigenous people. One of the imaginability sources is that the mapping session participants have a lot of experience of the place. Despite the prevailing myths about it being a "gangster" neighborhood, their long-term active social participation contributes to its positive perception. Thus, they repaint the socially negative reality with bright colors of the territory landlords/owners ("not quite trouble-free", "it's dangerous along the borders, but it's not dangerous in *Rastochka* itself"). This promotes a greater sense of security.

Novosibirsk residents typically demonstrate a disturbing emotional reaction to other cultures. However, our participants show some unique practices of sustainable interaction with migrants which is not observed in the new districts. At that, they can also co-exist without interacting. The vastness of the territory and the convenience of its organization significantly contribute to the "cross-cultural world" when spatial distance between groups helps to eliminate or avoid multiple daily conflicts.

Unlike the old district, in the "new" *MZhK* microdistrict there are either no architectural "icons" or they are partly replaced by natural ones. Discursive evidence of this is the value the residents attach to small natural objects and their desire to participate in the construction and reconstruction of garden squares. In spite of the residential density, which substantially exceeds the *Rastochka*, the sites important for the residents are located along the main streets. The space away from them remains empty and poorly developed (Fig. 2). In this case, the limited space leads

to a greater intensity of contacts that occur on highways and in the back yards, children's play and sports grounds.

Despite the multiethnic population composition, the main marker of successful intercultural interactions for "local Russians" is relations with the Kyrgyz and, despite their small number, with the Kazakhs. Other immigrants from Central Asia remain "invisible strangers" for the local residents. We observed coincidence of the mapped resources (to a lesser degree), risks and threats (to a greater degree) by the "local Russians" and "local Kyrgyz". This relative congruence of the images is an indirect sign of a positive trend in the interethnic interactions.

At that, the local Kyrgyz residents' map (Fig. 3) shows a significantly larger utilized space as compared to the map drawn by the local "Russians".

One of the obvious reasons for this is the size of the settlements of the Kyrgyz diaspora recruited for mapping. Another reason is connected with the resource demand. The main sites marked on the map are schools—the most significant resource for an ethnic group choosing life in the city (Fig. 3, the location of schools on the map is marked with red circles). Their significance is so high that all the group mapping participants were able to comment on the advantages and quality of education in each of the schools. A similar situation is observed on the map depicted by the Yezidi diaspora (Fig. 4). In this case, we are talking about the significance of school stadiums as a resource meeting the cultural values and interests of this ethnic group.

Both maps show low information density of the image of the territory, which is predominantly defined by communal objects and the ways leading to them. It also testifies the weak social development of the territory and community, insufficient experience of the place which lacks interaction within the community. Another factor affecting the completeness of the constructed image is the ability of the group to come to an agreement about the image. Ethnocultural groups had certain difficulties with this. The reasons for this need to be discussed; but perhaps it is the lack of experience of group discussion on the city and community. It seems that the problems of communication and rationalization of the image are compensated by the manifestation of groupness in the revealed interests and values.

The places indicated on the map are at the same time points of the ethnocultural group's entry into the urban community. However, they are clearly not enough to integrate into it or to create a sense of place. In this regard, new maps will be able to show progress.

CONCLUSION

The imaginability of a place, the presence of its image as a property of a physical object to evoke a stable bright image in an observer is one of the significant characteristics of the developed space. However, it must be associated not only with the nature of the place under study, but also with the specifics of the user, value systems, practical interests and preferences, in particular, involvement and the nature of their development of the environment. In this regard, the character of the constructed image gives significant information about the place, and the carrier of

the image which opens up new prospects for such studies. The analysis of the image shows that the experience of the place, the availability of the opportunity and practice of utilizing the social space is an important source of its design, as well as the construction of the associated sense of place, social and territorial identity. This is confirmed by the discovered relationship between the information density, density of meanings embedded in the image of space, everyday social practices associated with them, activity and interaction within the lived space as well as a sense of security, which, in turn, reduces uncertainty and fear of the “outsiders”.

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