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The Problem of Hyper-regulation in the Cities of Eastern Russia: The Case of Khabarovsk

ABSTRACT. The relevance of this study stems from the socio-spatial transformations occurring in modern Russian cities-changes particularly evident in the cities of the Russian Far East. Shifts in the urban environment that began in the post-Soviet period have led not only to the restructuring of urban space but also to transformations in how different social groups interact and how local communities form. This study aims to identify the specific characteristics of social community formation in Russian Far East cities, using Khabarovsk as a case study. The research employs an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on urban sociology, social anthropology, urban studies, and spatial analysis. This approach allows the city to be viewed not merely as a collection of territorial and administrative entities, but as a space defined by everyday practices, social interactions, informal ties, and varying modes of control. The study examines a distinct social phenomenon termed the "invisible city." This refers primarily to the former "private sector" areas of Soviet cities that have survived post-Soviet transformation. Unlike the "visible city" - which operates under strict control -these areas experience a much lower density of oversight. It is precisely this condition that enables the formation of stable communities within this space that remains "invisible" to the authorities. The article proposes a classification of these communities and identifies the ways in which they interact with the "visible city." The findings can assist local government bodies and professionals in urban planning and policy as they develop spatial development strategies, urban improvement and renewal programs, and decisions regarding the transformation of neighborhoods characterized by historically established individual housing. Taking into account the specific nature of these existing local communities can help mitigate social risks associated with urban transformation and foster more effective interaction between administrative bodies and local residents.

KEYWORDS: density, social emptiness, invisibility, costs of control, urban space, community, togetherness.

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Ресейдің Шығысындағы қалалық кеңістікті гиперреттеу мәселесі: Хабаровск қаласы мысалында

АҢДАТПА. Бұл зерттеудің өзектілігі қазіргі Ресей қалаларында, әсіресе Ресейдің Қиыр Шығыс қалаларында байқалатын әлеуметтік-кеңістіктік өзгерістерден туындайды. Кеңестік дәуірден кейінгі кезеңде басталған қалалық ортадағы өзгерістер қалалардың кеңістіктік құрылымының өзгеруіне ғана емес, сонымен қатар әртүрлі әлеуметтік топтар арасындағы өзара әрекеттесу тәсілдерінің қайта құрылуына және жергілікті қауымдастықтардың қалыптасуына әкелді. Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – Хабаровскті мысал ретінде пайдалана отырып, Ресейдің Қиыр Шығыс қалаларындағы әлеуметтік қауымдастықтардың қалыптасу ерекшеліктерін анықтау. Зерттеудің әдіснамалық негізі қалалық әлеуметтануды, әлеуметтік антропологияны, қалатануды және кеңістіктік талдауды қамтитын қалалық кеңістікті зерттеуге пәнаралық тәсіл болып табылады. Бұл тәсіл қаланы тек аумақтық және әкімшілік құрылымдар жиынтығы ретінде ғана емес, сонымен қатар күнделікті тәжірибелердің, әлеуметтік өзара әрекеттесудің, бейресми байланыстардың және әртүрлі басқару режимдерінің кеңістігі ретінде қарастыруға мүмкіндік береді. Бұл зерттеу «көрінбейтін қала» деп аталатын нақты әлеуметтік құбылысты зерттейді. Бұл құбылыс, ең алдымен, кеңестік дәуірден кейінгі трансформациядан өткен кеңестік қалалардың бұрынғы «жеке секторына» қатысты. Қазіргі уақытта қатаң бақылауда болатын «көрінетін қаладан» айырмашылығы, мұндағы бақылау тығыздығы әлдеқайда төмен. Міне, сондықтан да билік үшін «көрінбейтін» қалада тұрақты қауымдастықтар қалыптасуда. Бұл мақалада осы қауымдастықтардың жіктелуі ұсынылады және олардың «көрінетін қаламен» қарым-қатынас нысандары анықталады. Алынған нәтижелерді жергілікті басқару органдары мен қала құрылысы және саясат мамандары кеңістіктік даму стратегияларын, көгалдандыру және жаңарту бағдарламаларын әзірлеуде, сондай-ақ тарихи қалыптасқан жеке тұрғын үй құрылысы бар аумақтарды трансформациялауға қатысты шешімдер қабылдауда пайдалана алады. Қолданыстағы жергілікті қауымдастықтардың ерекшеліктерін ескеру қалалық ортаның т Шығыс Ресей қалаларындағы гиперрегуляция мәселесі: Хабаровск мысалындарансформациясымен байланысты әлеуметтік тәуекелдерді азайтуға және мемлекеттік органдар мен жергілікті тұрғындар арасындағы тиімдірек өзара әрекеттесуді ілгерілетуге көмектеседі.

ТҮЙІН СӨЗДЕР: тығыздық, әлеуметтік бостық, көрінбеушілік, бақылау шығындары, қалалық кеңістік, қауымдастық, бірлік.

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ҚАРЖЫЛАНДЫРУ ЖӘНЕ АЛҒЫС: Бұл мақала Ресей Федерациясының Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігінің қолдауымен № FEME-2022-0004 жобасы аясында дайындалды.

ЖАСАНДЫ ИНТЕЛЛЕКТ ТЕХНОЛОГИЯЛАРЫН ПАЙДАЛАНУ ТУРАЛЫ ХАБАРЛАМА: Автор(лар) осы қолжазбаны дайындау кезінде әдебиетті өңдеу және іздеу мақсатында генеративті жасанды интеллект технологиялары (HTTPS://CHATGPT.COM) пайдаланылғанын мәлімдейді. Ұсынылған материалдың нақтылығы, толықтығы және ғылыми стандарттарға сәйкестігі үшін толық жауапкершілік авторларға жүктеледі.

ДӘЙЕКСӨЗ ҮШІН: Бляхер, Л.Е. (2026). Ресейдің Шығысындағы қалалық кеңістікті гиперреттеу мәселесі: Хабаровск қаласы мысалында. *Social Sciences & Digital Humanities, 3*(3), 133–145. https://doi.org/10.51885/3107-2755_SSADH_2026_3_8

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Проблема гиперрегуляции в городах Востока России: на примере Хабаровска

АННОТАЦИЯ. Актуальность исследования обусловлена происходящими в современных российских городах социально-пространственными трансформациями, которые особенно заметны в городах Дальнего Востока России. Изменения городской среды, начавшиеся в постсоветский период, привели не только к преобразованию пространственной структуры городов, но и к трансформации способов взаимодействия между различными социальными группами и формирования локальных сообществ. Целью настоящего исследования является выявление особенностей формирования социальных общностей в городах Дальнего Востока России на примере города Хабаровска. Методологической основой исследования стал междисциплинарный подход к изучению городского пространства для изучения социологии города, социальной антропологии, урбанистики и пространственного анализа. Такой подход позволил рассматривать город не только как совокупность территориальных и административных объектов, но и как пространство повседневных практик, социальных взаимодействий, неформальных связей и различных режимов контроля. Исследуется особый социальный феномен, обозначенный в работе термином «невидимый город». Это, прежде всего, бывший «частный сектор» советских городов, переживший постсоветскую трансформацию. В отличие от «видимого города», существующего сегодня в режиме жесткого контроля, здесь плотность контроля гораздо ниже. Именно благодаря этому в «невидимом» для власти городе формируются устойчивые сообщества. В статье предлагается классификация этих сообществ, выявляются формы их взаимосвязи с «видимым городом». Полученные результаты могут быть использованы органами местного самоуправления и специалистами в сфере градостроительства и городской политики при разработке стратегий пространственного развития, программ благоустройства и реновации территорий, а также при принятии решений, затрагивающих преобразование районов с исторически сложившейся индивидуальной жилой застройкой. Учет особенностей существующих локальных сообществ может способствовать снижению социальных рисков, связанных с трансформацией городской среды, и более эффективному взаимодействию между органами управления и местными жителями.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: плотность, социальная пустота, невидимость, издержки контроля, городское пространство, сообщество, совместность.

КОНФЛИКТ ИНТЕРЕСОВ: Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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УВЕДОМЛЕНИЕ ОБ ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИИ ТЕХНОЛОГИЙ ИСКУССТВЕННОГО ИНТЕЛЛЕКТА: Автор(ы) заявляют, что при подготовке данной рукописи были использованы технологии генеративного искусственного интеллекта (HTTPS://CHATGPT.COM) с целью обработки и поиска литературы. Ответственность за точность, полноту и соответствие научным стандартам всего представленного материала полностью возложена на авторов.

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INTRODUCTION

The relevance of this study stems from the socio-spatial transformations taking place in contemporary Russian cities, which are particularly pronounced in the cities of the Russian Far East. Changes in the urban environment that began during the post-Soviet period have affected not only the spatial structure of cities but also the ways in which different social groups interact, and local communities emerge and develop.

In this context, particular attention should be paid to former low-rise private housing areas that have remained embedded within the contemporary urban fabric. Unlike urban spaces characterized by a high degree of institutional and administrative control, these areas tend to retain greater autonomy and rely on less formalized mechanisms for regulating everyday life (Blyakher & Kovalevsky, 2021). This creates conditions conducive to the development of enduring horizontal ties, localized social practices, and communities that remain largely overlooked in official representations of urban structure.

The study of the phenomenon referred to here as the "invisible city" makes it possible to broaden our understanding of processes of social self-organization in contemporary urban settings and to identify the mechanisms through which local communities emerge amid transformations of the urban environment. The case of Khabarovsk is particularly instructive in this regard, as it allows for an examination of how historically established private housing areas adapt to contemporary conditions, what types of social communities develop within them, and how these communities interact with the institutionalized space of the "visible city."

Therefore, lies in the need for a more comprehensive examination of the relationship between urban spatial organization and the formation of social communities, as well as in the limited scholarly attention devoted to informal forms of social organization within the post-Soviet urban space of the Russian Far East.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last several decades, urban development in Russia has increasingly become a multidimensional field of professional and public intervention. Contemporary urban transformation involves not only architects and planners, but also sociologists, geographers, economists, public administrators, researchers from different academic traditions, and residents themselves. The growing diversity of actors involved in shaping the urban environment might reasonably be expected to have generated a more differentiated understanding of the Russian city as a specific social and spatial phenomenon. Indeed, since the beginning of the 2000s, Russian scholarship has produced methodological proposals for studying urban development (Vagin et al., 2000), a growing body of empirical research focused on cities and urban processes (Glazychev, 2005), and subsequent critical reflections on the conceptual foundations of urban studies (Trubina, 2011).

Nevertheless, a considerable part of this literature continues to rely on an implicit assumption that urban space can be interpreted through a relatively universal set of categories and normative standards. Such an approach tends to obscure the internal differentiation of the city and underestimates the fact that urban space is produced through interactions, negotiations, conflicts, and unequal access to resources. From this perspective, the city can also be understood as the outcome of an ongoing "struggle for the city" (Harvey, 2003), in which different groups seek to define legitimate forms of spatial organization and appropriate ways of using urban territory. The problem with universalizing models is therefore not simply that they may fail to describe urban environments accurately. More fundamentally, they can render certain forms of urban life analytically invisible because these forms do not correspond to the spatial, institutional, and visual characteristics associated with the normative model of the city.

This issue becomes particularly evident when externally developed urban policies and planning interventions are applied to existing territories. Reform-oriented actors often approach the city as a formally structured object that can be reorganized through a relatively standardized set of instruments. Yet the administrative and morphological boundaries of the officially recognized city do not necessarily coincide with the boundaries of everyday social life. Significant parts of the urban

territory may remain weakly represented in planning documents, statistical classifications, public discourse, or urban policy. These spaces should not necessarily be interpreted as peripheral anomalies. Rather, they may constitute persistent and socially meaningful forms of urban organization that operate according to principles different from those embedded in conventional planning frameworks.

Research addressing such territories in Russia has generally remained fragmented and case-specific. Existing studies have examined, among other phenomena, private housing areas (Grigorichev, 2019), population groups that remain poorly represented in official statistics (Mkrtchyan, 2012), and informal or unconventional everyday practices (Seleev & Pavlov, 2016). Although these studies reveal important dimensions of urban diversity, they are frequently approached as investigations of marginality or exceptionality. As a result, the phenomena under consideration are often treated as deviations from an assumed urban norm rather than as integral components of the city's social and spatial structure.

The distinction between the normative and the existing city can be conceptualized as a division between two analytical layers. The first corresponds to the image of the "universal city," constructed through established planning principles, institutional standards, and recognizable indicators of urbanity (Vagin et al., 2000; Glazychev, 2005). The second consists of those territories and forms of social organization that cannot be readily incorporated into this model. The normative city is consequently not identical to the empirical city. It represents an idealized configuration against which existing urban environments are evaluated and classified (Glazychev, 2011). Once such a model becomes the implicit benchmark, the analytical task tends to shift from understanding urban diversity toward identifying deviations from the prescribed standard and determining how these deviations can be corrected.

This perspective has significant implications for contemporary urban improvement policies. The territories selected for intervention are far from homogeneous. Some may originally have been intended to develop according to conventional urban models but followed a different trajectory. Others were organized from the outset according to alternative principles of settlement and land use. Examples include Soviet-era private housing districts, contemporary cottage settlements, suburban residential areas, and other forms of low-rise or individually organized development. Their spatial characteristics cannot be fully understood through the absence of conventional urban markers alone. They are also shaped by the communities that inhabit them and by accumulated practices of adaptation, maintenance, interaction, and collective use.

Residents of such territories are not merely passive recipients of planning decisions. Through everyday activities, informal agreements, mutual assistance, and collective responses to local problems, they participate in the continuous production of their surroundings (Kovalevsky & Ivanova, 2021). Over time, these practices may generate relatively stable social relations, locally shared norms, and specific understandings of what constitutes a safe, convenient, familiar, or desirable environment. The resulting urban space is therefore not simply an unfinished version of a standardized city. It may represent a different mode of urban organization; one whose internal logic becomes difficult to recognize when assessed exclusively through conventional planning criteria.

This distinction is particularly important in the context of urban improvement programs. When intervention is guided by a standardized understanding of urban quality, existing communities may be reduced to the status of beneficiaries or consumers of externally designed improvements. Their collective interests established patterns of spatial use, and locally developed forms of organization can consequently remain outside the analytical framework of the project. In this sense, the issue concerns not only the physical transformation of territory but also the question of whose knowledge, practices, and interpretations are recognized as legitimate components of urban development.

Classical and universalist approaches to urbanism tend to identify urbanity through a recognizable set of physical and functional indicators: formal street networks, standardized public spaces, visible landscaping, transport infrastructure, regulated buildings, and other material characteristics associated with the modern city. Where these indicators are absent or insufficiently expressed, an outside observer may interpret the corresponding territory as underdeveloped,

incomplete, or spatially "empty" (Filippov, 2009). Such an interpretation, however, reflects the limitations of the analytical framework rather than the actual absence of social or spatial content.

From the perspective of residents, these territories are neither socially nor morphologically empty. They contain established routines, interpersonal networks, informal institutions, memories, territorial attachments, and locally meaningful material environments. Their apparent "emptiness" is therefore relational: it emerges when a particular territory is evaluated against a normative image of urban space that privileges certain forms of visibility and organization. Recognizing this distinction makes it possible to approach the city not as a homogeneous spatial object but as a heterogeneous assemblage of overlapping social worlds, institutional arrangements, and locally specific practices.

Such a perspective provides a conceptual basis for examining the "invisible city" not as an exceptional or marginal residue of urban development, but as a constitutive dimension of the contemporary Russian city. Its relative invisibility may result less from the absence of social organization than from the limited capacity of dominant planning and analytical frameworks to register forms of urbanity that fall outside standardized models. The study of these spaces therefore requires attention not only to their physical morphology but also to the communities, everyday practices, informal networks, and institutional relationships through which they are continuously produced and reproduced.

Two distinct parts of the city emerge-parts that differ not merely from one another but are built, both architecturally and socially, according to different models. Yet, while the first (official) part appears in photographs and reports and is the subject of study and planning, the second is represented solely as a set of temporary urban planning shortcomings requiring correction, or as spaces for the city's future expansion (or "contraction"). Crucially, however, these "temporary" shortcomings are constantly reproduced even in cities that lack a historical tradition and did not originate from the merger or expansion of other types of settlements (Nelyubov, 2010). In this article, using a specific city as a case study, we aim to trace the formation of the visible and invisible spaces within domestic settlements and the interactions between the communities inhabiting them.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is grounded in an interdisciplinary approach to the study of urban space that integrates concepts from urban sociology, social anthropology, urban studies, and spatial analysis. This approach makes it possible to view the city not merely as an aggregate of territorial and administrative entities, but as a space defined by everyday practices, social interactions, informal networks, and various modes of control (Werlen, 1995).

A key analytical concept in this study is the "invisible city," defined as the set of urban areas, social practices, and communities that are underrepresented in official models of urban spatial organization and regulation. Specifically, the study focuses on areas of Khabarovsk formerly characterized by low-rise private housing; during the post-Soviet transformation, these areas developed distinctive forms of social organization and interaction with the broader urban environment. The concept of the "invisible city" serves as a research category that enables the identification of social processes often overlooked by official statistics, administrative classifications, and formal governance institutions.

The methodology of the study is based on a combination of spatial, institutional, and practice-oriented approaches. The spatial approach makes it possible to identify the territorial boundaries and patterns of localization of the "invisible city," establish its relationship with different functional zones of Khabarovsk, and trace the transformation of the urban territory during the post-Soviet period. The institutional approach is used to examine the extent and forms of presence of state and municipal authorities, public utilities, and other formal institutions within the areas under study. The practice-oriented approach focuses on residents' everyday activities, practices of mutual assistance, local communication, and informal mechanisms for regulating social relations. To empirically examine the concept of the "invisible city," the study employs a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative research methods. This methodological combination makes it possible to

examine the study areas simultaneously as spatial formations, institutionally organized environments, and settings of everyday social practices.

The first stage involves an analysis of historical, statistical, and spatial data. The study draws on state and municipal statistics, spatial planning documents, archival materials, cartographic sources, and data on the development and transformation of areas of private housing. A comparison of historical and contemporary maps makes it possible to reconstruct changes in former private-sector areas, identify transformations in their functional status, and detect persistent spatial structures that have remained relatively stable despite changes in the urban environment.

The second strand of the research focuses on the sociological and social-anthropological study of residents' everyday practices. The primary method employed is semi-structured interviewing with residents of the study areas. The interviews address such issues as length of residence, the nature of neighborhood relations, practices of mutual assistance, local identity, attitudes toward the place of residence, interactions with public authorities and municipal services, and residents' perceptions of the territorial boundaries of their neighborhood and its position within the broader urban structure.

Particular attention is paid to the networked character of social relations. The analysis considers horizontal relationships among neighbors, kinship and friendship ties, local initiatives, and forms of collective action aimed at addressing everyday and infrastructure-related problems. This approach makes it possible to move beyond an understanding of the territory solely as a physical space and to conceptualize it as a space of social relations, thereby identifying the mechanisms through which stable local communities are formed and maintained.

The third strand of the research involves an analysis of the visual and material dimensions of space. Field surveys are conducted to document patterns of development, the condition of infrastructure, the organization of streets and public spaces, elements of urban amenities, fences, retail and service facilities, and other material markers of local identity. Visual materials are treated not merely as illustrative evidence but as an independent source of empirical data (Song et al., 2024) that can reveal patterns of spatial organization, appropriation, and use.

Observation of everyday practices constitutes another important component of the research. It enables the documentation of forms of interaction among residents, patterns of street and local public-space use, characteristics of neighborhood communication, and informal ways of organizing and regulating the territory. Comparing observational data with interview findings makes it possible to identify potential discrepancies between residents' stated perceptions and their actually observed practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Imperial City. The tension between the visible component-constructed on universal principles-and the invisible one is particularly acute in the major (historical) urban centers of the former imperial periphery (Blyakher, 2015), such as those in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Russian East. The reason lies in the fact that most of them were built as "imperial cities" (the term was suggested by V.I. Dyatlov; for more details, see Blyakher & Blyakher, 2022) specific type of entity essential for an expansive empire characterized by poorly developed internal communications.

In this context, the discussion concerns not so much the special status of cities within the Holy Roman Empire as a relatively modern type of entity. The term "empire" is understood here not merely as a specific historical entity, but as a type of polity-a method of organizing a heterogeneous territorial formation linked by a "universal project." We are adopting the definition of "empire" proposed by Charles Tilly (Tilly, 1997). In his model, the imperial center serves as the source of meanings (political, social, and economic) associated with the "universal project." These meanings are transmitted to various territories, shaping them into a unified whole-an empire. However, while Tilly focuses primarily on political structuring, our interest lies in the territory itself-specifically, its heterogeneity and the mechanisms used to transmit the impulse of power across vast and diverse localities.

Unlike modern states, which presuppose spatial homogeneity within their borders (Mendelson-Shwartz & Mualam, 2024), an empire readily accommodated the relative autonomy of local areas;

control over these was delegated to local elites in exchange for complete loyalty to the imperial center. Loyalty was defined by a willingness to accept and relay the impulse of authority. Imperial cities served as the hubs for receiving, controlling, and transmitting this impulse across the territory-particularly in the cities of Russia's East, where direct control was hardly feasible.

As imperial cities, the urban centers of the eastern periphery were home to both local and "transient" imperial elites. They came into existence with a specific purpose: to transmit the impulse of authority. This impulse might take the form of an idea regarding the "proper" order-whether celestial, aligned with the objective laws of history, or mirroring the path taken by all civilized nations-or it might be a political, military, or even economic objective, such as the extraction of furs or oil from the territory to meet the central government's needs. Crucially, this impulse-be it a task or a goal-originated externally, from the center. It is precisely this impulse of authority that legitimizes both the local elites and the imperial elites residing in the region. Their presence in the territory serves the aforementioned function: to convey and implement the impulse of authority.

However, what was transmitted was not merely an impulse of authority but also a distinct "imperial" way of life, propagated by the "imperial" (newly arrived) population. This lifestyle differed from the one native to the region. The newcomers and their local assistants inhabited buildings constructed according to different-specifically imperial-models; "their" urban space was organized differently; the forms and rules of social interaction varied; and often, even the language of communication was different. The presence and dissemination of this lifestyle throughout the local community constituted yet another imperial function. This way of life was also sustained by local residents who were, in one way or another, involved in carrying out the imperial mandate-such as industrialists and merchants linked to state contracts, low-ranking local officials, and so forth.

Yet, almost immediately alongside the imperial city-with its orderly urban layout and structured arrangement of buildings and facilities-there emerged another city, one that rarely appeared in official reports. The reason for its emergence is clear: someone had to build the houses and lay out the streets where the "imperial" people would live, as well as run the shops, taverns, and inns. It was assumed that these were transient individuals who would either vanish from the city or be absorbed into its population once the construction work was complete.

Yet, by virtue of its location, the city inevitably served not only as a receiver and relay for the impulses of power but also as a distribution hub for significant resources (money, privileges, status, etc.). This made the imperial city a focal point for the local territorial community. At the same time, the objectives and interests of this community were not necessarily linked to the directives emanating from the center. Clearly, the "local" aspect of the imperial city-its population, settlement patterns, and architectural features-differed significantly from the aspects generated by the impulses of power; furthermore, the resources provided by the imperial city were often invested in a distinctly non-imperial way of life. It is precisely this sphere-and the spaces it creates-that typically remains invisible from the center, goes unrecorded, or is perceived merely as a "transitional form" destined either to be transformed into a proper imperial model or to be eliminated.

In this article, we aim to illustrate this phenomenon using the example of Khabarovsk, a city that has served for over a century as the center of a macro-region (spanning the Priamur Governor-Generalship, the Far Eastern Krai, Khabarovsk Krai, and the Far Eastern Federal District). The analysis of the "historical period" draws on memoirs, official statistical data regarding the city's demographics and the social status of its residents across various eras (sourced from the Khabarovsk Krai archives), and secondary data from published sources. Empirical material for analyzing the contemporary situation includes city master plans, urban spatial mapping, participant observation conducted by the authors in 2019–2020, and two series of unstructured interviews with residents of low-rise private housing areas and Khabarovsk city administration officials. A total of 24 unstructured interviews, including 17 interviews with residents from various parts of the city, 5 interviews with state and municipal officials, and 2 interviews with police officers.

The city and the impulse of authority in the late 19th and early 20th centuries: Khabarovsk emerged and-for the greater part of its history-developed as a military-administrative center. Its formation, like that of many major cities in the Russian East, was driven less by natural agglomeration

processes than by the administrative objectives set by the central government for this remote territory and the resources it allocated. At the same time, active settlement of the surrounding region was taking place-a region for which the city served as a conduit for the impulse of authority and the "imperial" way of life.

In this territory, a developed peasant market economy took shape-driven by factors beyond the scope of this article-giving rise to a local merchant class independent of the state treasury (Blyakher & Blyakher, 2018). For these merchants, Khabarovsk was not so much an "imperial city" as the hub of an economic region-a center for trade operations, logistics, and the like. This group of residents embodied a different lifestyle and inhabited different types of buildings (Borisova & Sternin, 1990). Yet, both groups shaped the city's character. This duality has been a feature of the urban community from the very inception of the settlement to the present day.

The emergence of Khabarovka should be understood within the broader process of Russian territorial expansion and state consolidation along the Amur frontier in the second half of the nineteenth century. In May–June 1858, a detachment of the 13th Siberian Line Battalion, acting under the authority of Nikolai N. Muravyov-Amursky, Governor-General of Eastern Siberia, established a fortified military settlement on the elevated bank of the Amur River, close to its junction with the Ussuri. The choice of location was strategically significant: the settlement provided an effective position from which the state could monitor and control extensive sections of the Amur and Ussuri territories. At this initial stage, therefore, Khabarovka was conceived primarily as an instrument of territorial control rather than as an urban settlement in the conventional sense.

The establishment of the military post was closely connected with the broader objective of consolidating Russian sovereignty over the frontier. Military security was regarded as a necessary precondition for permanent settlement, economic development, and administrative incorporation of the newly controlled territory. In this respect, the emergence of Khabarovka reflected a characteristic pattern of frontier urbanization in which military infrastructure preceded the development of civilian institutions. The settlement functioned simultaneously as a defensive position, an administrative foothold, and a base for further territorial expansion. Its early spatial organization and institutional structure were consequently determined to a considerable extent by the requirements of the military establishment.

During the first decades of its existence, military personnel remained the predominant social group among the inhabitants of Khabarovka (Chernysheva et al., 1983). By the end of the 1870s, the settlement had a population of slightly less than 3,000, with servicemen accounting for approximately half of the total. The built environment reflected this demographic and institutional composition. Most of the earliest permanent structures were associated with military administration and the accommodation of troops and their families (Kabuzan, 1985). Contemporary descriptions emphasize the distinctive appearance of the settlement, where barracks, headquarters, and residential buildings connected with the military establishment constituted the principal architectural elements. S.V. Maksimov, for example, drew attention to the specific visual character produced by the concentration of battalion facilities, large barracks, and smaller family houses (Maksimov, 1864).

A major institutional transformation occurred in 1880, when Khabarovka was granted city status and designated the administrative center of Primorskaya Oblast. This change strengthened its role within the regional system of imperial governance and stimulated further demographic growth. During the following decade, the population increased to approximately 7,000 inhabitants. Military personnel continued to constitute an important component of the urban population, but they were increasingly joined by civil servants and administrative officials. Together, these groups formed the core of what may be described as the official or "imperial" segment of the emerging city. Many officials were newcomers to the region and frequently regarded their residence in the Far East as a stage in their professional careers, associated with advancement in rank, access to new positions, or the prospect of obtaining a state pension after a prescribed period of service (Popovicheva, 2003).

At the same time, the demographic and social composition of Khabarovka was never limited to representatives of the imperial administration. Civilian residents began to appear alongside the military establishment even before the settlement formally acquired urban status. Initially, this

population included lower-ranking soldiers who, after disciplinary sanctions, remained in the settlement and performed various forms of service for the military community. Gradually, however, a substantially broader civilian milieu emerged. Merchants, shop assistants, fishermen, petty traders, artisans, construction workers, and migrant laborers became increasingly visible within the settlement's social and economic structure. Their activities introduced forms of economic exchange and everyday interaction that could not be reduced to the requirements of the military administration.

The coexistence of these different population groups was reflected directly in the spatial development of Khabarovka. The first attempts to regulate the urban territory were associated with the master plan prepared in 1864 by M.M. Lyubensky. Planned streets and formally organized building plots became the principal spatial framework for the development of the official settlement. At the same time, however, urban growth extended beyond the boundaries of the regulated plan. Informal or only partially regulated residential areas emerged alongside the planned streets, providing space for groups whose economic activities and social organization were less closely connected with state institutions.

This produced an increasingly differentiated urban landscape. The areas associated with the military and administrative establishment tended to follow a more regular spatial pattern and were increasingly marked by durable, including stone, construction. By contrast, the peripheral and informally developed areas were characterized by predominantly wooden buildings, irregular pathways, and a less standardized organization of residential space (Przhevalsky, 1870). These differences were not merely architectural. They reflected the coexistence of distinct social groups, institutional affiliations, and modes of occupying and using urban space.

Consequently, the early development of Khabarovka can be interpreted as the formation of two interconnected but structurally different urban environments. One was organized around military power, administrative authority, and the institutions of the imperial state; the other emerged from everyday economic activity, informal settlement, and local social networks. Although both were physically situated within the same settlement, they were differentiated by their institutional connections, demographic composition, patterns of land use, and forms of social interaction. This early spatial and social differentiation provides an important basis for understanding the subsequent development of Khabarovsk as a city in which formally organized and locally constituted urban spaces continued to coexist and interact.

In 1884, Khabarovsk became the center of the newly established Priamurye Governor-Generalship, and in 1893, it adopted its modern name: the city of Khabarovsk. The number of civil servants in the city increased. The very concept of the “imperial city” also evolved; while in the early years its purpose was defined primarily by military defense, the administration of a vast territory now became its central function.

This was also reflected in the city’s “official,” public face, where administrative and military structures were the most prominent features. Moreover, two-thirds of the city’s 200 buildings belonged to the military and were constructed in a distinctive, officially prescribed style that A.P. Ivanova termed “barracks architecture” (Ivanova, 2013). Yet, the function of these buildings had evolved; they were no longer merely barracks, headquarters, or housing for military families, but included an “officers' assembly,” a “treasury,” and other structures serving cultural and administrative purposes.

Following the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), Russia began to play an active political role in the region (Avilov, 2018). One might have expected this to intensify the military aspect-and, to some extent, this was indeed the case for the region as a whole. During this period, regional Cossack forces were organized and line units were established, accompanied by extensive military construction. Buildings in the “barracks architecture” style sprang up across the region, alongside military forts, artillery batteries, and other fortifications. At the same time, however, there was a mass migration of peasants, intended both to supply the military forces with food and, to some degree, to create a mobilization reserve.

The drive for settlement-an imperative of state power that had long remained largely unrealized-began to shape the territory's population. After 1881, the benefits offered to settlers moving to the

Priamurye Governor-Generalship increased sharply, leading to a surge in the volume of migration. While fewer than 15,000 people-predominantly “penalized lower ranks” and state peasants-migrated to the Priamur Governor-Generalship between 1860 and 1881, the number of such migrants rose to over 200,000 between 1881 and 1901 (Osipov, 2012). The city was becoming not only a center for exercising authority over the region but also an economic hub.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the population of Khabarovsk gradually increased, reaching 50,000 residents by the second decade of the 20th century (Istoriya Dalnego Vostoka SSSR…, 1991), with a rise in the number of *meshchane* (townspeople). Alongside supplying the military, these townspeople engaged in trade with the local population, agriculture, artisanal crafts, fishing, and other trades (Vostrikov & Vostokov, 1991). Local trading hubs, shops, and workshops sprang up across the city. The number of merchants and artisans grew - catering not only to state contracts, though these remained their primary source of business. Skilled tradesmen, doctors, teachers, industrialists, and wage laborers also appeared. Beyond the high level of security the city offered its residents, the opportunity for duty-free trade with China was a significant factor. Consequently, a local regional center began to take shape almost immediately alongside the imperial city, which served clear military and administrative functions. The city evolved into both a center of regional authority and an economic hub. Khabarovsk emerged as a center of power and commerce, as well as a foothold for cultural expansion into Asia.

The expansion of the permanent population fostered economic diversification and the emergence of new types of employment. Townspeople played a significant role in the city's economic life; in addition to servicing the military garrison, they engaged in trade with local residents, agriculture, various crafts, fishing, and other commercial activities (Vostrikov & Vostokov, 1991). An urban commercial infrastructure gradually took shape: retail outlets, small workshops, and consumer service businesses began to open. At the same time, professional groups typical of a developing urban settlement emerged - merchants, artisans, skilled workers, doctors, teachers, entrepreneurs, and wage earners.

Khabarovsk’s economic appeal was driven by more than just its administrative status and the presence of military institutions. Its border location was a crucial factor, offering opportunities for trade with China - including under preferential terms. The combination of relative security, an administrative presence, military infrastructure, and favorable conditions for economic activity laid the groundwork for the city’s continued growth.

Consequently, even in the early stages of Khabarovsk’s development, an independent local economic hub emerged alongside the official administrative-military sphere. The city gradually acquired a multifaceted functional structure: it served simultaneously as an instrument of state territorial governance and a center for economic exchange and trade, while also acting as a key conduit for spreading the cultural and social practices of the Russian Empire across the Far East and toward the Asian borderlands.

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