

Report «Urban Planning Conflictology R&D in Russia»

This report presents the results of twenty-year researches and developments at field of urban planning conflictology, with were realized by the Laboratory of Humanitarian Technologies in Urban Planning (Russian State Institute of Urbanistics). New humanitarian approaches and methods of decision-making in urban-planning activities are described.

History of conflictology R&D in St.Petersburg

The largest in the USSR and Russia Research and Planning Institute of Urbanistics in collaboration with American mediators founded the experimental Conflictology Department (1991-1993) and worked out the first in Russia systematic program of training mediators, which later was realized at the Conflictology Department, Philosophy Department at St.Petersburg State University (1994-1999). Since 1999 till now conflictology R&D are realized by the Laboratory of Humanitarian Technologies in Urban Planning (Institute of Urbanistics). The developments are unique because the position of the conflict researcher was not the position of a consultant, but s/he was at an “industrial function”, involved in the process of urban planning in conflict situations, when city-planners can't perform a project using tradition way. Thus there was a mixture of theory and practice, followed by creating technologies and their putting into practice.

Specifics of Urban Planning Conflicts in Russia

Urban planning conflict is a symptom, resulting from the current practice of urban planning. In Russia democratic urban planning principles are just declared, public participation measures are formal. The measures don't take into account the interests of the local citizens in balance with public and government interests.

The spontaneous changes, realized in the interests of separate people, corporations or companies (in the private interests that often are presented like state, government ore nation interests), without taking into account its consequences for the public, are leading to the irreversible degradation of the environment. The developed urban-planning documents are ignored, if these plans are fulfilled in an opposite manner.

The risk of bringing to a standstill and ruining a construction schedule, resulting from the protest activities became one of main risks for investors.

We offer for city-planners the new conceptual grounds of urban planning itself, which could provide the alternative to the socialist theory of settling. And we offer for authorities a new practice of decision-making in this sphere of activities and the new practice of their coordination, which would take into account the aims of the stakeholders and the interests of the local citizens.

1. Conflictology survey of the situation

The matter is that Russian city-planners usually begin their activities with making a basic plan, called a “scheme of the current situation”. The basic plan includes only material, natural and technical factors, which from the city-planners' viewpoint serve as limiting obstacles or possibilities for the urban planning decision-making. Humanitarian factors, such as interests of different local groups, activities, conditions of social reproduction, ethnic and cultural specifics are not taken into account. The aim of the conflictology survey of the situation is to include in the urban planning the above humanitarian factors as the elements of the current situation scheme.

Situation:

The project of constructing the protecting structures (polders) in the delta of the Volga-river at the situation of rising the level of the Kaspian Sea had been developed at the stage of technical and economic validating. But the people, living in seven coastal villages (mostly fishermen), “to be flooded” in accord with that project, refused to settle in other places. The conflictologists were given the task to obtain the consent of the local people to move to a different place.

For the first time in the Russian practice of urban planning there was conducted a conflictology survey of the situation with making possible scenarios of the social consequences resulted after fulfilling of this project. The conclusions of the survey were the following: that project reflected only the interests of the Construction Ministry and of agricultural industry. Flooding of the fishermen’s villages would destroy the territorial communities, which had existed there for centuries and would bring to impoverishment of the fishermen and their families. Realization of the project was also a threat for other types of activities. The stakeholders were willing “to start shooting in case if the construction work started”. That was not a conflict, that was a war. There was found out a specific “humanitarian” limitation for the project: exploitation of polders, being very complicated engineering structures, are not the problem in Holland, but how long will they manage to function at the territory of Astrakhan region, if even the simplest irrigating wells get out of action if used for throwing garbage?

Instead of receiving a consent for moving to a different place, the conflictologist made a scenario of possible sequences of the project and made a conclusion about the humanitarian catastrophe in case of fulfilling this project.

2. The Technology of Planning for City Environment Quality

Technology of the Soviet urban planning, being transferred without fundamental changes to the present uses term «население» (“urban/rural population”) as a calculating unit, regarding which the calculations “of square meters of dwelling per capita” are made and development signified the quantitative growth. Humanitarian approach supposes coming from quantitative distribution norms to diversify of consumption quality standards. The technology means identifying different types of the city environment “users” and when realizing the urban-planning activities. “Quality of environment” and “quality of life” should be planned not according to the formal norm the same in different cities, but taking into account parameters are used by people when defining the quality of life on concrete territory. Qualities must be determined by different inhabitants (townsmen, people of different ages and social status, business, ethnic and confessional communities, migrants etc.) due to their intentions and interests.

Situation:

The town of Lensk (Yakutia, Eastern Siberia) was almost entirely destroyed by the catastrophic flood. The government of Russia allocated the finances and set the task to construct the town again within the limited period of time, before the beginning of the cold period (i.e., during four months). It was a unique situation, when it was possible to work out the plans and construct the town at the empty place and from the very beginning.

Lensk was a typical town in the Eastern Siberia. First (in the 17th century) it was a village along a post road. The town of Lensk began its development as a town in 1962, when there was found a diamond deposit and Lensk served as a trans-shipment point, serving for the development of diamond mines. At the stage of urban planning, aimed at restoring Lensk there was the rivalry among the potential developers. The representatives of industrialized house-building of Yakutia were interested in typical prefabricated construction of 9-storey

apartment buildings, saying that only in such a way it was possible to fulfill the task of constructing the town by the deadline. The city-planners and local authorities began putting pressure. We were sure all town people would prefer live in private house with a surrounding plot of land for gardening. In this situation conflictologists, who were involved in the urban-planning activities, conducted a survey and interviewed the local people about their preferences concerning the types of apartment buildings. The results of the survey could help us in protecting the citizens from the attempts to construct only 9-storeyed apartment buildings.

The results of the survey astonished, as we hadn't expected, that more than 20 per cent of the citizens would prefer to live in 9-storeyed apartment buildings. This fact made us think over these figures and realized, what were the specifics and difficulties of living in a northern town.

The conclusion: the leading criterion for the quality of the city environment in Lensk is the safety of residing. In a small town with the population of 30 thousand people there were four types of people, who meant different things under the notion of "resident safety". The old-timers, poor people at mainly, who preferred to live in private house with a surrounding plot of land for gardening, located inside the town boundaries, understood "safety" as the possibility of surviving by means of the traditional types of activities and the social buildings should be located within the walking distance from their house. The newly-formed "layer" of rich people (businessmen and top leaders of the diamond-mining industry) also preferred private houses (cottages), but located in an autonomous settlement, located outside the town, having its own engineering and social infrastructure. The "middle-class" (white-ties workers of the corporation, businessmen, specialists and so on) who wanted to live in 2-4-storeyed apartment houses, understood reside safety as the opportunity to self-organize the community and be able to support by joint efforts the local facilities and engineering infrastructure (they preferred to live in condominiums). The temporary workers Unfortunately, not all our recommendations were taken into account at urban-planning activities, preceding the restoring of Lensk and further this resulted in the conflict, unexpected for those who managed the process of the town restoration. Many citizens preferred to stay in the temporary tents, put up at the places of their former houses in order to keep their private plots of land and to build by themselves a new house at the former site, but not to move in the "square meters" of the apartment building, where they wouldn't be able to survive.

3. The Technology of Conflict Management

Practice of development is always of conflict-rising character, because it changes the habitual environment of vital activities. In Russia due to the unregulated relationships concerning property and market mechanisms of the land turnover, practically any developer takes a risk to encounter with a conflict. Russian realities of urban development are very specific. When it's impossible to "make an agreement", the building which prevents from further construction, very often burns down.

The approach of conflict management assumes that not peace, but conflict opposes the war. So, conflictologist should identify, what should be added into situation, so that sides could clash in conflict, no matter how paradoxically it can sound. By means of inserting some elements in the situation, conflictologist opens the possibilities of nonviolent actions. After that it's possible to apply methods of conflict resolution.

Situation

"Ecotechnopolis" project at the Baltic spit (Kaliningrad region) supposed to take into the economic turnover a unique area, practically untouched by urbanization, since at the Soviet times it was a closed military territory.

The most numerous group of land tenants were people, living in the village of Kosa, there were about 700 of them. The developer could do urban planning only concerning the urbanized pieces of the territory (all the rest was a natural reserve). That's why he was strongly interested in moving the inhabitants of the village of Kosa to a different place. The developer "weighted" pluses and minuses of the place. Pluses meant a unique place, opportunities of fishing and gardening, in summer having additional income by means of renting rooms to tourists. Minuses included the following: the unsafe getting to the continent by ferry, tumbledown houses and engineering infrastructure, lack of jobs, having no first aid office and fire-station, having only elementary school and no secondary school.

In accord with this analysis, the project conception suggested moving of the villagers to some place at the continent, with liquidation of minuses and with possible compensation of pluses.

But even the initial information about the project conception caused confrontation of the villagers, the local "politicians" informed, that they were going to bring the people to barricades.

The mediators identified the basis of this conflict readiness: in the situation of unregulated rights in land tenure and property the villagers had no opportunity to join the constructive interactions with the developer (for example, to start negotiating). They were afraid, that in any case they would be deceived, that's why they preferred to protest, but not to negotiate. The conflictologists found out, that most of the local people just didn't know about their rights.

As a result, there appeared a separate direction in the city-planning, namely establishing "the institute" of the right for property and land tenure at the local territory. The local people were differentiated as six subjects of law. A specially created portfolio "Your Rights" explained the rights of the villagers and the range of possible actions in accord with their rights. The local authorities promised to guarantee the realization of their rights. The developer paid for the work of enlightening the villagers concerning their rights for the property. But he encountered with the opposition, who were able not only to go to barricades, but also to be involved in the negotiations.

4. The Technology of Interaction and Balans Modeling

One of the reasons for urban planning conflicts includes the following – when the image of the future, drawn at the scheme of the "Project plan", doesn't coincide with the future – that's what stakeholders are striving for. This dissonance can turn into conflict interactions, or stakeholders will just ignore the prescriptions of the urban plan.

Keeping these facts in mind when making urban plans we began taking into account the targets and interests of stakeholders. But some evident methodological problems were left unsettled. Where is the guarantee, that multiple aims taken into account are real aims? Could a number of particular aims, being summarized, "produce" public aims of urban changes? How should a "Project plan" look like in the situation of the fundamentally unknown future, keeping in mind the fact, that an urban plan is developed for the period of 25 years, but tomorrow some new stakeholders will set absolutely new targets or the new technologies will change the opinion about the resource potential of the territory? Besides, nowadays city-planners themselves don't have enough grounds to depict the trustworthy future. Can we see any elements of the future, really existing at present? For conflictologist the leading reality of the contemporary urban planning is the reality of interacting. Urban planning changes are the result of interacting the stakeholders. Initiators of changes can either take or not to take into account the professional knowledge and professional position of the city-planners. The reality shows, that in contemporary Russia city-constructing processes very seldom are based on long-term urban plans. And no one law can change the situation. It is urban planning that should be changed.

It's necessary to change the idea of feasibility, understood as "the project should correspond to the embodied future. This is professional knowledge and professional position of the city-

planners (if they are involved in the process of planning), that are being realized here and now. As a model this looks the following way: stakeholders set their targets and identify the ways of their realization, but “at one scheme and with only one pencil for the whole group”.

We realize this approach in the technology of modeling the future: in organizing a problematic interaction of stakeholders in the course of urban planning activities. We propose organizational activity games as method of “modeling the future”.

5. Communicative Technologies

The period of realizing the urban plan is 20-25 years. Authorities are changed every 4 years. How is it possible to provide the succession of the city-planning policy on the basis of the adopted urban plan? How is it possible to protect the city budgets and their citizens-taxpayers from manipulators, suggesting “ambitious projects of the 22nd century”? In Russian cities/towns it's impossible to do, because there is no city community – a structure, developing the city-planning policy in public interests and controlling its execution.

That's why one of the tasks of conflictologist in planning is to form the public position of the citizens on the issues of the urban-planning development.

The stages of forming the public position are the following:

1. Development of the urban plan – 1-2 years: manifestation of public interests.
2. Coordination – 6 months: involving the local (urban) community in discussing the plan.
3. Making a plan of realization – 6 months: manifestation of the grounds for the long-term self-organization of the local (urban) community.
4. Terms of the plan realization – 3-5 years, 10-15 years, 20-25 years: functions of the local communities: controlling realization of the plans, keeping their own interests, formulating requirements to correcting the plan.

These are only several from new humanitarian technologies which have to apply in urban planning activities and decision-making process in order to diminish urban conflicts and make better quality of urban plans.