The planning of Moscow, the ancient capital of the Russian Empire was a pivotal event in the 20th century planning. Its importance was directly related to the Marxist basis of the Russian Revolution and the city’s role as Red Moscow; capital of international communism. Impassioned debates raged about the new proletarian society that was being formed. As a result, modern Moscow became emblematic of the long sought alternative to exploitative capitalist cities and the economic system that nurtured them. Its leaders understood that the city had to be both an evocative and inspiring capital as well as an urban environment offering a superior way of life to its citizens. It was to be nothing less than the new proletarian, socialist, capital; a worker’s paradise. This paper looks at the many factors that made the planning and design of Moscow distinctly socialist as well as those that were similar to other cities. It assesses both the role of planners and the role of communist leaders such as Stalin and Kaganovich. It analyses the extent to which the planning of Moscow produced a different urban form and way of life from that of capitalist cities.
Introduction

In the twentieth century, Russia had two very different capitals; one, St. Petersburg, the imperial capital, was modern and very European. The second, Moscow, was ancient and intensely Russian. The century opened with St. Petersburg as Russia’s capital and the seat of autocratic power of the Tsarist government and the royal court. However in 1918, after the Bolshevik revolution, the new Soviet leader, Lenin, “temporarily” moved the capital back to Moscow where it had been since the 14th century. However, the revolution abolished both the Tsarist system as well as fledgling efforts to establish a Western style democracy, and imposed a Marxist-Leninist form of government. As a result, Moscow had a new and important status as capital of the world’s first communist country, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or USSR. This paper will give an overview of the outpouring of Soviet plans and designs for turning Moscow into a model communist city.

Moscow-Origins

Moscow is one of Russia’s oldest cities. Founded in 1147, Moscow developed as a walled city with the Kremlin at its centre. As it grew, additional protective walls were erected further out and roads were extended toward the gates, aimed toward distant cities such as Tver and Smolensk. Thus was set the original radial concentric pattern of the city. But the plan as such was an organic plan, the product of a multitude of ad hoc decisions taken by various authorities and private parties each pursuing their own interests. The importance of Moscow as a centre of orthodox Christianity cannot be underestimated; after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Moscow was proclaimed as the third Rome [“and there shall be no fourth”]. A ring of beautiful walled monasteries marked the periphery of the city. Population grew, fueled by trade and the growing wealth of local merchants and nobles as well as immigration from various European nations.

The walled Kremlin has long been the heart and soul of Russia and of Moscow. Rebuilt in 1495 by Ivan III, this ensemble of buildings and spaces continues to inspire wonder and awe due to its opulent designs and monumentality. Its gigantic brick walls were topped by eighteen towers and five gates, some as high as 76 metres (249 feet). Inside its huge grounds were scattered the palaces of the Tsars, ancient churches, historic monuments, arsenal and government buildings. The Tsar’s family and the imperial court were housed monumental facilities in the Great Kremlin Palace (1837), the Tarem Palace (1635), and the Faceted Palace (1485). The centrality of faith to the Russian state was manifested in the Patriarch’s Palace (1656), seat of the head of the Russian Orthodox Church. Governmental administrative functions were housed in the Senate (1790). The public realm was represented by the paved vastness of Red Square, guarded by Resurrection Gate. In front of the gate was the large marker designating the centre of the Russian Empire where Russians come to have their pictures taken. Here too is St Basil’s church (1561), Kazan cathedral (1637) and the trading rows. Also in the Kremlin complex was Alexander Gardens (1821) containing the obelisk commemorating 300 years of Romanov rule (1913) and the tomb of the unknown soldier (1967). These elements comprised the heart of an inspiring capital complex that was almost without peer.

Moscow saw a comprehensive plan drawn up in 1775 but little of it was ever implemented. Indeed, several plans were prepared over the years but little was done even after the opportunity for rebuilding afforded by major fires in 1773 and 1812. One noteworthy exception produced the ensemble that included the Bol’shoy Theater and the square in front of it (French, 1995). By the start of the twentieth century, Moscow was still a unique blend of Eastern and
Western architectural styles. Small, wooden buildings with gingerbread detailing around the windows jostled with the imposing, stone mansions of the nobility; myriad Byzantine style churches adjoined modern buildings designed by foreign architects.

**Planning the Capital for World Communism**

A new epoch dawned after the Bolshevik revolution and the relocation of the capital back to Moscow. This epoch was epitomized by Moscow’s unique status; it was once again both Russia’s capital city as well its most economically dominant city. But most importantly, it was now the showcase city of an emergent new country based on communist principles laid out by Marx and Engels. Since communism was entirely antithetical to capitalist principles, specifically its requirement of state ownership of the means of production and support for a world-wide proletarian revolution, ensured that what occurred in Moscow would reverberate around the world.

The Bolshevik seizure of power and the immediate nationalization of the land cleared one of the major obstacles hindering effective urban planning. Indeed, it was largely for this reason that city planners were among the few segments of educated society to welcome the revolution. Indeed, during the 1920’s and 30’s it occasioned a tremendous outpouring of exciting and radical new plans, designs and proposals for the new Moscow. The fever to produce the new communist capital traveled outside of Russia and attracted the attention of a host of famous architects and planners such as Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe. A number of constructivist buildings, such as the Izvestia building and the Zuyev Club were built but most were not due to lack of resources during the civil war in the 1920’s. The future seemed full of fantastic possibilities; a “city on springs”, a “cosmic city”, and “horizontal skyscrapers” were all mooted (French, 1995; Colton, 1995).

Impassioned debates raged about the new proletarian society that was being formed and all aspects of its new social and economic relationships. As a result, modern Moscow became emblematic of the long sought alternative to capitalist cities and the economic system that gave rise to them. And as the capital of the USSR, it was to be much more than Paris or London, it was supposed to be a workers’ paradise, nothing less than the perfect egalitarian city of the future. As a result, its leaders understood that modern Moscow had to be developed as both an evocative and inspiring capital, as well as an urban environment that offered a superior way of life to its citizens. Thus, the adequate provision of new housing forms became as central to its planning as did monuments, boulevards and governmental ensembles.

Moving the capital proceeded chaotically. By 1918, Lenin, his family and his close associates were ensconced in the Kremlin and soon the huge Kremlin complex was filled with military and administrative offices. As a result, other government officials and their staffs, fresh off the train from St. Petersburg, engaged in a competitive struggle for space in the streets and precincts near the Kremlin. There were no purpose-built buildings available. Instead, hotels, offices and mansions vacated by departed corporations or the wealthy were commandeered; for example, the old Nobles’ club became the House of Unions. In what would become the most hated symbol of communism, the Cheka (KGB) took over a former insurance building on Lubyanka Square a few blocks from the Kremlin (Colton, 1995). The shortage was such that Lenin was forced to use the Bol’shoy Theater to hold communist party meetings. Moscow’s city council or Duma was soon superceded by the Moscow Soviet. This new local administration came to be dominated by the central government.
Stalin’s Socialist Capital

The years after the revolution were difficult ones for the USSR. It was only after the death of Lenin in 1924 and the ascendancy of Joseph Stalin (1879-1953) that various “socialist reconstruction” projects were realized. Most of these projects are noteworthy because of their monumental size. All projects required Stalin’s approval. Often he would drive through the city at night with his bodyguards inspecting building projects and issuing detailed instructions. He was held in such fear that one building was erected with a disjointed facade; the architects had submitted two versions for his approval and he mistakenly had approved both. Rather than risk approaching him again, they built both versions (Colton, 1995).

That Stalin was the master planner of Socialist Moscow was beyond question. According to Kaganovich, Stalin became involved first with the need to improve city infrastructure and services and “...Comrade Stalin kept enlarging the boundaries of the discussion until it got to the desirability of a general plan for the rebuilding the city of Moscow.” To carry this out, a special Central Committee Commission was established. Stalin reportedly was an active participant in all sessions, listening to expert presentations and making suggestions [see Illustration 1]. The result according to Kaganovich was...old Moscow becoming Stalin’s Moscow” (Colton, 1995).

Under Stalin, Moscow saw the destruction of many of its oldest buildings, particularly churches, in violation of Lenin’s pronouncement calling for the protection of all ancient buildings. Stalin also expanded the official government policy of atheism. As a result, many of the signature religious buildings in and around the Kremlin were demolished. In the Kremlin, a monastery and a convent were destroyed in order to build the Presidium (1929), the headquarters of the executive arm of the Soviet parliament. Later, during the Khrushchev era, a large modern glass and steel office building, the Palace of Congresses (1961), was constructed within the Kremlin for communist party conferences. In Red Square, the ancient Kazan
cathedral was demolished, as was the Resurrection Gate. The monuments of modern Russia were added; Lenin's massive tomb, the graves of John Reed and other selected heroes of the Revolution and WWII. Much of the destruction in Red Square was designed to facilitate the massive display of military might during May Day parades that became emblematic of the Soviet state [see Illustration 2].

Illustration 2: Red Square, May Day

Most symbolic of Stalin's new Moscow was the demolition in 1931 of the huge cathedral of Christ the Redeemer, off of Red Square. It was removed to make room for a monumental Palace of the Soviets, which was to be the centrepiece of the soviet capital. This was to have been a colossal building with a tower soaring 315 metres topped by a statue of Lenin 100 metres high -three times the size of the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor. Its conception was based on the cold war tensions and the quest for international dominance. It was no accident that it was to be taller than the Empire State Building and larger in volume than the six biggest New York skyscrapers combined [see Illustration 3]. The Palace was never built due to site problems and a municipal swimming pool replaced what was to have been the world’s largest building set within the world's largest plaza (Colton, 1995).
In the years following the revolution, several notable civic projects were built, including the Volga navigation canal and the Moscow underground. The latter, in particular, stirred civic pride due to its heroic scale and rapid construction and the lavish decorations of the stations (Perchik, 1936). The stations were illuminated with massive chandeliers with the walls decorated with ceramic tiles, and artwork commemorating historic events. The Moscow underground, bus and trolley systems were part of Stalin’s vision for an urban, high density, metropolis, like New York. A similar, but smaller, system was constructed in St. Petersburg.

Monumental boulevards were another Stalinist initiative. Soviet planners straightened and widened many of the radial streets leading to the Kremlin. A high price was paid. Architectural historians decried the fate of classical Moscow; much of which was lost by road widening and housing developments that affected ancient streets such as Tverskaia (Gorgii) in the 1930’s and the new Kalinin Prospect that cut through the old Arbat district in the 1960’s. When informed of opposition, Stalin instructed that demolitions be conducted at night. These boulevards constitute an unwavering commitment to monumental style planning traditions. This commitment is all the more remarkable due to the low per capita car ownership that prevailed in the USSR in the 1930’s.

Whole sections of Moscow were rebuilt according to Stalin’s notions of civic design, he ordered that the boulevards be lined by large apartment blocks so as to complete the monumental panorama viewed as one rode in toward the Kremlin. The apartment blocks were designed in a neoclassical style, built around large, open communal courtyards, often referred to as a “superblock” (French, 1995). These imposing and commodious apartments were reserved for favoured members of the Communist Party, the military, sports figures and the like (Lang, 2001).

In addition, Stalin worked to rid Moscow of its vestiges of the “large village”, demolishing many one story wooden houses near the city centre. This was controversial since many of these
districts represented the older picturesque Russian style. Many average Russians bemoaned the loss of their “wooden Moscow”, but, of course, they were not consulted in such decisions. More telling was the strong role of the Communist Party and its ideological approach to urban design, a generalized and shifting approach often called “socialist realism” (Parkins, 1953). Many existing squares were enlarged and lined with new civic buildings crowned with portraits of revolutionary heroes. Large statues and monuments to revolutionary heroes, literary and artistic figures completed the ensemble.

Perhaps the most visible symbols of the Stalin era were the seven monumental skyscrapers, which dominate the skyline to this day. They were built after WWII under Stalin’s orders to show off to visiting dignitaries. The buildings’ bulky wedding-cake style represented his personal design preferences. The skyscrapers housed several government ministries, hotels and apartments. The towering design for Moscow University, another Stalinist project, was even more lavish. Set on a commanding hillside site, with the city below, it continues the Russian tradition of dominating design ensembles (Colton, 1995,).

Stalinist planning approaches, such as wide boulevards and large blocks of flats serviced by an underground transit system, were later used in St. Petersburg suburbs and many other cities in communist Eastern Europe. In contrast to Moscow, St. Petersburg’s historic central precincts were preserved and completely rebuilt after the devastation of the 900-day siege suffered during WWII.

**Socialist Reconstruction**

Kaganovich’s 1931 monograph, “Socialist Reconstruction of Moscow and other Cities in the USSR” is perhaps the best statement on planning Moscow under Stalin (Perchik, 1936). Kaganovich was an old Bolshevik and confidante of Stalin who organized the building of the Moscow underground. His book contained his report on the planning of Moscow and the resultant resolution that was passed by the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1931 [see Illustration 4].

Illustration 4: Cover of Kaganovitch report on Moscow city planning
Kaganovich’s report was hardly a stirring call for planning a new capital; rather, it featured a frank assessment of Moscow’s problems, especially housing (Kaganovich, 1931). He knowledgeably described the need for comprehensive city planning as an integral part of the process of building the new “proletarian” socialist capital. His report gave a clear overview of the comprehensive planning needed and the goals to be achieved in such areas as housing, streets, sanitation, energy, transportation, education, health services, etc. Missing, however, was any significant analysis of Moscow’s capital functions, either symbolic or practical, and how they would be maintained or reconfigured under socialism. Indeed, the Kremlin was not even mentioned.

Instead, Kaganovitch focused on housing since he felt this was the crux of the matter to chart the course of the new communist capital. He advocated strict limits to growth by prohibiting new industrial development and called for a capital city set within a planned hierarchical system of cities. This approach was used to prepare comprehensive plans for Moscow and St. Petersburg in 1935 (Parkins, 1953).

Throughout the communist period, broadly conceived Garden City thinking played a surprisingly powerful role in the planning process. While a number of interesting communities were built along these lines, by and large the Garden City notion was rejected for Moscow.

Perchik, like so many communist officials, imbued the 1935 plan with both patriotic and propagandistic ramifications: “Every clause ...speaks of only one thought, one desire: to improve in every way and to enhance to the utmost the well-being of the toiling masses of the Red capital of the glorious socialist fatherland, to make Moscow a city worthy of its great title-capital of the USSR. ....new Moscow-Soviet Moscow- is a world centre, a flourishing socialist city, the international capital of the workers and toilers of all lands, it is the dream city of all who are oppressed and exploited” (Perchik, 1936).

The 1935 Moscow Plan

All of this broad strategizing found expression in the 1935 plan for Moscow which demanded a halt to all experimentation in planning and moved to establish principles common to all socialist cities [see Illustration 5]. These were:

- Limited city size
- State control of housing
- Planned development of residential areas (the superblock and micro-region)
- Spatial equality in the distribution of items of collective consumption
- Limited journey to work
- Stringent land use zoning
- Rationalized traffic flow on a hierarchy of new roads
- Extensive green space (parks and city greenbelt)
- Symbolism and the central city (May day parades)
- Town planning as an integral part of national planning (Bater, 1980; Parkins, 1953).
Post 1935 planning

Moscow’s planners drew up comprehensive plans in 1971 and 1989 that continued and developed the thrust of the 1935 plan. The 1971 Moscow Genplan put the focus on the establishment of 8 “town regions” with populations from 650,000 to 1,340,000 within Moscow, each a self contained, serviced, sub-centre of the city, akin to the borough form of government in New York or London. Another notable feature was the plan’s emphasis on public transport development rather than highway development (Colton, 1995).

The 1989 plan called for extensions to the city’s infrastructure such as new subway lines and other public works. It predicted that Moscow’s population would move upward to 9.5 million in 2010. Garden City thinking was again represented by the proposal to develop a “system of
satellite cities” which would catch the overspill population. The greenbelt was to be expanded. All polluting factories were to be relocated. However, the changing political climate under Gorbachev and Yeltsin led to the abandonment of this plan (Colton, 1995).

Failures of Communist Planning

The failure to cap the population growth and the failure to provide adequate housing accommodation were the two most signal failures of planning Moscow. All of the plans for Moscow up to the present, called for limiting its population. Moscow’s planning apparatus, for all its size and supposed authority, lacked the power to zone or otherwise control the development of the city (French, 1995). Most of the major building activities such as housing, day care facilities etc. were undertaken by individual industrial enterprises often with the enforced labour of political prisoners in the Stalinist era. These enterprises reported directly to central ministries and functioned independently from city plans, much like public authorities and special districts in America. It is a situation that persists today although the situation is changing due to privatization of land and the influx of large domestic and foreign development interests eager to put up large projects (Colton, 1995).

Clearly, the failure to control the growth of the population had a deleterious effect on the integrity of the greenbelt around Moscow. The 1935 plan had established a 10km wide swath of open space around the entire city (French, 1995; Colton, 1995). The effect on the city plan was significant but not catastrophic because the growth came in the form of high-rise flats rather than low-density sprawl. As a result, Moscow still has a clear, if ever-expanding, city boundary with the surrounding countryside. In the 1990’s, for the first time, the population of the city dropped, falling back from just over 9 million to 8,881,000 in 1993 (Colton, 1995).

Housing policy is another signal failure of socialist planning. Poor housing conditions were one of the factors that precipitated the revolution so it appears strange to an outsider that even today Moscovites remain so minimally housed. There are a myriad of reasons for this, but can be traced to the initial decision to favor the development of the military industrial complex at the expense of the consumer/workers social and physical needs, as well as the rampant demand fueled by industrial growth.

After Stalin’s death, Krushchev’s new housing policy was aimed at the masses. Using industrialized housing methods, production rates rose impressively, but quality was quite low. To this day these units are referred to as Khrushovey, combining his name with the term for slum. Today, virtually all new housing projects on the outskirts of Moscow are built of ferroconcrete, giving many districts the sterile appearance of 1960’s style American high-rise housing projects; a Russian version of Le Corbusier’s Radiant City. Another problematic area for the Soviet capital has been the signal lack of adequate and convenient commercial and service facilities (French, 1995).

Post-communist Moscow

Following the fall of communism in 1990, Moscow, under an activist Mayor, embarked on a major development program to reverse many Stalinist deprivations. The capital has seen a remarkable program of reconstruction and restoration of historic structures such as the Victory Memorial, the Gostinny Dvor (guest’s court), Kazan Cathedral and Resurrection Gates at Red Square to name a few (Vinogradov, 1998; Glushkova, 1998). A wider program of historic preservation and revitalization includes museums and nine railway stations dating from Tsarist
times (Vinogradov, 1998). Clearly, much remains to be done given the years of neglect. 1990 saw the designation of Moscow’s Kremlin and Red Square as UNESCO World Heritage sites. New monuments have also been constructed, notably a controversial statue of Peter the Great. It is quintessentially Russian in its inception, its grandiosity and its many hidden meanings.

Strenuous efforts to engage in more open, participatory planning have led to a wider dialogue about Moscow’s future (Colton, 1995). New strategic plans for both Moscow and St. Petersburg have been drawn up following Western participatory approaches. One offshoot of this has been the growth in active citizen participation and even protests regarding road plans and historic preservation issues.

Housing construction has emerged slowly from its centralized administrative pattern. Downtown has seen the development of large, new post-modern hotels and office and apartment buildings, often funded by foreign consortiums. These have impinged on such historic areas as the Arbat, a major tourist draw near the Kremlin.

The fall of communism opened a new chapter in the Moscow’s history; one that will allow it to build on the many successes of communist planning and the 1935 plan by adding the private sector as a player (Luzkov, 1998). One of the most notable new projects has been the 5-level underground shopping centre at Manezhnaya Plochad near the Kremlin’s walls. Extending some 5 floors underground, it provides a modern, attractive shopping venue and food court. A joint venture built along Western lines, it is covered by a beautiful park, fountains and statues.

Conclusions

Tsarism and constitutional democracy were overthrown in St. Petersburg while the new Communist state was forged in Moscow where it was, in turn, overthrown. Clearly the revolution of 1917 is central to the modern history of Russia’s two capitals; the forces it unleashed profoundly influenced their planning and design. But the modern history of these two cities also reflects the duality of old and new and eastern and western cultural traditions inherent in all things Russian.

In St. Petersburg, this duality can be seen in the Soviet government’s decision to completely rebuild the former imperial capital including its outlying imperial palaces after the WWII destruction. Since the fall of communism, official support for the former capital has strengthened and the city’s original name was restored. The remains of the last royal family were interred with the other Tsars in the Peter and Paul Fortress in a religious ceremony attended by President Yeltsin. Recently, President Putin, who is from St. Petersburg, held several meetings with world leaders in the city, lending credence to rumors concerning the possibility that the capital of Russia might once again return to St. Petersburg. Whatever the case, these actions form part of a strengthening process of official sanction for the monuments, ceremonies and observances associated with the former monarchy and its imperial capital.

Historians can recognize that planning in these two capital cities was influenced by several important factors. First was the personal influence of the autocratic authority of the Tsar or the various communist dictators, particularly Stalin and Khrushchev. Second was the role played by the many pre-Revolutionary architects and planners who remained in Russia to help build the ideal communist city. They were instrumental in establishing and maintaining a planning movement that was based on blending foreign notions with Russian design traditions to meet the needs of the new Socialist society. Also important was the competition with the West, which led to the decision to develop a high-density, urbanized society showcased in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The results were based on the interplay of these forces. The fall of communism has radically opened up the decision-making process. This, and the reintroduction of a private
market, will presage major changes. It will be interesting to see how these changes influence the future course of planning these two great Russian capitals.
Bibliography


