

Oleg Golubchikov^{1*}, Nicholas A. Phelps² and Alla Makhrova³

^{1*} Research fellow, School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK. Christ Church, St Aldates, Oxford, OX 1 1DP; Tel. +44 (0)1865 285070; Email: oleg.golubchikov@chch.oxon.org **Corresponding author.**

² Professor, Bartlett School of Planning, University College London, London, UK; 22 Gordon Street, London WC1H0QB; Tel: +44 (0)20 7679 7594; Email: n.phelps@ucl.ac.uk

³ Senior research fellow, Faculty of Geography, Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia; Leninskie Gory, Moscow, 119899; Tel. +7 (495) 9394263; Email: almah@mail.ru

*** Corresponding author**

POST-SUBURBIA: GROWTH MACHINE AND THE EMERGENCE OF “EDGE CITY” IN THE METROPOLITAN CONTEXT OF MOSCOW

ABSTRACT

To what extent do the ideas of “edge city”, “post-suburbia” and associated models of urban growth apply in the transition economy case? The paper considers urban development and place-making on the periphery of Moscow, based on the case of Khimki, a former off-limits “satellite city” and more recently a fast-growing area. The forces and ideologies driving the growth on the edge of Moscow and the relationship between different actors are considered. The paper argues that while the Russian case shares some commonalities with the Western models of “edge city” and “growth machine”, growth in Khimki is fuelled by opportunistic profit-making initiatives that are disconnected from “local” city. It is yet to be seen whether a growing demand for new infrastructure, as well as emerging residents’ movements will restructure the modes of governing urban growth more in line with proactive place-focused post-suburban politics.

KEYWORDS: suburbanization; satellite city; Khimki; Moscow city-region.

INTRODUCTION

While the processes of “post-suburban” patterns of urbanisation have been identified in a number of Western contexts (Western Europe and North America), spaces beyond these regions remain fairly absent from associated research. Little is known, for example, how easily the ideas of “edge city” [Garreau, 1991], “post-suburbia” [Kling et al, 1995] and associated models of urban growth may travel to the transition economy case. The interest of this paper is therefore to establish some considerations in this respect specifically focusing on the metropolitan context of Moscow, based on the case study of Khimki.

While the logic of socialist urbanization produced a somewhat different type of the city from the Western regimes, the introduction of the market economy resulted

in a flood of new urban processes changing the function and morphology of cities. Larger cities, such as Moscow, and especially their inner areas were first to accommodate post-industrial transformation, tertiarization and commercialization [Bater et al., 1998]. However, eventually the processes of change have fallen upon the cities further down the urban hierarchy, as well as peripheries of the larger cities. To what extent this centrifugal momentum of growth and attendant urban change is predetermined by certain “structural” forces and to what extent it is driven by purposeful strategies of economic and political agency can be investigated by looking more closely at local contingency and the local combination of different forces.

In this paper we consider the politics and practice of development and place-making of urban areas at the periphery of Moscow, based on the case study of Khimki and drawing on material collected during our fieldwork in summer/autumn 2008, which involved almost 50 semi-structured interviews with local officers in Khimki, planning bodies at the Moscow Oblast level, Federal authorities, private developers, chambers of commerce, academic experts, as well as representatives of local environmental groups.

URBAN PROCESSES ON THE PERIPHERY OF MOSCOW

In the US literature both inner-city regeneration and transformations on metropolitan edges are sometimes opposed to suburbanization in the previous decades. In Russia, the processes of urban transformation have been unfolding as a rapid explosion. Due to suburbanisation the “built-up” land use had grown twice in the 1990s and still in parallel central urban areas have been renovated and increasingly colonized by the new rich – a recognizable pattern of gentrification [Badyina and Golubchikov, 2005]. Furthermore, what looks familiar has much local specificity. For example, “suburbanisation” in Moscow has taken a form of second-home developments rather

than permanent residences, although more “permanent” residential suburbanisation is also increasingly taking place [Makhrova et al., 2008].

Along with quasi-suburbanisation, the fringe of Moscow metropolitan area is now experiencing some patterns of intensified growth. Initially at least, this was driven by the development of shopping malls along the Moscow Orbital Motorway (which for the most part corresponds to the administrative border between the City of Moscow and Moscow Oblast – a separate administrative region surrounding Moscow), as well the development of warehouses along the major motorways running from Moscow. But, increasingly, more complex forms of development, such as major modern office-based employments, including back-offices, emerge in the nearest cities of Moscow [e.g. Rudolph and Brade, 2005; Makhrova and Molodikova, 2007]. These forms of development are also paralleled by intensified residential construction around the Russian capital.

Khimki was one of the first cities in Moscow Oblast to experience the combination of these processes. Khimki is often seen as having a favourable location. Firstly, it is adjacent to Moscow and is well connected with it. Secondly, there are Russia’s major transport links crossing Khimki, including the Moscow-St Petersburg motorway (known as Leningrad Motorway) and Moscow-St Petersburg railway. Thirdly, Khimki is located near and on the main route from Moscow to Russia’s major international airport Sheremetyevo, which also now administratively belongs to the territory of Khimki. Fourthly, the city is located in an environmentally favourable zone to the west of Moscow (for the socio-economic performance of Khimki see Table 1).

Khimki was traditionally considered as one of “satellite cities” of Moscow in its “near belt”, although it administratively belongs to Moscow Oblast. Historically, the city has been a centre of a larger district with a few other

Table 1. Main socio-economic indicators for Khimki

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Population, 1,000s	176.5	176.9	177.6	178.7	179.7	180.1	181.0
Migration, ‰	11.1	12.2	13.7	11.8	9.0	12.5	19.8
Employee (excl. small enterprises), 1,000s	53.3	43.5	47.4	52.2	55.2	61.4	65.6
Average salary, RR (excl. small enterprises)	5,764	7,616	9,716	11,846	15,471	18,898	22,919
Retail turnover, RR per capita	21,144	33,007	32,743	65,669	81,175	11,1447	185,370
Paid services, RR per capita	6,970	8,246	11,120	13,966	18,747	55,559	68,686
Existing housing, sq. m per capita	26.4	25.8	26.5	26.8	27.5	29.1	31.3
New housing completed sq. m. per capita	0.42	0.76	0.84	0.44	0.72	1.75	1.24
Capital investment, RR per capita (excl. small enterprises)	9,988	10,075	32,877	34,661	36,396	37,094	81,830
Accumulated foreign investment, million US dollars	187.3	262.6	552.1	787.1	1,226.7	2,129.9	3,424.7

Source: Mosoblkomstat (2000–2007)a, Mosoblkomstat (2000–2007)b.

settlements and the countryside. In 1984, the Council of Ministers of Soviet Russia handed over a large part of the territory of the Khimki District to Moscow. This is because Khimki was an off-limits city, based on defence; hence Moscow grew around the city rather than incorporating it into its borders. As a result, the Khimki District became divided into two parts, separated by the territory under Moscow's jurisdiction. As one of our interviewees noted: "it's a very complicated city as it is all interpenetrated by Moscow territory, Federal transport junctions and motorways" (Ladygina¹). In January 2006, due to a municipal reform, the Khimki District changed its status and the whole district area which used to consist of several urban and rural parts became amalgamated as the unified "Urban District of Khimki" with the total population of about 180 thousand.

POST-SOCIALIST GROWTH MACHINE?

No one who travels to and from Moscow to the Sherymetyvo airport within Khimki district can avoid making superficial comparisons

with the edge city environment of the US. The heavy congestion on the stretch of road allows one ample time to gaze out onto what is a rather chaotic mix of office and apartment blocks and retail outlets that, until very recently, were being built at very rapid rates (Figure 1).

It is tempting therefore to consider this suburban nodal point of car based accessibility being subject to the sorts of private sector forces apparent in the US. Growth in the peripheries of major cities in post-socialist countries has prompted Kulscar and Domokos (2005) to invoke the term post-socialist growth machine – making use of Molotch's (1976) classic description of the politics of US urban development. The conjoining of the term growth machine is testimony to the concepts ability to travel, but it may actually conceal more than it reveals. As Kulscar and Domokos (2005: 560) acknowledge "The nature of the pro growth agenda is primarily political in the post-socialist case. The power core is the local administration and this strongly influences the composition of the growth machine". Development activity is also almost entirely unimpeded by civil society.

¹ Interview with Olga Ladygina, Deputy Head of the Project Studio for Suburban Zone of Moscow and Moscow Oblast, Research and Development Institute for the General Plan of the City of Moscow, Moscow, 26 August 2008.



Figure 1. The spatial structure and new development projects in Khimki. Development projects shown on the map: 1. Mega-Khimki. 2. Liga. 3. Ramstor. 4. Levoberezhnyy shopping and entertainment centre. 5. Khimki City. 6. Big Boxes. 7. Country Park. 8. Office centre, Moskovskaya Ul. 21. 9. Office centre, Yubileyny Prospect, 60a. 10. Mercedes Benz Club. 11. Sheremetyevskiy Business Centre. 12. Sherrizone. 13. Business park, Mashkinskoye Shosse, build. 1. 14. Khimki Business Park. 15. Aeroport Komplex. 16. Aeroplaza. 17. Khimki Gate. 18. Khimki Plaza. 19. Business park, Lavochkina Ul. 16. 20. Olympus. 21. Aeroshare Express. 22. Sheremetyevo Cargo. 23. National Logistic Company Khimki. 24. Khimki Praedium. 25. Sheremetyevo Warehouse Complex. 26. Sheremetyevo Industrial Park. 27. Terminal Europe. 28. Vesna-M. 29. Vega-Khimki

Both of which leads Kulcsar and Domokos to suggest that post-socialist constellations of pro-growth interests would exist in the absence of growth, as their motivations centre on the exercise of power and control of the communities.

Some similarities to patterns and processes of urban development in the US do exist. These revolve around the speed of development and allied to this the motivation of development in terms of exchange values. Certainly, the initiative, as in the US, does tend to come from the private sector as one interviewee from a commercial property brokerage described:

As for the government, there is no one good well thought-out strategy of developing this or that Moscow Region suburb or district or Moscow Region. It is stimulated by developers. Developers come to the government and ask for permissions. IKEA, for instance, was built without any permission for construction. They just came out on the land and started to build and got the permissions in process. (DTZ²).

Here, government and its planning and regulatory systems at all level and especially the municipal level in Russia responds to

² Interview with DTZ property consultants, Moscow, 20 August 2008 (in English).

a newly created market system which was ushered in, albeit in a rather incomplete way, in the early 1990s. Legislation in the early 1990s provided for private property rights, and although incomplete, released a huge suppressed demand for housing from individuals and commercial premises from established and new financial and business services, retail and distribution businesses (including foreign direct investment). This time, until new legislation effectively completing the market system in more recent years, was considered as period of 'wild capitalism' by one informed interviewee (Gauge³) as implied in the description of the IKEA development in Khimki above (Figure 2).

In this respect, post-socialist processes of urban development may well be a mutation of the US growth machine. However, once we move on to consider how the development process relates to a politics of place, major dissimilarities appear. In Molotch's original formulation and in subsequent elaborations [Logan and Molotch, 1987], the mutual interests of municipal politicians and officials and private sector, usually land based business interests, are place-based due to what Cox and Mair (1988) have further elaborated as local dependency on both parties. The joint actions of the private and public sectors coalesce over the profits and revenues that attend the development patterns centred on uplifts in the exchange value of land and property within a particular jurisdiction. As such municipal economic development strategies, and planning policies become a focal point for coalitions of public and private sector interests. And here dissimilarities become pronounced. In the next section, we will start exploring these dissimilarities by firstly discussing why planning policies play a rather different role in the context of Russia.

THE ROLE OF THE PLANNING SYSTEM

The Soviet model of urban planning was inscribed into a centralized institutional

setting and land development was part of social and economic regulation. Social infrastructure, including housing, services and green spaces, was allocated according to some norms based on the needs of production. The implication of this top-down planning process was that it was largely "sectoral", while urban plans were to integrate different sectors by the virtue of their location in one place.

With the emergence of market reforms and political and economic liberalization, Russian urban planning fell into a state of crisis, as the new requirements made many inherited principles of Soviet planning for administrative-led development ineffective [Golubchikov, 2004]. A series of reforms in relation to the institution of urban planning have, however, not solved this problem but instead considerably emasculated the institution of planning without providing a really workable alternative. Importantly, the 2004 Urban Development Code of Russia stresses the role of legal zoning, thus re-orientating the accent of the Russian town planning from a more comprehensive concept of planning to that of land use zoning underpinned by narrower development rights interests. Planning in modern Russia has increasingly taken development-led and opportunistic forms, which are familiar to many other post-socialist cities in Europe [e.g. Tazan-Kok, 2006].

This combination of the legacy of sector-based planning and pro-development zoning results in a lack of a comprehensive and purposeful approach to make coherent places. When asked whether there were any visions at local or regional governments how individual cities in Moscow Oblast should look like in 20–30 years, the head of Moscow Oblast Planning Board argued that such "visions" were not according to the market regime: "people who will live in those places in 20 or 30 years time will have their own vision about how they want those places to look like and we don't have the right to impose our

³ Interview with Gerald Gauge, Partner, Ernst and Young, Moscow, 28 October 2008 (in English).



Figure 2. The IKEA centre was one of the signature development projects for Khimki in the previous decade and has become one of its landmarks

views on their wishes" (Frolov⁴). It may be paradoxical to hear such a discourse from those responsible for planning. However, this reflects the uneasy combination of the neoliberal ideology with the tradition of considering urban plans not as the instruments of "making places", but rather as the tools of providing the basic functionality to the places, mostly in terms of transport infrastructure as in Soviet times. Thus, the centralized sector-based planning of the Soviet era continues to have an important legacy in that there remains little appreciation of the value of territorial planning at the municipal scale among political leaders and local officials.

Furthermore, the capacity for municipalities to integrate aspects of planning for their jurisdictions is also significantly compromised by planning responsibilities

and financing that remain fragmented between Federal, regional and municipal levels. The situation contrast, for example, with China where the State is seen as a coordinator and promoter of development as part of place building at national, provincial and local level. Russian local state has rather become an unpredictable holder and releaser of developable land. It is here that we should turn to considering in more details the power relations between different interests in the development process based on an analysis of our case study city.

THE INTERPLAY AND BALANCE OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT INTERESTS IN KHMINKI

For some, at least, aspirations to improve territorial planning at municipal level do exist. There is some suggestion that Khimki's mayor has been resistant to powerful real estate company interests with designs on

⁴ Interview with Alexandr Frolov, Head of the Main Department for Architecture and Urban Planning of Moscow Oblast, Moscow, 29 October 2008.

his municipality (Pozdnev⁵). Nevertheless it seems that these companies are able to realize development opportunities on the vast land banks they have acquired at the outset of liberalization in Russia by capitalising on their political connections at the regional or Federal political levels. The clash between local plans and financial interests, with clear dominance of the latter, is exemplified by the development of a previously vacant prime location at the entrance of Khimki from Moscow by the Leningrad Motorway and next to the municipality's first class A office development – Country Park. The site was originally earmarked in the general plan for a new commercial and community centre. However, the plot was suddenly granted planning permission for large residential development by the developer PIK. The interviews with both local administration and neighbouring businesses reveal the discontent about this outcome, which is considered to disrupt what could have been a compatible cluster of office and retail land use. But the pressure for development seems to be not only restricted to the lack or availability of money, but with vested interest involving both large development groups with strong backing. As deputy mayor put it:

The problem is related to the investment attractiveness of the city. There are people coming here who we cannot actually turn down. It happens that we are forced to take decisions that contradict with the policy we have. It happens very often (Pozdnev).

One might assume that a municipality like Khimki experiencing such rapid development ought to have a healthy fiscal capacity. In fact due to the tax system in Russia all municipalities are in a relatively weak position relative to the regions in which they sit. As a result, some of the chief possibilities for place making that are evident at the municipal level have come from the planning gain extracted from

developers. For residential developments, the planning gain extracted has been quite significant with 20% (and up to 25%) of all units of flats constructed in Khimki being handed over to the municipality in the form of municipal housing. Beyond this, one would have to say that the planning gain extracted so far is modest and far from guaranteed. It has extended so far to the provision or refurbishment of public spaces and parks and the building of kindergartens and schools (Maximov⁶). Even so, the present financial crisis promises to affect the planning gain extracted from even the largest of developers who according to one interviewee are now struggling to finance the amenities and services promised for major residential developments in Khimki (Figure 3).

For a number of reinforcing reasons, local officials and politicians operate in a context in which as yet there is little understanding or concern for issues such as rising social inequalities and the costs of rapid urban development. The enormous pent up demand for housing that exists in Moscow coupled with a celebration of unbridled economic growth and the personal wealth that it offers mean that there is little or no popular discourse, and hardly any major grass-roots or civic group action, relating to, for instance, issues of rising social and spatial inequalities, or of the costs of growth. Yet, in some respects this coupled with Khimki's accessibility to Moscow may make politics rather more active in Khimki than many other localities. As one interviewee suggested, "Taking into account that Khimki is very near Moscow, it's a very politicized city." (Mikhaylov⁷). What was being described here was less a genuine conflict of developer and preservationist interests than the fabrication of such conflicts by different development interests, as highlighted by environmental activists:

⁵ Interview with Dmitriy Pozdnev, Deputy Mayor for Building, Architecture and Land Use, Khimki Administration, 30 October 2008.

⁶ Interview with Yuriy Maximov, Head of the Committee for the Economy, Khimki Administration, 30 October 2008

⁷ Interview with Valeriy Mikhaylov, Chief Architect of the Urban District of Khimki, Khimki Administration, Khimki, 30 October 2008.



Figure 3. Some of many new residential complexes built in Khimki before 2009

On the one hand, there are those people who want to live in suburbs and they need a normal environment... On the other hand, there are the interests that want to pump up the economy of these zones and make them means for money-mining. This means maximum destruction to these green zones and maybe at the cost of residents but with some development of the infrastructure that will bring money... (Mikhail⁸)

There is some evidence to suggest that the comparatively highly educated population of Khimki has exerted some influence on the municipality. One interviewee commented that the population did have rising expectations of the municipality in terms of improvements to the existing housing stock (Pozdnev) and another that the public have been vocal at planning meetings (Mikhaylov). Yet, this is rather limited evidence that business and civic groups are becoming engaged in any political economy of place

with any substantial degree of impact. There is, for example, little sign of business interests having become organized to any significant degree and no real evidence of lobbying government regarding the need for transport improvements, as would be the case in the US and Europe. Indeed, the only organized action regarding transport issues actually relates to environmental and civic group opposition to a by-pass proposed by the Federal government in order to relieve this bottleneck. A small but tenacious group of people have been trying to raise awareness of the potential destruction of a major forest area and part of Moscow's greenbelt that lies in the eastern part of Khimki which they suspect is driven by the new development opportunities that it would present.

As yet there is little indication that municipal level politicians are evolving distinctive agendas across the greater Moscow area. The problem is the system of politics that prevails at present is one in which local political leaders are constrained by patronage

⁸ Interview with Mikhail and Evgeniya Chirikova, Khimki Forest Defence Movement, Moscow, 21 August, 2008

relationships with the regional governor. Thus “opportunities” for the building of a sense of place are often allocated by political leadership at a higher tier of government. As Rudolph and Brade’s (2005: 139) argue “the districts of Moscow Oblast have relatively little influence on local economic development, because major economic actors operate at the level of the governor”. Whilst Khimki has one of the largest municipal budgets in the Oblast, of more importance in this respect is that Khimki is considered, according to one interviewee, to be the ‘locomotive for Moscow Oblast’ (Maximov). The close relationship of the Khimki administration and its leadership to the Oblast government and its political leadership has ensured some significant flagship capital investments such as a new basketball and football stadium. However, to one observer from a major company operating in Khimki this relationship between municipal and regional government had provided little in the way of any place-shaping strategy:

Khimki administration work quite closely with the Moscow Oblast and Moscow Oblast needs to take a long-term grip but so far they have done little cosmetics for the citizens to see that the parks are greener and nicer and that the football stadium is a bit better and so on. I think they try with the funds they have. But what really will make a difference is the long term strategy (Gewert⁹)

There are also obstacles for the territorial planning which are beyond the control of local or even regional administration. Khimki was originally built as a location for key state enterprises related to missiles and aerospace. As many of these enterprises are still controlled by the Ministry of Defence, the insertion of these state enterprises into municipalities represent a freezing in time of industry location, with only some urban adjustment to industrial expansion in the post-Socialist era. Furthermore, as Khimki has a complicated border and is

inter-penetrated by the territory of Moscow. There is still a lack of inter-regional planning in Russia, while Moscow in particular is not keen to cooperate with federal government or its neighbour on such issues, as a number of interviewees indicated (e.g. Vorona¹⁰). The new general plan for Khimki, which is expected to come into force in 2009, and related land use zoning documentation leave considerable strips of the territory “in the middle” uncovered.

CONCLUSIONS

Patterns of suburbanisation and the development of satellite towns around Moscow embodied something of the ambiguities that were apparent in the planning ideals during much of the early Soviet era [French, 1995]. The ambiguous position of suburban and satellite settlements remains and has often been amplified in the post-Soviet era. Rudolph and Brade (2005), while making it clear that contemporary urbanisation at the periphery of Moscow can be described as a new phase, suggest that development at the periphery displays hybrid elements [Rudolph and Brade, 2005: 148]. Notable in this regard is a strengthening of processes of social polarisation that have become visible at the periphery. Perhaps as a corollary to this, as they argue, is that the economics of transition have become less powerful as a defining force in peripheral urbanisation and that “Rather, universal economic mechanisms and strategies with global effects are starting to shape the Moscow periphery” [Rudolph and Brade, 2005:148]. What we have described above tends to question the diminishing importance of transition.

While the case of Khimki may share some facets and controversies as depicted by the concepts of “edge city” and “(suburban) growth machine”, it is still distinctive from these. Particularly, it is “placelessness” that must be added to the conceptualisation

⁹ Interview with Herman Gewert, Vice-President, Director of Operations and Marketing, IKEA Real Estate Russia and Ukraine, Khimki, 6 November 2008 (in English)

¹⁰ Interview with Galina Vorona, Ministry for Regional Development, Russian Federation, Moscow, 1 September 2008

of rapid urban growth in the context of post-Soviet Khimki. The placelessness, or the lack of purposeful place-making strategies by the growth coalitions, arises from a number of reinforcing reasons, including highly speculative development practices, a little interest of local businesses to influence the shape of wider urban development beyond their immediate control, and local government's retreat to standardised planning requirements and to a capricious allocation of developable land as opposed to visionary urban planning and development strategies. This model of growth destroys Khimki's Soviet-era industrial identity as a self-contained city and makes the city into an increasingly fragmented place which may well be hardly distinguished as one city, but rather as several peripheral dormitory districts of the city of Moscow proper. In this respect, Khimki may be considered as actually reverted from being a self-centred (moreover, "closed") city to more of a suburb.

However, Khimki does have a separate local government, which complicates the political structuration of development interests. Rather than being considered a peripheral and less well-off district of Moscow, Khimki finds itself in the position of being a "special" district of Moscow Oblast, effectively one of its wealthiest and investment-attractive. This territorial configuration circumscribes to some degree a place-focused element and creates prerequisites for Khimki remaining a separate place. It remains to be seen, however, whether a growing demand for new urban infrastructure and emerging residents' movements will further re-structure the modes of governing developments in Khimki more in line with what is believed to be proactive place-focused post-suburban politics.

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Oleg Golubchikov is a Research fellow at the School of Geography and the Environment of the University of Oxford. He has Master degrees in Geography from Moscow State University and in Land Management from Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden, and a PhD in Geography from the University of Oxford. His research is concerned with post-socialist urbanization, urban governance, and housing policy. His recent publications include: Golubchikov, O. (2009) Green Homes: Towards Energy Efficient Housing in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Region. Geneva: UN; Golubchikov, O. (2007) Re-scaling the debate on Russian economic growth: regional restructuring and development asynchronies. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 59(2):

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Nicholas A. Phelps received a BA in Geography from University College London and his PhD in Geography from the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. He has interests in the economic geography of multinational enterprises and foreign direct investment, the theory of agglomeration, and urban politics and planning. He is currently Professor of Urban and Regional Development at the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London. His recent publications include: Phelps, N.A., Parsons, N., Ballas, D. and Dowling, A. (2006) Post-suburban Europe: Planning and Politics at the Margin of Europe's Capital Cities. Basingstoke: Palgrave-MacMillan; Phelps, N.A. (2008) "Cluster or Capture? Manufacturing foreign direct investment, external economies and agglomeration"

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Alla Makhrova is a Principal Research fellow at the Faculty of Geography of M.V.Lomonosov Moscow State University. She gained her PhD degree in 1987. Her research interests are the studies of urbanization and cities, spatial planning, and residential property markets. Main publications include: Moscow Capital City-Region at the Turn of the Century. Smolensk: Oykumena, 2003 (co-author); Moscow Oblast Today and Tomorrow: Tendencies and Perspectives of Spatial Development. Moscow: Novyy Khronograf, 2008 (with Nefedova, T. G. and Treivish, A. I.); chapters in Stanilov, K. (ed.) The Post-Socialist City: Urban

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