

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

“Intuitive districts”: Agentive images in a post-socialist city

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Abstract

Anyone who has lived in a city knows that, separately from the administrative or electoral districts, there are districts that exist in the imagination. Areas of the city seem to have a distinctive character and ethos. The article suggests that such notional place-forming occurs spontaneously through everyday sensations, life activities, and events and is spontaneously evaluative and comparative. In these ways, a notion of “intuitive district” differs from externally given analytical concepts commonly used in the literature to categorize urban divisions, such as neighborhood or *quartier*. Intuitive districts are subjective but also widely shared in urban communications. The article argues that they have an objective agency: They influence people's decisions, what they care about, how they move around the city, and interact (or do not interact) with other residents. Using the example of one post-socialist city in Russia (Ulan-Ude), the article explores how intuitive districts have formed and shows how their existence can have effect on highly diverse urban processes and actions, from the formation of gangland territories to house prices, from religious intensification to providing the foundation for public protest.

KEYWORDS

comparison, imagination, right to the city, urban districts

This article suggests an angle that may help advance a better understanding of how people perceive the cities they live in. This is the notion of “intuitive districts.” By this, I refer to the opinions, images, and verbal representations people generate about the various districts of the city. Such mental images are different in kind from the delimitation of administrative districts, for they arise from quite different sources, the inhabitants' own perceptions, life experiences, values, and assumptions about the urban material around them. What makes “intuitive districts” worth studying, I suggest, is that they are subjective in the sense that they derive from perceptions and feelings about the differences between various areas of cities. But at the same time these “intuitive representations” have an objective agency. These oral determinations and images of places can become potent *actants* in the multitudinous affairs of urban life.¹ Especially when shared (in storytelling, gossip, blogs, sketch maps, cartoons, etc.) they influence how people interact with one another

and what decisions they take, such as where to live, where to avoid, which ways to travel, or where to invest. Through the cumulative effects of the mass of such decisions, these intuitive images can become agentive in the change of material conditions and the informal activities in the very neighborhoods, quarters, and localities they describe, in a word in the dynamic processes happening in them. An “intuitive district” is thus not the district itself in an economic or sociological sense but a shared imaginative perspective on this place.

There is a reason for the use of the word “intuitive,” rather than the more usual term “vernacular,” which refers initially to language (see also later discussion). “Intuitive” points to the human body with its sensory organs as what perceives spaces first, seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, feeling comfortable, exhilarated, or tired, along with associated sentiments such as feeling “at home” or apprehensive in a particular urban environment. This relates to the notion of the *habitation* of cities proposed by Henri Lefebvre, who suggested

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that one way of constructing general propositions about cities is by reaching out from what is observable, the “private” or concealed daily life, to understand the rhythms of a given form of *habitation*, its spatio-temporal organization, its “culture,” and its underground life (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 113). However, while owing much to certain of Lefebvre’s insights, this article takes a different and on occasion critical line, if only because my urban subject, the post-socialist “regional capital city,” has such a different past and composition from the west European cities he had in mind. Lefebvre’s ideological preoccupations (he was for a time a communist and always a Marxist) were specific to their time and place. Unlike his hoped-for socialist liberation of urban ways of life from the stultifying effects of *capitalist* hegemony and homogenization, the situation discussed here is that of daily life amid an unpredictable capitalism overlaid on earlier *socialist* attempts at hegemony and homogenization. To ground this discussion in the actualities of a particular city, I will take the example of Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Buryat Republic in Russia. The article will discuss intuitive districts as they have emerged amid social processes characteristic of many post-socialist cities, such as sharpening income disparity, gangland divisions, ethnic networking, rural in-migration, industrial decay, and religious intensification, all of which feed into residents’ place-making and underpin their vivid images of the different areas of the city.

It has unfortunately not been possible to conduct fieldwork in Russia for this article. The methodology perforce has had to adopt a variety of alternative tactics. The sources used include my own many visits to Ulan-Ude from the 1960s to the 2000s; open-ended interviews with Buryat friends, some of whom travel to Ulan-Ude regularly; recent sociological and anthropological literature published in Russia; and newspaper and online/social media materials. I have benefitted from the fact that post-soviet Ulan-Ude is unusually well-studied by local and international scholars (Breslavsky, 2012, 2016; Humphrey, 2007; Jonutyté, 2021; Quijada, 2019; Szmyt, 2017, 2021). A methodological device employed for this article is the creation of sketch maps of the city made by current and former residents at my request, two of which are illustrated later in this article. The authors of these maps include both sexes, a range of occupations, and ages from early 20s to mid-40s. They have given permission for their maps to be used for this article. I regret the limitations of these various sources: the absence of on-site immediate reactions to place and atmosphere; the inability to undertake walkalongs or to compare online with on-street assertions; the fact that almost all of my respondents were Buryats (who are only one third of the city’s population); and the impossibility of generating maps in sufficient quantity to pretend to representativeness.² The article should therefore be seen only as a pointer to what could be a future dedicated research project. Given these limitations, the aim of the map-making was to provide visual evidence that people do indeed imagine and re-name the parts of the city in ways that are strikingly alternatives to the official divisions and to use the maps as indicators when interpreting the interviews and other materials.

It will be argued that, as imaginative constructs, intuitive districts retrieve or create images of the character of a given area and thus

provide an identity for the people living there. However, there is nothing simple about this. Although shared opinions may be stacked up behind the images, their hues, tones, and emotional weight differ according to generation, class, and political and gender positionality. Furthermore, the characteristics are inevitably historically ephemeral, subject to change when events and government policies override over earlier evaluations. In that respect, districts are like the great monuments and focal points of a city, which, whatever solid continuous existence they were designed for, are used to mark regime changes, signal loyalty to a politician, or serve as a protest object, as has been shown in the cases of Moscow (Grant, 2008), Yerevan (Abrahamian, 2011), and Ulan-Ude (Jonutyté, 2021).

Yet paying attention to districts rather than focal points in a city brings a range of different, more diffuse, city-wide, or even globalizing (Grigorichev, 2017; Sweet & Chakars, 2019) processes into view. A central argument of this article is that intuitive districts are impulsively compared to other districts, very often in a disparaging or a competitive way. There are struggles not only about the meaning or dignity of a single district but also about the value and relative status of the array of districts in the city. In some cities, the contrasted characters of districts become salted into mocking stereotypes, for example, in Odesa (Ukraine) where they are represented as a variety of cats (the satisfied fat cat, the dingy alley cat, the crafty cat, etc.).³ It is not only ordinary folk but also the municipal authorities, tycoons, and high religious figures who make judgments about the different parts of the city. The totality of verdicts, which are both affective and hard-headed, become visible in many diverse ways: for example, in the provision (or to the contrary, the neglect) of infrastructure in a given territory; the siting or removal of street markets; decisions about where to invest in shopping centers or hotels; the emergence or discouragement of tentative district-based civil society initiatives; the symbolic location of political protests; the financing and positioning of religious buildings; and the territorial organization of criminal structures. In Russia’s capitalism, such decision-making is usually non-transparent and appears arbitrary to the ordinary citizens, but it always has the effect of monetizing the evaluation of districts. This not only affects the lives of the residents via differential house prices, rents, mortgages, etc., but also constitutes an implicit judgment on the “kind of people” believed to live there, amplifying these alleged characteristics in the process. However, it is not only external opinions and actions that differentiate districts. Internally, as my ethnographic evidence will show, the sheer fact of residence, familiarity, and the diverse emotions associated with that is conducive to “own place” imagination; and this at the same time spontaneously assigns contrasting character(s) to other locations in the city seen as a whole. Implicitly, the area seen as home is always compared to other (non-homely) districts.

How did I arrive at this approach to cities? It arose from my own experience as a child, and this is one reason why I use the word “intuitive.” I grew up in the grand old city of Edinburgh, and I had to travel across the city in buses and trams to reach my school. By the age of around 12, I and my school friends had a shared “mental map” of the city: It was based on sound. It was made up of five distinct accents

spoken by people from different areas of the city. I and my friends from the few streets around our house used to have fun imitating them. We were innocent about “class” or “ethnicity”—we just knew that those kids from over there in a district known as “the Meadows” were hostile. Relatively newly developed towns in Russia such as Ulan-Ude lack the greater density of communication in particular areas over generations that gives rise to distinctive accents/dialects, which is found in old cities like Shanghai, Paris, or Edinburgh. Yet discrimination between the various districts of post-Soviet towns is just as important, made manifest in other, mostly non-linguistic, ways, as this article will describe.

THEORETICAL FIELD

In an article reviewing anthropological theories of the city, Ruth Toulson suggests “that there is a fine line to be drawn between urban determinism—the suggestion that the city is *the* pivotal force in shaping individual lives, a perspective that ignores both human agencies and the complexities of causality—and anthropology that relegates the city to mere context, ethnographies that, almost by chance, take place in urban contexts but say little about the realities of city life” (Toulson, 2015, p. 28). I would like to place the idea of intuitive districts exactly on this “fine line”—though perhaps it should be seen not as a line but as an area of complex interactions. Intuitive districts form as a kind of interface. They would not exist were it not for the real factual differences in the make-up of cities—material, infrastructural, historical, social, and economic differences—but they emerge from a separate source, the consciousness of place, and the *cultural habitus* of the diverse citizens (Feld & Basso, 1996). When people move through the streets on their usual tasks, “the city” becomes a series of felt experiences: an accident in a teeming plaza, a hidden away nook, sight of an ugly vista, or a scene that seems delightful. All this enables people to form mental maps. Lynch (1960) and Olma (2023) argue that although such images are individual, similar movement through cities creates common mental maps among residents. I would add that just as important as movement in forming shared images is social communication in myths, stories, cartoons, jokes, memes, and insults. People become aware of the city as a gigantic patchwork of overlapping and contested images of places—a variegated whole that is squeezed or slanted according to one’s own perspective. I see intuitive districts as a form of urban place-making. But while much of the literature on place-making concerns the making of “my place,” identity formation, and the boundedness and distinctiveness of places (Bonner, 2002; Friedmann, 2010), in this article the concept of place-making is also extended interpersonally and “geographically”; it becomes an intersubjective scanning of a multifarious agglomeration.

This approach is different from that of the classic sociology of the Chicago School and its successors in which it was the analyst, not the inhabitants, who defined which areas comprised districts. Analysis of incomes, occupations, ethnicity, and migration, as well as ethnography, enabled the sociologist to draw diagram maps and

allocate names of their own choosing to the various districts, such as “two-flat area,” “slum,” “vice,” or “Little Sicily.”⁴ This approach was later influential in the emergence in the 1950s–60s among reform-minded sociologists of the idea of “traditional working-class neighborhoods,” where the focus was on the destruction of a community and its replacement through urban renewal (Topalov, 2003). In the French school of urban geography, the debate was about the nature of *quartiers*, whether they are, as was first thought, factually and materially different segments of space or, in a later set of theories, should be understood as “elementary social units,” the functional cells of urban life. The latter idea was criticized when it was observed that there is no true social group of the *quartier*. Individuals come to live there by happenstance and most of their working time and even their social interactions are spent in a wide variety of places outside it. Over time, the turnover of population in some areas can be substantial, while in other places generations reproduce in the same streets. Study of such processes led to the idea of the “morphological personality” of the *quartier* (for discussion of the history of the French school, see Di Méo, 1993, 1994). Similar issues come up in a later literature on “neighborhoods,” which repeatedly dwells on the presence or not “neighborliness” and the quality of social relations inside them. It is because of the theoretical clothing and research agendas that have accreted around “neighborhood”⁵ and “quartier” that I prefer to move on and use the neutral word “district” in this article.

Christian Topalov and his colleagues (2002) have proposed that study of toponyms is the most helpful approach for understanding popular partitioning of the city. Studying the naming of urban divisions in North Africa, Europe, China, Japan, and Europe, Topalov argues that “lexical systems and their changes can be inscribed in social processes, where ‘representations’ are an integral part of ‘reality.’” Toponyms should therefore be understood as forms of experience of a social world and the means of placing or de-placing oneself in it, eventually to change it (2002, p. 375; my translation). Using a similar approach, Nikolaos Olma (2023) further observes that the use of vernacular names for landmarks (*orientiry*) in finding one’s own way around is a form of everyday resistance. Not only in post-Soviet cities like Tashkent, the city he studied, but also in other postcolonial contexts in the global south people are eschewing official street names and any toponyms that are remnants of colonial rule or apartheid. Their own orally transmitted names for landmarks “reflect the city dwellers own identity, celebrate their belonging, and draw a line between insiders and outsiders.” This is a “bottom-up place-making tactic” that undermines the monopoly that the state exerts over symbolic violence (Olma, 2023, p. 102). As this article will show, the same general argument can be made about the in-subordinate naming of “intuitive districts” in contemporary Russian cities. But I would add that the existence of imaginative evaluations of different areas is not just a tactic, nor is it a functional solution to a problem such as describing a route to be taken. It is more like an inevitability, brought about by living in and being affected by a city that in any case cannot be a uniformity. For all the interest of the study of toponymy, it is too limiting to be the sole basis of the work

attempted here. A linguistic object may stand for but cannot fully convey “experience.” In fact, such an object may be misleading. We could remember here the well-known saying of the great historian Marc Bloch: “To the great despair of historians, men fail to change their vocabulary every time they change their customs.”⁶

It is in view of these considerations that I propose the notion of “intuitive districts.” Perhaps the first key to such imaginative constructs is sheer bodily familiarity with a place (Casey, 1996), much of which is shared by residents however different they are in other respects: the little hill you have to climb to get to the school; the smell of the dirty canal; the bench by the post-office people instinctively side step because of the glowering youths who always sit there; the shade enjoyed under the trees by the river. Familiarity with the locality of this fugitive kind is not primarily linguistic, even if a shared sense that somewhere is a place means that it is likely to be given a colloquial name. The counterpart to the places of everyday familiarity, of course, is the parts of the city that are un-named, very rarely visited, or deliberately avoided. If we accept the meaning of intuition found in dictionaries (e.g., “based on what one feels to be true even without conscious reasoning”) surely characterizing the unfamiliar also has an intuitive character—assumptions in this case floating in to form mental pictures mainly based on views from jokes, hearsay, and myth.

Finally, I suggest that study of intuitive districts is germane to one of Henri Lefebvre’s most lasting contributions, his theory of “the right to the city.” By this he referred to the right of city dwellers to take part in all the networks and circuits of communication of the city. This depends on access to the essential quality of urban space, centrality. Lefebvre wrote that there is no urban reality without a center, without the encounter there, actual or possible, of all “objects” and “subjects.” The right to the city implies the refusal to allow oneself to be removed from urban reality by a discriminatory and segregating organization (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 195). This idea is particularly relevant to post-socialist regional capitals. Unlike many European cities, in which busy centers emerged unplanned usually from a combination of a palace, a marketplace, a cathedral, coaching-inns, an avenue for fashionable self-presentation, etc., in the socialist capitals “the center” was premeditated and designed, usually by architects from distant Moscow. Its components were standardized: government, Party, security headquarters, a key monument, perhaps a state opera house, plus a large empty square for parades and mass meetings. Such a center was a more forbidding place. But as will be shown, it too was imagined as an intuitive district, and the right to it was the focus of regulation and contention.

ULAN-UDE

My case study, Ulan-Ude, is located at the confluence of two great rivers in the forested steppes east of Lake Baikal and is the capital of the Buryat (formerly Buryat-Mongol) Republic. This might seem to indicate an exotic town, but in fact Ulan-Ude is a chiefly Soviet and post-Soviet city that underwent the same urbanization

processes as elsewhere in provincial Russia. All such cities share at least one feature—their ideologized demolition or re-signification of pre-revolutionary urban landscapes. This involved the creation of a “socialist” center that was in principle open to all citizens. Such a central district was built for Ulan-Ude around the Square of the Soviets, which was designed essentially as a parade ground. Its focal point added in the 1970s is a monument, a gigantic “Head of Lenin” in black bronze, which rears on a pedestal above the square. A quasi-sacred area surrounds this monument, which is normally kept clear and reserved for dignified events such as awarding medals to war veterans. Ulan-Ude has been called a “red city”: Soviet leaders remained in power long after the end of the USSR, and no one thought to move the Head of Lenin or to change the toponymy of the main streets. Still today, the main street, Lenin Street, leads from the Square of the Soviets down to Revolution Square, and the central streets around this square are named after Kuibyshev, Sverdlov, Kirov, etc.

Before the 1917 revolution, Verkhneudinsk (later Ulan-Ude) was a small colonial town of military officials and merchants constructed around a 17th century Cossack fortress that had been built to suppress and tax the indigenous Buryat population of nomadic herders. Today, Lenin Street links the governing district at the top to an area of elegantly carved old merchants’ houses and a former synagogue at the bottom. These houses are now decrepit and inhabited by poor people, but a local initiative of young people has redecorated some of them and the area has come to have a lively informal identity. Buryats call it “Dumpling District” (*Buuznyi Raion*) because of its numerous small Buryat cafés and restaurants. Meanwhile, the site of the demolished Cossack fortress, nicknamed “Battery” (*Batareika*) in recognition of its ancient military function, is now marked by a stone Christian cross and the district around it has become an area where patriotic working-class Russians tend to live.

In 1926, Ulan-Ude was almost entirely Russian, with a small community of Jewish merchants and only 2.9% Buryats (Humphrey, 2007, p. 181).⁷ It therefore contains no pre-socialist indigenous neighborhoods such as those found in Central Asia and the Caucasus (Darieva & Kaschuba, 2012, p. 23). Buryats started to enter the city in the 1930s and 1940s, with a flow into factories in the 1970s–1980s, and finally a mass influx of people from depressed and derelict villages in the 1990s and up to the present. Even so, Buryats today are only around one-third of the population. So, if we recall Lefebvre’s “right to the city,” one aspect is the right of incoming Buryats to what was and still is mainly a Russian city—even though it is the capital of the Buryat Republic (Szmyt, 2021).

Ulan-Ude has one historical feature that it shares with many other Soviet cities. This is the great power that was wielded over it by the industrial ministries based in Moscow, which overrode any attempts by successive city architects at implementing an overall urban plan (Zhimbiev, 2000). The ministries simply chose a spot wherever they liked, at whatever distance from the center, and built their factory there along with the housing for its workers. In Ulan-Ude, this created sub-centers for the great Glassmaking Factory, the Aircraft Factory, the Wool Textile Factory, the Flour Milling Factory, and the Meat Products Factory. The greatest of them was

the Steam-engine Repair Factory (known locally as “PVZ”),⁸ built to service the Trans-Siberian Railway. Exceptionally powerful and well-funded, in the 1930s it built its own “socialist town” (*sotsgorodok*) in partly constructivist, partly early Stalinist style, with apartment blocks, gardens, and a vast House of Culture with theater and assembly hall. The House of Culture of the PVZ was placed on top of a hill, with a great series of steps leading to its plaza and its own statue of Lenin. The PVZ was located not far from the center, but even so its estate was separated by a forest, and it was reached by a specially built tram line. The other factory settlements were further on the outskirts, even several kilometers distant, with the result that Ulan-Ude is a very widely dispersed city. The solid Stalinist buildings of the PVZ were an exception; the other industrial enterprises could afford only a mixture of two-story apartment blocks of timber and bricks, individual log houses, and wooden barracks. This accommodation was surrounded by sheds, vegetable plots, and fruit trees, today by garages and workshops (Zhimbiev, 2000, pp. 52–3). Gradually, some of the spaces around the factory settlements were filled in with new housing, first the Khrushchev-era standard blocks and more recently the high-rise panel housing seen all over post-Socialist space. Finally, low-lying riverine and outlying areas were appropriated without permission by the incoming flow of Buryat villagers. They just took vacant land wherever they could for their small individual houses. Often the village house was dismantled plank by plank with family labor and set up again in the city. These settlements, which initially existed under threat of eviction and without roads or services, are known “brazen” housing (*nakhalovki*).

Ulan-Ude has no areas that are 100% Russian or Buryat, but there are ethnic patterns: the inhabitants of the socialist factory settlements are mostly Russians brought in as workers from western parts of the USSR. However, the earliest industries, such as the

Glass Factory, were partially staffed with prisoners, former kulaks, and deportees, some of whom were Buryats. Meanwhile, due to policies of indigenization (*korenizatsiya*) from the 1920s onward, Buryats came to be numerous among Party officials, state employees, intelligentsia, etc., and were allocated flats in the center. An area of better-quality housing for elites locally nicknamed “the nobles’ nest” (*dvoryanskoe gnezdo*) can be seen as an intuitive district of a kind that was found in cities across the Soviet Union, the archetype being the “tsar’s village” (*tsarskoe selo*) in Moscow, the area of elite housing blocks for the families of high Party leaders. On the city’s peripheries are grim military settlements and a prison encampment.

The result of all this is that Ulan-Ude is a patchy, uneven, and sprawling city. Although in the post-Soviet era many areas were opened up to free purchase of housing, rather than allocation, the underlying Soviet structure is still perceptible.

Communication between the outlying parts is not easy, and usually not possible without first going into the center and then out again. The city is divided not only by the housing patterns but also because of its geography: it straddles two large rivers, with only three widely separated bridges across them. It is also divided into two halves by the Trans-Siberian railway, and the city has only one bridge over that.

“INTUITIVE DISTRICTS”

Such a scattered and subdivided city is propitious ground for the emergence of “intuitive districts.” They bear little relation to the three large official districts (*raion*) of the city (Figure 1).⁹

Nor do they map directly onto the dozens of administrative sub-districts, *kvartal* or *mikroraion*, the number of which is constantly



FIGURE 1 Map of the administrative districts of Ulan-Ude. Legend: Soviet District (yellow); October District (red); and Railway District (orange).

growing as new developments are built and villages on the periphery are included within the city boundary. The municipality homogenized these scattered subdistricts by classifying them for administrative purposes only by number (*kvartal 14, kvartal 15, etc.*, Breslavsky, 2012). By contrast, the “intuitive districts” conceived by residents reveal the different character and atmosphere attributed to each area. An example is seen in Figure 2, which is a map posted in 2020 by *Andergraund Buryatii*, a large Internet group in VKontakte.¹⁰

This map was “liked” many times, and people wrote in with messages like “Greetings from the Zone of Alienation” or “Hi from Wasteland.” Of course, the attributes of these particular “intuitive districts” are specific to the person, or people, who made this map. But judging from other maps I asked my Ulan-Ude friends to make and my research online, their location and approximate shape correspond to widely shared ideas of the folk districts that make up the city. However, no new word has appeared in Russian or Buryat to refer to this informal type of district. The areas are just “appropriated” by the citizens giving them nicknames (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 194). These are often acronyms like “PVZ,” are known by every local, and are used to explain where you live or where you want to get off the *marshrutka* bus. As I discovered from asking my friends, what differs from person to person is not so much the location of the districts but the range of associations they evoke.

For example, the riverine area marked “*Boloto, Pustota*” (Bog, Emptiness, Wasteland) in Figures 2 and 3 was characterized by another person, possibly ironically, as “Summer Paradise.” The area known as “Left Bank” (of the Selenga River), which in Figure 3 is characterized as “Big Village with dogs,” on the *Andergraund* map is “Zone of Alienation,” while another respondent described it as “Unknown, with places of public gatherings and drinking” and yet another singled it out as “Smell of coal, poverty.” On the contrary, there is considerable agreement about the Glass Factory area immediately north of the center: In Figure 2, it is “simply dangerous,” in Figure 3 “dangerous places,” and Figure 4 labels it “crazies, garages, hostile defensive [zone].”

What lies behind such characterizations? Several of the respondents’ maps depict, surprisingly, a great blank space right next to the Centre district. People call it “*Kirzavod*,” because presumably at some point a brick factory was there (*kirpich* “brick,” *zavod* “factory”). But now, no one knows anything about this long dead factory. On the *Andergraund* map, this district is “wasteland” (*pustyr*), and in Figure 2, it is labeled “never went there; vacant place.” In fact, it is indeed a kind of emptiness—unused land with weeds, a few *khruushovki* (Khrushchev-era blocks), a car repair place, a yard with piles of wood, and great spaces with nothing but a few pipes and electricity pylons. “*Kirzavod*” is an intuitive district, but it reflects the melancholy reality of a “has been” place. No investments are made here,

Карта Улэндэ

Описание районов

Население: 431 922 человек
Площадь: 365,7 км²
Уровень быдла: выше среднего



FIGURE 2 *Andergraund* map. Legend: Map of Ulende: Description of districts. Population: 431,922. Area: 365.7 sq. km. Level of roughness: higher than average. Key to district labels, from left, in red: Zone of Alienation; Simply Dangerous; Beautiful but Dangerous; Barracks; Distant and Dangerous. In green: Head of Lenin; Wasteland; Hunting Territory; New York. In brown: Dubai; Wild West; Wasteland; Energetic; Sounds of Shrapnel. In Yellow: Here, there is a Theater; Dachas; Wasteland.



FIGURE 3 Local resident sketch map 2022, Buryat, male, aged 30s, reproduced with permission. Key to district labels, from left to right in circle: Big Village, Dogs; in purple, Dangerous Places; Chinese market, trade; Forest, museum, Buddhist monastery; Car parts, big parking lot, smoke; chaos; I don't know what is here; Town, high rises, grayness; New buildings, distant; Bog, Wasteland; Old Town, history, dumplings; I never went here, “empty place.”

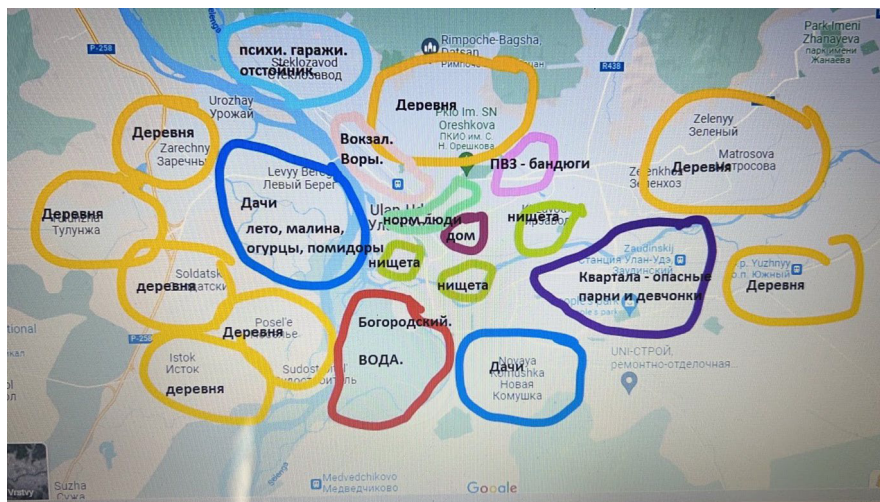


FIGURE 4 Local resident sketch map 2022; Buryat, female, aged 40s, reproduced with permission. Key to district labels: all eight areas circled in yellow: Village; in pale blue: Crazies, garages, hostile defensive [zone]; in pale pink: Station, thieves; in mid-blue: Dachas, summer, raspberries, cucumbers, tomatoes; in turquoise: Normal people; in dark brown: Home (my house); in deep pink: PVZ, bandits; three areas in pale green: Destitution; in dark red: Bogorodskii (holy), water.

and it retains its obsolete name like the ring of ashes that remain after the fire has died.

DISTRICT-FORMING WAYS OF LIFE: (A) STREET GANGS

In Ulan-Ude, a sharply confrontational variety of intuitive district was thrown up by the activity of street gangs. From the 1970s onward, they divided up practically the whole city into their territories. Such gang division of Russian cities has been well analyzed by Svetlana

Stephenson (2015) so I will say little more about the Ulan-Ude variant here. I describe only certain ethnographic aspects because they relate to Lefebvre's notions of the “way of life of the *quartier*” and the “right to the city.”

The Ulan-Ude street gangs of the 1970s–2000s were devoted to creating and maintaining their own stylistic ways of life as much, if not more, than achieving domination over one another. They were alike in the aim to monopolize petty crime in their districts, which they called “states” (*shtaty*), but they differed greatly in the atmosphere of their domains and in their (now much romanticized) styles and manners. In the industrial settlements where the prison labor

employed in Stalinist times mostly remained in place, the gangs reproduced a criminal-oriented culture. The particular atmosphere of certain gang territories was felt by people from other parts of the city. For example, in the words of a Buryat writer:

The zone of influence of the 'Sixty-Three-ers' gang extended far and wide beyond the odious barracks across wasteland and wooden houses as far as the gloomy building of the SISO, the investigatory centre and solitary confinement prison. In this district, one could not but feel the great breathing of the city penitentiary system, from Tsarist times and the GULAG.¹¹

By contrast, there were central city gangs, such as the Gortop, made up of youngsters from the prosperous Buryat intelligentsia. They dressed stylishly and arrogantly roamed with knives, holding the center in their grip. The Gortop were instantly distinguishable from the Russian working-class groups called "Chav," who had their own dress code and adopted a squatting posture.

These two gang cultures were distinct from the Chiang-kai-shisty, who were Buryats from the new *mikroraiony* of Zauda. The rebellious name they chose declared both their anti-Communist attitude and their Asian (non-Russian) identity. Rapidly spreading in the district described as "Wild West" in the *Anderground* map (Figure 2), they gathered at hang-outs they called "Taiwans." Other Buryat groups then emerged, calling themselves Asian names such as Gunny ("Huns"), Khunkhuzy, and Barguty. All of them opposed the Russian gangs of any kind. The Chiang-Kai-Shisty elaborated their own code (or "way of life") to differentiate themselves from the Russian Chavs. They dressed fashionably if they could, refused "low-life" street crime such as mugging, they respected elders, claimed to treat girls well, rejected the influence of criminals, and resolved all problems only by fighting. They divided up their "states" accurately by road boundaries, and normally did not venture into the center, from which their districts were separated by the river Uda. But once, in 1968, a mass of Buryat groups joined forces to pour across the bridge over the Uda to attack the core of the city, shouting their battle cries; as one observer wrote, "they won themselves a historical place of habitation in the center of the city."¹²

The distinctive localized gang cultures are interesting in relation to Lefebvre's idea of the "right to the city," which he identified with the right to freely enjoy the "heart of the city" with its urban grandeur and cosmopolitanism.¹³ The austere spaces of central Ulan-Ude were radically unlike the exuberance of central Paris praised by Lefebvre. Nevertheless, defending one's own boundaries, and attacking the Russian gangs' districts, was the rural Buryats' way to grasp at the right to the city that was theirs, at least in name. The epicenter was of course the Head of Lenin (*Golova Lenina*). The gangs of Buryat former country folk who live in the self-built *nakhalovki* in the outskirts on the Left Bank are known as Golovary. That name, which is now an insult meaning "uncouth hick," is often said to have originated with the

first arrivals, who were farm boys unfamiliar with the city but who "ignorantly" and "boorishly" chose the *Golova* as the place for their meetings. They even showed their effrontery by climbing up on it (Makhachkeev, 2018).

Today, many of the district-based gangs have either disappeared or been taken over by organized criminal racketeers that divide the city into income generating districts.¹⁴ Yet the old gangland "states" are remembered precursors for many of the intuitive districts of the present time, notably by delimiting numerous areas of danger (see maps). Although existentially present to the inhabitants, these are "invisible" to the administrative eye. The official protocols provide no categories with which to register or manage dealings with them. Hovering in the ambivalent status of "everyone knows, but not jurally acknowledged," such "invisible" imagined communities/networks/districts can nevertheless be realized and put to work by inhabitants.

DISTRICT-FORMING WAYS OF LIFE: (B) "IMPUDENT HOUSING"

It is mainly rural Buryats who have flooded into the "impudent settlements" (*nakhalovki*) and created new ones. A family arrives and then brothers, sisters, and cousins follow with their families, taking up land nearby. They appropriate large plots allowing vegetable gardens, workshops, chickens, even perhaps a cow here and there. Some of the academic literature assumes this means a regrettable "ruralization" of the city (Zhimbiev, 2000), while Grigorichev and Elokhina (2022) have adopted a more nuanced vocabulary, arguing that the "private housing sector" has in fact promoted *non-urban* or *not-yet-urban* localities and communities in Siberian urban space. These areas are set aside by city authorities as vague "development reserves"; but since there are no specific planning categories or funding streams directed to them, they are essentially unheeded by the authorities. Factually, they can be large, well-populated places, but they do not fit the visions of the "correct" urbanism (ibid. 2022, p. 171). *Nakhalovki* have a clear rationale in the eyes of the inhabitants of Ulan-Ude, however. Nodes of the core inhabitants cultivate networks linking them to kin in the countryside from which they came. Exchange of rural produce (meat, milk products, forest, and mining pickings) for city manufactures (clothing, electrical equipment, etc.) has long been essential survival strategies. Economic ties are buttressed by the mobilization of wider socio-cultural frameworks such as clans and religious associations, both Buddhist and shamanist. For example, there is an area on the outskirts of Ulan-Ude where Aga Buryats have settled, and another that has become an "intuitive district" for Buryats from remote Kizhinga. In my view, there is no reason to see these city-village relations as "pre-modern" and the city as "non-urban," on account of their presence. On the contrary, because the inhabitants of deprived areas often make a living by taking part in the long chains of informal/illegal long-distance trade with China and Mongolia, in practice these places are often tied into the most contemporary of global economies. The products of illegal

gold-panning, jade mining, hashish cultivation, medicinal plant collection, and countless other activities of resourceful villagers are fed to efficient product sorting and logistics operations in the *nakhalovki*, thence to workshops in China and onward to world markets.

The spreading hectares of wooden *nakhalovki* houses surrounding Ulan-Ude are precariously linked to the electricity grid and often without made-up roads, sanitation, shops, schools, or medical facilities. One way, sadly, that they became envisaged as *proper places*, rather than filled-in gaps or tagged-on outskirts, is by consciousness of deprivation. Residents sometimes band together to file complaints: “The ambulance won’t come to us, nor taxis.”¹⁵ Neighbors generally help one another, compensating for the absence of services such as childcare, central heating, large stores, banks, pharmacies, or cinemas. There are also symbolic indicators that some areas are felt to be socially denser realms, such as unauthorized Buddhist centers, small temples, and prayer wheels, hidden away in a housing block, a backyard, or in an insignificant shed. The attendant lamas are brought in from the same rural location, sometimes from the same clan, as the residents (Hürelbaatar, 2007, pp. 140–2).

Long-standing urbanites often deride the *nakhalovki* as “villages” (see Figure 4, whose author considered half the city to consist of village-like districts and who marked only a tiny city center enclave as the district of “normal people”). However, it is a dubious step to elevate folk labels such as “village” to academic categories. The idea of “intuitive districts” allows me to sidestep an unproductive debate in the regional literature about whether life the *nakhalovki* is properly “urban” or de facto “rural.” The academic term “suburbanization” is supposed to overcome this dichotomy (Breslavsky, 2016). But it is also unhelpful when the term *prigorod* (suburb) is applied to every settlement outside the center, irrespective of the great social, economic and symbolic factual differences between them.¹⁶ What matters for my purposes is whether a shared “folk” idea of a district exists (or not) and the extent to which it is shared and affects the decisions people make. Key to this in Ulan-Ude is understanding that the Buryat manner of “inhabiting” is different from the Russian, if only because it involves ideas of ancestral roots that tie people to the power attributed to the land itself.

CASE STUDY 1: VERKHNYAYA BEREZOVKA

My example here is Verkhnyaya Berezovka, an outlying district in a hilly and forested area, which has become known as a prime area of Buryat indigenization and place-making (Szmyt, 2017). The area is full of elite cottages, an ethnographic museum, banqueting halls, and pleasant single houses. So why does the Anderground map (Figure 2) comment that it is “beautiful but dangerous?” What is dangerous about it?

Verkhnyaya Berezovka is one of the few areas in the city where Buryats used to live in pre-Revolutionary times. They call this district *Deed Ongotstai*, which means “high place with spirits.”¹⁷ The 18 Buryat households listed as living there in 1912 had an *oboo* shrine, dedicated to worship of the spirits of the land. The Soviet powers

moved the Buryats out in the 1930s and destroyed the *oboo*. But soon the Soviet development projects failed disastrously, one by one. The Buryat explanation is that the ancestor spirits had been angered and took their revenge. Locals say that this is “hard land” (*Bur. hatuu gazar*), that the spirits are harsh and angry, and this is why it is dangerous to live there—this should be an area only of respect and worship.¹⁸ This idea was ignored, or not known about, by the authorities. Before long the area was already filling with dachas, an open-air Ethnographic Museum, a Fruit-tree Station, and private housing. In the 1990s, descendants of the local Buryats restarted rituals of respect to the land spirits. So who are these spirits? They are the vengeful souls of the persecuted Buryat ancestors, which merged into the land itself and now emit supernatural “energy,” blessings, and misfortunes. If such a place is sacred, it is also automatically dangerous. Buryats say that the Ethnographic Museum has only made Deed Ongotstai “harder” and more powerful, because so many shamanic fetishes (*ongot*, sacred receptacles for spirits) are kept there (Hürelbaatar, 2007, p. 145). Since the 1990s, the shamans who invoke and pacify the spirits have become more popular in Ulan-Ude. Sophisticated, often highly educated, they have developed performative means of satisfying an urban clientele, and as Szmyt argues (2017, p. 88) many are involved in promoting indigenous Buryat rights to certain city spaces. The shamans started innovative mass rites at Deed Ongotstai.¹⁹

The strong and organized Buddhist church wanted a stake in such a spiritually powerful district. The Head Lama built a wooden monastery there. There was a fire and three lamas died—the revenge of the shamanic spirits again, as some locals say. But the Head Lama carried on regardless, rebuilding and expanding the Buddhist complex. A city resident told me that there must have been a massacre in the past for there to be so many angry spirits in this place. He thought people were glad that Buddhist temples had been constructed because they would counteract the evil and bless the area. Soon what had been to most citizens just an outlying area began to appear on everyone’s radar as a favored and colorful district: Weddings were held there; banqueting halls and a sleek health resort were added. Russians celebrated a Tsarist-era merchant who had built a Christian shrine there. In addition, another prominent lama, an independent from a different region of Buryatia, decided that Deed Ongotstai was where he too should build his Buddhist temple. His rationale was as follows: “Powerful lamas intentionally choose such places to build monasteries. If you do the right things in the right way, you will get support from the spirits and energy from the land, otherwise you will be punished. It is also a chance for the spirits of the land to be liberated by listening to the lamas’ chanting prayers. Our ancestral spirits will be glad to have such a monastery here” (quoted in Hürelbaatar, 2007, p. 147).

As this short history shows, Verkhnyaya Berezovka/Deed Ongotstai has become a super-concentrated version of a controversial, but overall positive, “intuitive district.” Meaningful elements are constantly being added, investment flows in, house prices rise. It is the opposite of Kirzavod, the central wasteland where nothing happens. But there are other kinds of districts too, and my next case

returns to the settlement of the Steam-Engine Repair Factory, the PVZ, which has been turned into a self-conscious “district” by a different set of elements.

CASE STUDY 2: THE STEAM-ENGINE REPAIR FACTORY DISTRICT

In contrast to the thriving multi-spiritual life of Verkhnyaya Bereзовka, the PVZ is left with a powerful ghost culture. Alone among the factories of the city, the PVZ had built a Stalin-era “socialist town” (*sotsgorodok*) for its workers. The builders were German prisoners of war—the only reason the place still stands, as local people joke. Sited on a hill, planned streets, gardens, a fountain, and a magnificent staircase lead up to a statue of Lenin and the huge House of Culture (*Dom Kul'tury*, DK). An elderly resident remembers: Street lights shone at night; music played in the evenings. People arranged to meet at the Lenin statue. There were regular films and concerts in the DK. The assembly hall with its great 24-layer chandelier was rich with paintings of revolutionary scenes. I remember how we tipped our heads backward to look at the scenes as the light slowly dimmed before the beginning of a film.²⁰

However, with the end of the USSR, the factory renounced ownership of the DK. The House of Culture and the *sotsgorodok* fell into disrepair, even though the factory is still operating. The communal “socialist way of life” no longer appealed to managers and engineers. They moved out, and a Russian working-class way of life took shape. Now, as a blogger commented:

“Made in PVZ” means worker or peasant origin. *Chav* [coarse] or lawbreaker neighbours with rosaries in their hands. Sports clothing and padded jackets with specially rounded shoulders, invariably slippers worn in all weathers. Long conversations about way of life, a singing-drawling way of pronouncing words. And strangely, avoidance of swearing: ‘Are we devils, or what?’ But also, a cult of former prison inmates, use of criminal slang, and the idea of ‘feeding the [prison] zone’.²¹

Today, the residents face crumbling brickwork, ancient, and dangerous electric wires, disintegrating sanitary arrangements and terrible smells. Yet the *sotsgorodok* remains a special place in the minds of Ulan-Ude people. It is spacious, bare, and Soviet. People say it is like “stepping into the past,” because it has none of the brash advertisements and intrusive commercial constructions found elsewhere in the city. The PVZ is not the place where a businessman would site a glamorous restaurant or a tourist hotel. The inhabitants make do in their own ways: If not working in the factory, they set up nail-bars, mend cars, and process stolen goods.

Recently, some occupants of this special place have taken action to have their district restored. They fiercely reject plans for

demolition of certain of the blocks and rehousing in a different area. They held meetings, harangued municipal officials, and hired TV filmmakers and architectural heritage experts to gather support. This is an example of the civic community building that Oleg Kharkhordin and Alapuro (2010) discusses in relation to the steel-making settlement of Severostal. Kharkhordin argues that provision of “public goods,” notably the material things themselves, are the crucial drivers of community action. Yet in the case of the PVZ, the valued aspect of the *sotsgorodok* for the occupants is only partially their material well-being. Also important is the more intangible idea that PVZ constitutes a harmonious, well-proportioned *ensemble*, a word that is constantly repeated. It was planned on a generous yet human scale for a socialist way of life. That mode of existence has ended but the neglected architectural composition remains its specter. The PVZ, people say, should be considered and dealt with as a whole—in other words, as I would put it, as an intuitive district.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have tried to move beyond some of the ways internal divisions in cities are often considered from an external perspective. Such segmenting of the city has reflected the preoccupations of the analysts and does not necessarily coincide with the concerns or experiences of the residents. Even if an attempt is made to register local views, these are gathered in relation to the given frame of analysis. To take two examples: A planning mindset encouraged Lynch (1960) to analyze images of the American city in terms of its design, form, and legibility. The analysis included the “look” of parts of the city to the inhabitants, but not the vast variety of other ways they engaged with the urban environment. A theoretical concern with governmentalism lies behind Chuang’s examination (2022) of public housing districts in Singapore as a means for the creation of “spatial-political subjectivity”; but as my examples have shown much of city life involves affect and sensation and escapes even a generous definition of the “spatial-political.” It is true that the two analytical questions of urban design and governance just mentioned are also practical issues, and that they preoccupied Soviet planners too. This can be seen most clearly in one of the ethnographic studies described here, the Steam-engine Repair Factory (PVZ), where it was not only the planners and architects but many of the residents also who became attached to the form and legibility of the *sotsgorodok* and to their memories of socialist political subjectivity. But even though it might be appropriate and illuminating to conduct an analysis of the PVZ in terms of these two analytics, I have argued that that would not capture an essential feature of life in cities as whole, the cognitive, affective, memory-laden, and judgmental appraisal of the differences between its various parts.

A different, though similarly partial, issue besets many Russian urban sociologists: the existence or not of the “true city” and what that says about Russia as a whole. The country is burdened with too many “non-cities” or “not yet cities” (*nedogorod*), they argue, made up of dislocated migratory folk and the imitative urbanism created by

Soviet planners. For writers like Glazychev (2005), smaller cities like Ulan-Ude are little more than agglomerations of villages.²² Again, it is true that some, though only a few, citizens share this view (Figure 4). But what I have suggested in this article is that using such essentially binary analytics—the urban versus the rural, the center versus the periphery, the well-planned versus the disorganized, “real” versus ersatz urbanism, and so forth—is not the only way to understand these cities. Instead, we could adopt a less implicitly judgmental, less teleological, language, one that is not reliant on an ideal of the “true city.” We could see these cities as made up of “intuitive districts” that are intrinsically different from one another; that is, districts arrived at in the minds of the inhabitants. As Grigorichev pointed out (2015, p. 52) in an insightful article on the emergence of a distinct community space in the mishmash of the outskirts of Irkutsk, “to take charge of space it is first necessary to ‘conceptualize’ it.”

I have elicited residents’ sketches as a way of starting to understand their mental images of the city. But I have also suggested that such sketches are just conceptual signals of the broader and deeper factors that underlie people’s intuitive life in cities. The term “intuitive” is used here to refer to lifeways that are not initially consciously rationalized; it indexes the universal experience of bodily and affectual involvement with the diversity of places. The intuitive experience of difference becomes manifest—or bursts out—as representations or word-images, as imaginative memes (“the cats of Odesa”), poetic tropes (“summer paradise”), notes of apprehension (“district of dangerous boys and girls”), mocking anti-metaphors (“Dubai” for some gray dingy area), or unequivocal aversion (“zone of alienation”). Despite the many negative labels, there is little suggestion here of anti-government protest or ethnically pointed political critique, nor even of the emergence of movements of collective and liberatory “structures of feeling” in Raymond Williams’s terms.²³ Rather, the liveliness, humor and gamut of responses suggest individual irony, self-mockery, and resigned, but somehow jesting, acceptance of the variegated city as it is.

Much of the recent literature on Ulan-Ude has focused on “indigenization” (Jonutyté, 2021; Quijada, 2019; Sweet & Chakars, 2019; Szymt, 2017, 2020, 2021), and it is certainly the case that many religious and heritage organizations have made the city, in a fragmentary way, a more markedly Buryat than in Soviet times. But “indigenization” is another external academic concept. It is not clear to me that it figures largely, or even at all, in residents’ vocabularies (as Jonutyté, 2021 also implies). Rather, social analysts extract evidence of indigenization from various observations, meanwhile eclipsing the wide range of other ways in which people localize themselves spatially and conceptualize “places” through the imaginative means at hand. The means turn out to be myriad and not limited narrowly to “Buryat culture” or “Russian culture.” When Buryat netizens post images of a Buddha on the plinth in place of Lenin’s head (Jonutyté, 2021, p. 7), words like “indigenization” and “right to the city” may spring to mind. But Buddha is one of several virtual Lenin supplanters. Images of non-indigenous tyrants Chinggis Khan and Mao Zedong staring proudly from the pedestal also circulate.

In addition, thinking of the residents’ imaginative range we should note the use of allegory and analogy, and the many districts of the city that stand for exotic global places (“New York,” “Wild West,” “Dubai,” “Taiwan”) or lawless activities (“hunting grounds,” “bandits are here”), social class (“in this district they wear ties”), or states of mind (“here you can get a real detox from the depression of U-U”). In other words, in city-wide visions, it is both the felt reality and the variety of the whole world that are pictured in the patchwork of localities. It is this spontaneous yet fundamental aspect of city living that the idea of “intuitive districts” attempts to grasp.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Here, I follow Bruno Latour’s argument (2011, p. 1) that it is impossible to detect the agency of an actant without defining the ways in which we speak of it (or represent it visually).

² Some of my respondents were uncomfortable with cartographic images. This was sometimes due to unfamiliarity with two-dimensional rendering of places or computer drawing programs, but sometimes it was that there was just far too much to say. People preferred to name districts orally and hold forth on their history, childhood memories associated with them, and so forth.

³ <https://rrron.livejournal.com/3608041.html>. Consulted February 28, 2024.

⁴ <https://medium.com/an-idea/from-the-chicago-school-to-the-los-angeles-school-urbanism-sociology-6e86ed0ef88f>.

⁵ “The neighborhood” as that term has come to be used in urban anthropology is attributed with certain characteristics that in the post-Soviet case are often absent. For example, neighborhood residents interact with each other, at times act collectively to improve the area, can identify something they have in common with other residents, and feel that most of their needs are being taken care of in the vicinity; residents are linked by at least one faith community or school, local businesses, and space for leisure-time activity. Thus, not every parcel of named land in a city is a neighborhood. See <http://www.urban-anthropology.org/2020JUNEJULY.pdf>.

⁶ Quoted from Bloch *The Historian’s Craft* (1984, p. 34) in Ginzburg (2012, p. 97).

⁷ In 1926, the population of Verkhneudinsk was 22,400. Renamed Ulan-Ude in 1934, its population grew greatly in the Soviet era and continues to rise. In 2012, it was 413,850, and in 2022, it was 448,000.

⁸ It was later renamed the Locomotive Repair Factory (LVRZ), but the district continues to be known locally as “PVZ,” the term used here.

- ⁹Source: <https://newbur.ru/upload/iblock/fc5/fc5d5b3ea714ba82255cbfc4873856c9.jpg>. Novaya Buryatiya, open website. Consulted March 2024.
- ¹⁰<https://www.infpol.ru/210796-uroven-bydla-vyshe-srednego-v-sotse-tyakh-narisovali-kartu-ulende/>. 33,000 people in the V Kontakte group. Consulted March 2024.
- ¹¹Gennadii Bashkuev, quoted in Makhachkeev (2018, p. 86).
- ¹²Sergei Voron (2021) "Proshchai, shpana sovetskaya 5," <https://proza.ru/2021/04/18/1506>.
- ¹³Lefebvre wrote that the city dweller living in the heart of the city is privileged, even if he is poor. "Even if he is not wealthy, he reaps the benefits of past glories and enjoys a considerable freedom of initiative; his daily life is enlivened by monuments, chance encounters, and the various occupations and distractions of his everyday experience" (Lefebvre, 2000, p. 123).
- ¹⁴The city's youth is widely recruited into the AUye (*Arestantskoe Ugolovnoe Yedinstvo*), an illegal and secretive Russia-wide movement that gathers "tribute" from schoolchildren and students and feeds it into an *obshchak* (common kitty) to support prisoners and their families. Recruits have their own customs, idioms, tattoos, and a sign, an eight-pointed star. AUye is particularly prevalent in Ulan-Ude and may be agentive in generating a new layer of "districtification" of the city. It is not ethnically subdivided and operates via the "overseers" (*smotryashchie*) appointed to rule their own patches, dividing the city according to the schools and colleges that are the most promising targets for money-gathering. Some respondents' maps designate particular districts as areas of especially intense AUye predations. See <https://www.infpol.ru/219032-buryatiya-obognala-vsyu-stranu-po-interesuk-ae/>; https://pikabu.ru/story/v_buryatii_reshili_borotsya_s_aue_5433093. Accessed February 24, 2024.
- ¹⁵<https://arigus.tv/news/society/115895-luzha-po-poyas-taksisty-i-skoraya-boyatsya-ezditi-k-zhitelyam-chastnogo-sektora-ulan-ude/>. Accessed February 24, 2024.
- ¹⁶Separate from the *nakhlovki* are the districts of *dachas* (summer houses, Figures 2 and 4) allocated to apartment dwellers in the Soviet era for leisure, vegetable growing, etc. Grigorichev (2015) describes how allotment holders in Irkutsk "produce locality" when they become full-time residents and realize they have common interests. Consciousness of "our place" is produced by practices such as Soviet style communal workdays ("*subbotniki*") devoted to maintenance of shared spaces.
- ¹⁷Hürelbaatar (2007, p. 145). This name, sometimes written Deed Ongotstoi, allegedly means "upper woodyard" (Szymt, 2017, p. 117), but both ethnographers agree that for local people this is a place with spirits (*ongon*, *pl ongot*s).
- ¹⁸People also say that there is a natural cleft in the land that exudes poisonous gases and causes illness among residents.
- ¹⁹In 1998, around 20 shamans and over 2000 people attended a newly invented ritual called "Golden Autumn Prayer" in Deed Ongotstoi held in a field attached to the Museum of Ethnography (Hürelbaatar, 2007, p. 147). But there was opposition: Many Buryats hold that shamans are properly attached only to specific kinship groups and rural locales; therefore, mass rituals are "not genuine" and risk offending the spirits of Deed Ongotstai further.
- ²⁰<https://ludakutulik.livejournal.com/67880.html>. Written in 2010, accessed August 2022.
- ²¹<https://ludakutulik.livejournal.com/67880.html>. Consulted August 2022.
- ²²Grigorichev and Elokhina (2022) and Breslavsky (2012, 2016) argue slightly differently that the Soviets did create real cities of a kind, but they were "deconstructed" in the last 20 years by the flood of

countryside immigrants, who swamped the city in "ruralization" or endless "suburbs."

- ²³Raymond Williams' idea of "structures of feeling" referred to the emergence at historical moments of affective popular responses to official and totalitarian discourse (see discussion in Middleton, 2020).

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