

**EXTENDING THE SPACE OF DOMESTICITY  
IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA:  
FROM DACHA TO SUBURBAN HOME**

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## Aristocratic dacha

Dacha means a summer country house for urban families. Dachas (from the Russian word “give”) started appearing in the 17th century, allocated (“given”) by the State to the aristocratic part of society



## Mass dachas in the 20th century

In the 1950s, due to macroeconomic problems, plots of land were given to ordinary civil servants for self-sufficiency (with strict limits on building construction)





## Modern dacha

In the 1990s these plots were privatized. In August 2013, 30% of Russians owned dachas and further 28% intended to buy one.

Rurbanization process: dachas transforming into «suburban home» suitable for year-round living.

# What does DACHA means?

- Physical attribute: dacha is a plot with a house
- Territory: located outside the city and domesticated the suburban spaces;
- Owners: city dwellers (family)
- Used seasonably (during the warm season)
- ‘Dacha space’ - territory of dacha communities and allotment associations are situated in
- Schematically - “zone in the form of concentric circles radiating from downtown to the periphery” [*Malinova-Tziafeta, 2013*]

# “Summerfolk: A History of the Dacha, 1710–2000” (St. Lovell)

- The dacha expressed the polarity and inconsistency of Russian society. It includes a suggestive diversity in:
  - functional as well as economical status of housing (from brick-built villas to temporary constructions);
  - sizes (from 2 decares to 1 hectare and more);
  - inhabitants (government officials, intellectuals and ordinary citizens);
  - occupation (it could be a luxury resort or a space of drudgery) [Lovell S. , 2000]

# Current dachas situation -1

- “The owners come to their secondary houses during the warm season, on weekends and holidays only. The dacha owners’ preferred activities when they have the lucky opportunity to escape the everyday routine and get out of town include hanging around, tending plants, renovating their houses and grilling shish-kebabs” (Public Opinion Foundation, July, 2013)
- **Seasonable hobby**
- **Second home** (extending the space of primary home etc)



# Current dachas situation -2

- Significant variables determining the attitudes towards the dacha are:
  - 1. income
  - 2. age
  - 3. existence of children
  - 4. education
- More educated people are more likely to be motivated to have a dacha
- Children are significant drivers for domesticating this space (*Clarke S., Varshavskaya L, Alasheev S., Karelina M., 2000.*)

# Modern dacha: a material object with post material values

Q: Which item of the list below is today's clearest sign of material success? Number of respondents: 1600.

	1997	1998	2008	2013
<b>Good housing</b>	42	43	62	58
Freely spending one's money, not having to think through one's expenses carefully	53	50	50	51
Being able to provide good education to one's children	30	37	38	29
Large savings	24	25	27	29
Eating well	33	43	28	28
Having a good car	13	14	21	25
Traveling, going abroad on holidays	15	15	15	22
<b>A good dacha or suburban house</b>	7	9	10	16
Nothing but money	6	11	4	5
Fashionable clothing	4	4	3	4
Don't know/No answer	6	3	1	1

Source: *Annual Report*. Yuri Levada Center, official website. Moscow. 2013.

URL: <http://www.levada.ru/sites/default/files/om13.pdf>

# Empirical research methodology

- **Case study research** (community located at 30 km to the north of Moscow)
- **Time: from August 2010 and August 2011**
- **Data collection:** interviews, focus groups, participant observation, document analysis
- **Main research subject was dacha practices**
- **Question: what is the social order of the dacha's space?**



# Soviet heritage: space of collective work

- **Strict rules** regulated dacha activities (open space, communities of coworkers)
- **Purpose:** labor for self-sufficiency and personal consumption only
  - *If you didn't plant things they took your plot away! They would come, the chairman would inspect that there's not a single [unauthorized] grass blade... building large houses was not allowed. You couldn't build toilets or saunas. You couldn't keep your car on the plot, because the whole plot had to be planted over (Male, 65)*
- **Previously private** (apartment) life became **collective** (dacha) life
- **Gender order** were defined based on **participation in labor** (Ashwin, S., 2000)

# The dacha resident's culture and identity

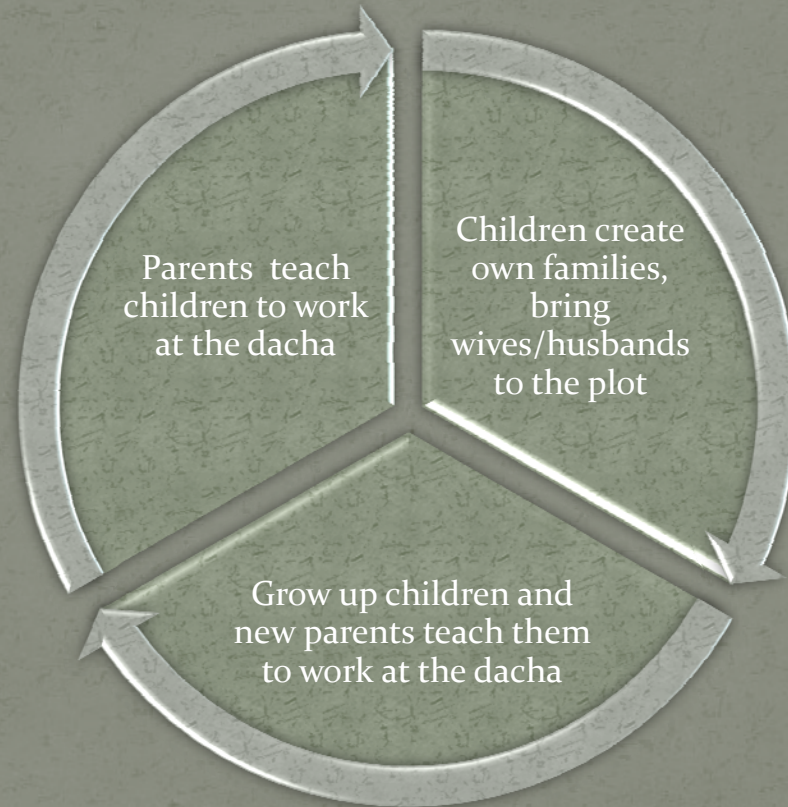
- **Lifestyle**
- Dacha labor has meaning continuum (from **labor as a 'burden'** and **till unique leisure activity**)
  - Do you think I'd do it if I didn't like it? (Wife, 58)*
  - This is a way of life (Husband, 61)*
  - I get pleasure from it, from this work! (Wife, 58)*
- Labor is differentiating dacha residents between “**true dachniki**” (work hard) and “**not dachniki**” (don't work)
  - We plant from time to time, for the neighbors. Otherwise we would be embarrassed in front of them for not growing anything (Female, 45)*

# Is the dacha work irrational?

- Dacha's work is irrational: it is cheaper to buy vegetables than to grow it up (*Chekhovskih I, 2001*)
- BUT: this labor cannot be reduced to gardening and to the price of produce as its only result
- July, 2013 (summerfolk national survey), work at the dacha is:
  - 66% **“rather a pleasure”**
  - 21% **“rather a burden”**
  - 13% were unable to answer the question

# Domestication at the dacha space

- Family cycle is reproduced in the dacha framework:



- Historically the dacha reinforces the creation of a classical family



# Gendered division of dacha's labor

## Female

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- Mostly “grannies”, engaged in housework, gardening and childrearing
- *I sit here at the dacha, I've brought up my kids, now I'm looking after my grandkids... (Female, 55)*

## Male

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- Construction work as an opportunity for gender project
- *Here I can do anything, in the apartment I do nothing (Male, 65)*
- Dacha a space of legitimate masculine scenario (“build a house, bring up a son and plant a tree” traditional Georgian proverb which is popular in Russia)

# Conclusions -1

- The modern dacha is a social institution providing stability for the social system and its development
- Being an urban family's local territory, it allows realizing a family project (gender roles, age-specific needs as well as extended space of domesticity)
- Dacha offers a unique practices, historically rooted and close to postmaterial values
- The menu of gendered practices creates a “positive” gender regime: women realize creativity and esthetic aspirations in gardening; men are offered a version of a legitimate masculine scenario in the form of self-fulfillment through construction work

# Conclusions -2

- Dachas form stable neighborhood communities. The fact that dachas were allocated to professionals means they could form one social class
- The meaning and form of the dacha is slowly changing: from a summer house it is transforming into a year-round accommodation
- Therefore, the dacha space gives its inhabitants freedom from the urbanized pace of life, while on the other hand, suggesting its own domesticated social order

# References

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