

A springtime journey to the Soviet Union: Post-war town planning and policy mobilities through the Iron Curtain

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Abstract

This paper builds upon a relatively small but growing literature in geography, planning and cognate disciplines that seek to understand the variegated geographies and histories of policy mobilities. The paper uses a case study of an exchange trip between town planners in the Soviet Union and the UK during 1957-58. It focuses on the experiences of the British planners in the Soviet Union and sets the tour in the wider context of a fluctuating and sometimes turbulent history of Anglo-Soviet politics, travels and connections. In doing this, the paper makes three arguments. First, that the circulation of expertise and ideas, models and policies pre-dates the emergence of neo-liberalism. Second, while occurrences of policy tourism often share some common characteristics, it is geographically and historically contingent, shaped by particular territorial and relational path-dependencies, networks and processes. Third, the paper makes a case for the use of archival research as a valuable method for making sense of policy mobilities and policy tourism.

Introduction

On the evening of 14 May 1958 a Tu104 plane from Prague landed at Vnukovo airport in Moscow. Six British planners stepped onto the tarmac to be welcomed by an ensemble of government officials. They were also met by two interpreters who would accompany them on a 22 day tour of the Soviet Union. For one member of the British delegation, Richard Edmonds (the Chair of London County Council's Town Planning Committee), they were greeted like friends and partners in learning:

“Passports are yielded up at the plane door and in a moment or two we are in the arms of friends, friends I say in part because of their smiling warm-hearted welcome, but through the memory, too, of a busy week in London in September [1957]... when, together we looked at the new London risen from the blitz, told of our difficulties, and pointed to what we felt were our successes. Now here we were at the start of the return visit” (Edmonds, 1958: 10)

Both the 1957 Soviet trip to the UK and this return visit to the Soviet Union were well publicized events. Numerous reports of both appeared in local and national newspapers in the UK and in the Soviet Union. The *Kentish Mercury* (1958: 5), for instance, announced that Edmonds was due to go “behind the curtain” to explore the intricacies of Soviet planning. Edmonds and the leader of the trip, Frederic J. Osborn, both wrote reports in *The Evening News* (London) and *The Daily Telegraph and Morning Post* respectively (Edmonds, 1958a, 1958b, 1958c; Osborn, 1958a). Detailed reports and commentaries by almost all members of the party also appeared in the *Journal of the Town Planning Institute*, *Town and Country Planning*, the *Town Planning Review* and *The Chartered Surveyor* following their arrival back in the UK (Osborn, 1958b; *Town and Country Planning*, 1958a, 1958b; *Town Planning Review*, 1958; Wright, 1958; Riley, 1959; Wells, 1959). Edmonds, furthermore, had his entertaining diary of this “not-to-be-forgotten adventure” published, entitled *Russian vistas: a springtime journey to Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Stalingrad, the Black Sea and the Caucasus* (Edmonds, 1958d: 7). All these accounts related what had been seen and done, who had been met and what had been learnt to UK readers largely unaware of life and town planning in the Soviet Union.

Rather than being just a quaint episode from a bygone era, over 50 years later the tour poses questions of the burgeoning academic literatures on policy mobilities which focus on the circulation and mutation of expertise, ideas, models and policies between places (see, for instance, Cook and Ward, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; González, 2011; McCann, 2008, 2011; McCann and Ward, 2010, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Peck, 2011; Peck and Theodore, 2001, 2010a, 2010b; Prince, 2010, 2012). In these accounts, the principal circulation nodes are situated in Western Europe and North America, with the US and UK frequently 'host' and 'donor' countries (e.g. Cook, 2008; Dolowitz *et al.*, 1999; Jones and Newburn, 2007; Peck and Theodore, 2001; K. Ward, 2006). As Dolowitz *et al.* (1999) note, policy circulations often occur between places with similar political infrastructures or ideologies. Indeed, the neoliberal ideology – crudely captured as stimulating/'freeing' markets and creating appropriately 'entrepreneurial' and 'flexible' individuals – is seen to underpin many of the en vogue policies currently circulating, from welfare schemes (Peck and Theodore, 2001, 2010b) to entrepreneurial urban development projects (González, 2011). For Peck and Theodore (2001; Peck, 2002), the movement of policy is both a symptom of the rise of neo-liberalism (especially the demand for 'fast' policy development) and a crusader or lubricant for neo-liberal 'colonization'. Even where the empirical focus has moved away from the global north to include examples of north-south, south-north and south-south movements, neo-liberalism is still represented as an important factor (Bunnell and Maringanti 2010; Peck and Theodore 2010b). We do not doubt the current importance of neo-liberalism, but we do caution against equating policy mobilities – past, present and future – exclusively with the neo-liberal 'moment'. Importantly, recent work gives few clues as to how to understand the circulation of expertise, ideas, models and policies 'outside' the neoliberal frame, particularly those that pre-date both the ascendance of neo-liberalism in the making of policy and its emergence as an object of sustained academic inquiry. Thus, what can we make of the 1958

trip to the Soviet Union by the six British planners? What were the institutional pre-conditions in both countries that made this trip possible? How did it fit with, or react against, the existing cultural, economic, political and social structure? What did they actually do on the visit? How did they make sense of what they experienced? Were there barriers to movement and understanding? What were the implications of the trip?

With these questions in mind, this paper starts to explore the relatively unknown policy mobilities outside the neoliberal frame, focusing on those between the Soviet Union and the UK. The paper is structured as follows. The next section examines the ways in which cities are understood relationally, bringing into dialogue work on intra-urban networks, post-colonialism and mobile urbanism. We then consider the evolution of post-1917 planning policy networks between the Soviet Union and the UK. Using published reports and archival materials written in English such as letters, lecture notes and itineraries produced by those people hosting, attending or facilitating the 1958 tour of the Soviet Union, we focus on the second leg of the exchange, explore in-depth the rationale and experiences of the tour, and its implications for post-war planning in the UK. In so doing, we will make three arguments. First, that the circulation of expertise and ideas, models and policies pre-dates the emergence of neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism may have altered the intensity as well as the form of the models circulating, the technologies used and the pathways constructed in the present day. However, the circulation of urban policies, models and expertise is certainly not a new phenomenon nor is it an exclusively neo-liberal one. Second, it is argued that despite policy tourism – defined here as visits by policymakers to territories elsewhere to learn about other ideas, policies and practices – often featuring common characteristics, it is geographically and historically contingent, shaped by particular territorial and relational networks, relations and processes. As the paper will demonstrate, the forms of policy tourism between the Soviet Union and the UK during the 1950s, and the

experiences of the policy tourists, were influenced by a wide array of contingent factors. Third and finally, this paper's contribution is not just theoretical and empirical. In making extensive use of various archives it highlights the strengths of archival research in understanding policy mobilities.

Relational cities and mobile policies

The intellectual project of “thinking space relationally”, led by the likes of Allen *et al.* (1998), Amin (2004) Massey (2004, 2007) and others is, according to Jacobs (2012: 142), the “mantra of early 21st-century geography.” This ‘relational turn’ has had widespread consequences for different aspects of the discipline, not least for those working on cities where increasing attention is being paid to their location in flows and networks of differing geographical reach. Cities are understood as “both a place (a site or territory) and as a series of unbounded, relatively disconnected and dispersed, perhaps sprawling activities, made in and through many different kinds of networks stretching far beyond the physical extent of the city” (Robinson, 2005: 763). Yet this understanding pivots on a newly revitalized approach to the comparison of cities (McFarlane, 2010; Robinson, 2011; K. Ward, 2008, 2010). This is “a *relational comparative* approach to the comparison of cities that recognizes both the territorial and the relational histories and geographies that are behind their production and (re)production” (K. Ward, 2010: 480, emphasis in original). According to McFarlane (2012) there are three central elements to this reappraisal of comparative urbanism, reflecting how recent years have seen a small but growing number of urban geographers thinking about the city relationally.

First there is an emphasis on the connections between cities, particularly but not exclusively the economic networks that are one of the most important means through which neo-liberal globalization is produced and reproduced (Smith and Doel, 2011; Sassen, 2001; Taylor, 2004). This has a relatively long history within and beyond the geography discipline dating back to the mid-1980s. Much of this literature is framed in or against the 'world cities' approach, which seeks to characterize and rank cities according to their location in various networks of economic activity. Here a series of insights and maps have been generated on different sorts of industries and the place of cities within corporate networks. The lists and rosters have provided ever more nuanced accounts of cities, with some labelled as 'alpha', others as 'beta' and a third group as 'gamma' world cities (Taylor, 2004).

Second is a more recent set of literatures that have as one of their goals to trouble the categorizing and ranking practices embodied in the 'world cities' approach (Amin and Graham, 1997; Robinson, 2005). Their focal point here is the seemingly post-colonial impulse to internationalize 'theory'. For them, critical work must therefore reveal the geographical origins and assumptions of theory presented as universal but which rest on a particular geographical imagination that has the West as the core and everywhere else as at the margins. So while such work probes from where theory originates and how it moves, for Roy (2009: 820, 825) it is also about "dislocating the centre". That is, moving away from the privileging of 'world cities' to taking "account of multiple cores and peripheries" (see also Roy and Ong, 2011). This rethinking of urban theory understands comparison as a strategy for both increasing the number of locations where theory is generated and being more creative and imaginative in how theories are appropriated and borrowed. For McFarlane (2010: 738) this necessitates "an openness to the uncertainty of learning through comparison in different contexts."

The third element to this renewed interest in comparison amongst urban scholars lies with a focus on the everyday, mundane and ordinary ways in which comparison is put to work by those who govern and plan cities – what Robinson (2004) and Clarke (2012) term as ‘actually existing comparative urbanisms’. Central to this body of work are the studies on policy mobilities. Focusing on an increasingly wide array of policy arenas, from creativity (Peck, 2011) to economic development (Cook and Ward, 2012b), sustainability (Temenos and McCann, 2012) to welfare (Peck and Theodore, 2001, 2010b), these studies have explored “how and why certain ideas become mobile and what channels are used to diffuse them” (González, 2010: 1403). In particular, the work on policy mobilities has analysed the actors and institutions involved in constructing, circulating and re-embedding policy models, including recent work on consultants (Prince, 2010, 2012) and academics (Jacobs and Lees, forthcoming). It has also examined the technologies and sites of learning and comparison involved in creating and circulating policy models such as study tours, conferences and best practice guides (Cook and Ward, 2011, 2012a; Gonzalez, 2011; K. Ward, 2011). Emphasis is placed on the process of translation – in other words, how policies are made mobile, making them seem appropriate and transferrable, and re-making the policies as they move across space (McCann and Ward, 2012a, 2012b; Peck and Theodore, 2010a).

As both Jacobs (2012) and Harris and Moore (forthcoming) have rightly argued, the geography-dominated policy mobilities literature shares important commonalities with the literatures on the trans-nationalization of planning and architecture (e.g. Almandoz 1999; Banerjee 2009; Friedman, 2012; Healey and Upton, 2010; Harris and Moore, 2012; King, 1980; Sanyal 1990; Stead *et al.*, 2010; S.V. Ward, 2010a, 2012). The former body of work, led by scholars within the discipline of planning, is particularly useful as it empirically explores a variety of travels – by architects and planners, firms, blueprints, models, ideas and so on – and the spaces through which they travel. In common with the policy mobilities

literature this work addresses the ways in which “[p]lanning ideas get re-shaped as they ‘travel’, losing some dimensions and accumulating others... and what happens when they arrive in particular places” (Healey 2010: 10-11). Particular attention here has been paid to the longer histories of circulating planning ideas and actors, their positions within wider processes of colonialism and post-colonialism, and the power relations that shape these circulations (e.g. King, 1980; Banerjee, 2009; S.V. Ward, 2010a; Friedman, 2012). Friedman’s (2012) study of the Indian influences on the design of the new town Reston, Virginia, furthermore, troubles assumptions over ‘one-way traffic’ from the ‘model’ cities in Western Europe and North America to the ‘imitators’ cities in the rest of the world. Echoing Phelps and Tewdwr-Jones’ (2008) call for greater positive dialogue between geographers and planners, we argue that research on urban policy tourism and mobile policies requires further trans-disciplinary conversations between geography, planning and other cognate disciplines.

This paper will advance the existing literatures in two further ways. First, through its focus on policy tourism in the 1950s the paper is able to explore the ways in which policy tourism is geographically and historically contingent, a product of particular times, places and social relations. Policy tourism does appear to involve commonalities, as recent studies have shown (Cook and Ward, 2011; K. Ward, 2011; González, 2011). For example, the ways in which it disaggregates and reassembles cities, much like other forms of tourism. Here as Gonzalez (2011) notes, *sites* (building, parks, roads, waterways etc.) are transformed into *sights* (objects upon which to gaze and interpret), with hosts repackaging individual components through inter-locking and overarching narratives that attempt to exceed the sum of the parts. Moreover, policy tourism always involves the encountering and discussion of some objects, places, narratives and people, while at the same time silencing, dismissing or leaving out others. Nevertheless, despite these commonalities or family

resemblances, the organization, performance, actors involved and effects of policy tourism is contingent.

Second, the paper seeks to demonstrate the usefulness of archives – personal and institutional – in exploring the geographies and histories of policy tourism. Much of the recent policy mobilities work has rested on semi-structured interviews with involved actors, together with some limited ethnography and participant observation. Archival work has been limited. It is possible to see why. Whether looking through dusty filing cabinets at the local library or searching newspaper databases online, archival work is often time-consuming, records may be incomplete or have not survived, some records may simply not exist or be publicly accessible, and archives are always partial and selective (Hoggart *et al.*, 2002; Roche, 2010). However, it is possible to acknowledge both the politics of archives and ‘make do-ness’ of archival research (Lorimer, 2010), while also recognizing its strengths. In particular, the ability of archive research to “provide a particular window on the geographies of earlier times” (Roche, 2010: 174), especially times that are no longer possible to explore through ‘direct contact’ with those involved (Hoggart *et al.*, 2002). Indeed, the archives used in this paper provide a series of insights into what those who participated in the 1957-1958 exchange felt about what they were doing. We would therefore argue that archival research potentially offers researchers new and complimentary insights into past experiences, performativities and contexts of policy tourism and policy mobilities.

Emerging Anglo-Soviet connections: 1917-1957

Much literature on policy mobilities reasons that mobile models are often wrapped up in and lubricated by narratives of positive and relatively rapid transformation (see McCann,

2004). As González (2011: 1397) has noted, Barcelona and Bilbao became “meccas for urban regeneration” in part due to the stories of their transformations certifying its transformation “from industrial cities of a post-authoritarian regime to culturally vibrant magnets, and all in only a few decades”. Did a similar process take place in and around Soviet cities following the 1917 Bolshevik revolution? The short answer is no. The revolution and the construction of a Communist society in the Soviet Union were met by a mixture of fear and fascination in the Western media (David-Fox, 2012). Furthermore, in contrast to Germany, United States and to a lesser extent Scandinavia, the Soviet Union was rarely showcased as a ‘best practice’ example in mainstream UK planning circles (cf. S.V. Ward, 2007; 2010b). Policy tourism from the UK as a result was somewhat limited (as we shall detail). Nevertheless, pockets of interest in Soviet planning developments did emerge in the developing British planning profession by the later 1920s. The boldness, scale and radicalism of state-orchestrated Soviet planning following Stalin’s moves from 1928 to industrialize and collectivize the Soviet economy attracted attention in the UK and elsewhere. This saw a few, largely *ad hoc*, visits to the Soviet Union by British planners. There was even a small glimmering of interest within government in 1931-2. Thus Kenneth Dodd, a planner from the Ministry of Health (at the time responsible for town planning), visited the Soviet Union in 1932 to study its planning system in detail (Dodd, 1933: 34-53; *Journal of the Town Planning Institute*, 1954: 80). Dodd was impressed by the ‘greatest state planning scheme the world has ever seen’ (Dodd, 1933, 34). He acknowledged the repugnance of Communism for many but saw clear lessons from the Soviet Union to help shape the emerging British debates on the need for national scale planning. Conversely, there were few professional trips by Soviet planners to the UK, but one notable trip brought a delegation of 14 members of Moscow District Council to London in September

1936, seeking ways of implementing the previous year's General Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow (*The Times*, 1936; *Town and Country Planning*, 1936).

Much like the current era, several organizations acted as intermediaries, shaping the expertise shared and the journeys made. Instead of consultancies and think tanks, which are often central institutions within modern-day policy mobilities (Prince, 2012; K. Ward, 2006), these were country-specific organizations. On the Soviet side, the state travel agency, *Intourist*, created in 1929, was a key institution. Likewise, was the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS), a state agency formed in 1925, responsible for arranging visits to the Soviet Union and organized dissemination of relevant information for external audiences about the Soviet Union. In the UK, meanwhile, the initiative mainly came from outside government. The creation in 1924 of the Society for Cultural Relations between the British Commonwealth and the Soviet Union, usually known as the SCR, was an important moment. Supported by many well-known figures from the arts, sciences, humanities and professions, it was the first of what came to be called the 'friendship organizations' (see S.V. Ward, 2012). Politically its membership was left of centre and, like the other friendship organizations that followed, included many with active Communist sympathies. Several British planners or those interested in city building attended SCR events, sharing experiences of, and views on, the Soviet Union. The SCR also arranged trips to the Soviet Union. Sir Ernest Simon, a prominent Manchester-based politician and SCR member, for instance, led a month-long SCR-arranged research trip that resulted in an important book *Moscow in the making* (Simon *et al.*, 1937). This became the leading British account of Soviet city planning and government during this period, fostering a largely favourable picture of the Soviet Union's planning achievements. *Moscow in the making* joined a small but growing volume of literature about the Soviet Union, some published by

planning bodies such as the Garden City and Town Planning Association (soon to become the Town and Country Planning Association) and the Town Planning Institute.

During the war, British interest in the Soviet Union increased dramatically, particularly so in its reconstruction plans. In 1945, the SCR established an Architecture and Planning section which attracted a relatively small but very influential membership, including planners working on some of the most prominent wartime and early post-war plans in the UK (Turner, 1985). They included several senior planners from the new Ministry of Town and Country Planning, and many others working on the seminal plans for the reconstruction of London and Coventry and on some of the New Towns (particularly Stevenage and Peterlee).

Yet the broader sense of wartime common purpose with the Soviet Union gave way to mutual fear, hostility and suspicion after 1948 as wartime allies became Cold War enemies. Increasingly tight restrictions on Soviet visas made visits more difficult than in the 1930s while open admiration of Soviet achievements became increasingly problematic. The British Government grew increasingly suspicious of the political agendas of the SCR and other friendship organizations. Following the death of Stalin in 1953, however, a new opportunity for British-Soviet links seemed to be opening under the new Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev. To take advantage of this, the British government sought to lay the basis of a more 'neutral' cultural diplomacy that sidelined the pro-Soviet biases of the friendship organizations. In May 1955 the British Council – since 1934 the official agency promoting Britain's international cultural relations – established a Soviet Relations Committee (UK NA BW 2/520). This unusually political move was led by a former Foreign Office minister, Christopher Mayhew, experienced in combating international Communist propaganda (Mayhew, 1998: 48-79). Housing and construction (including some urban planning) matters dominated the earliest technical exchanges overseen by the British

Council in July and September 1955 (UK NA HLG 128/1). The thaw in British-Soviet relations was politically endorsed at Cabinet level by Duncan Sandys, the Minister of Housing and Local Government (also responsible for planning), who visited the Soviet Union in May 1956, following Khrushchev's visit to Britain in the previous month. The first technical exchanges that focused exclusively on planning were those of 1957-8 discussed later.

The late 1950s were a key period in British-Soviet relations, with major consequences for the fields of housing and planning (S.V. Ward, 2012). For his part, Khrushchev was eager to reduce global tension in order to devote more resources to improving Soviet living conditions. He saw learning from Western achievements in housing and urban planning as a key part of this. On the British side, many admired Soviet technological achievements such as the sputnik satellites (first launched in 1957) and the Tu104 which for part of the 1950s was the world's only operational jet airliner. Against this, however, British planners discovered they were much less impressed by Soviet housing and planning. Like most other British people, they were appalled by the brutal Soviet suppression of moves to a more liberal type of Communism in Hungary in late 1956. This challenged the loyalties even of those with strongest sympathies for the Soviet Union whose thinking was also profoundly destabilized by Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in his now famous 'Secret Speech' of 1956 (Taubman, 2004: 270-99). For most remaining pro-Soviet architects and planners in Britain, 1956 marked the end and the SCR's Architecture and Planning section effectively collapsed (SCR, 1957: 3-4). The 1957-58 exchanges thus marked an early stage of a new, less automatically sympathetic British approach to Soviet planning relations. Their larger ideological intent was strikingly different to those of earlier SCR-orchestrated visits.

From Vienna to Glenrothes: Beginning the 1957-8 Exchange

The International Federation of Housing and Planning's 23rd World Congress took place in Vienna, in late July 1956. In attendance was Vice-President, Frederic J. Osborn, also Chairman of the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA). Osborn was by then a well-known international planning 'celebrity' (Whittick, 1987). As such, he regularly spoke to, and was approached by, planners and policymakers from other nations. In Vienna, he was introduced to Mr. A. Koudriavtsev of the USSR State Committee on Construction Affairs and leader of the Soviet delegation to the conference. Osborn and Koudriavtsev began formulating an idea for possible exchange visits between those interested in housing and planning in both countries. Osborn, whose TCPA had never visited the Soviet Union on its annual foreign 'study tours', was intrigued. A series of formal but affable letters were exchanged in ensuing months, agreeing the exchange and finalising details. Issues such as dates, broad themes of tours and costs were negotiated, with, no doubt, 'behind-the-scenes' vetting of arrangements.

On 11 September 1957, six Soviet planners arrived in London for a 19 day tour of the UK. The delegation included the heads of planning, architecture and building construction bodies in Minsk, Kiev, Leningrad and Moscow, an acting director of the Academy of Building and Architecture of the USSR, and was led by Mr. S. I. Kolesnikov, the director of the USSR State Committee on Construction Affairs. The visitors were allocated a British-based translator by the Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council.

In consultation with the Soviet Relations Committee and Koudriavtsev (who did not attend the tour), the TCPA devised a tour itinerary that focused primarily on post-war reconstruction in towns and cities and the ongoing development of new towns (see S.V.

Ward, 2004, for an overview of post-war British planning). The tour featured visits to several historic and large towns and cities in England and Scotland – London, Stratford-upon-Avon, Oxford, Birmingham, Coventry, Stafford, Liverpool, Manchester, Preston, Edinburgh and Glasgow – and rural areas of the Cotswolds, Loch Lomond and the Highlands. Also featured were the New Towns of Hemel Hempstead, Welwyn Garden City, Glenrothes and East Kilbride, each already well experienced in hosting British and overseas policy tourists (see Figure 1). The delegation met many Ministry of Housing and Local Government officials, mayors, planners, architects, Development Corporation officials, university lecturers and were guided through countless streets, squares, parks and building sites. The *Lancashire Evening Post* (1957: 1) noted that the visitors were “draped with cameras” on their visit to Preston. Almost everywhere they visited, they were received by local newspaper reporters and photographers (see, for instance, Figure 2).



Figure 1: Soviet visitors at Welwyn Garden City, 13th September 1957. Frederic J. Osborn is at the extreme right. A British Council ‘minder’ stands unobtrusively in the background.
Source: *Town and Country Planning* (1958c: 480)



Figure 2: Soviet delegates shown plans for the new town of Glenrothes by its chief architect and planner, Peter Tinto (nearest camera)

Source: *The Glasgow Herald* (1958: 10)

Experiencing the Soviet Union

About eight months later, the British delegation arrived in Moscow. The party comprised Richard Edmonds and Frederic J. Osborn, together with Henry Wells (Chairman of Hemel Hempstead Development Corporation), H. Myles Wright (Lever Professor in University of Liverpool's Department of Civic Design), E.G.S. Elliot (Chief Technical Officer at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government) and Dennis W. Riley (Chief Planning Officer of Staffordshire County Council) (see Figure 3). Like the Soviet delegation the previous year, these were all senior planning figures. They also faithfully reflected the white male-dominated nature of British planning at the time.



Figure 3: Delegation in front of the Kremlin and Moskva River. Left to right: Wright, Elliot, Edmonds, Riley, Wells and Dr. H. Rigby of the British Embassy. Osborn is taking the photograph.

Source: *Town and Country Planning* (1958a: 309)

As Figure 4 shows, the tour began and ended in Moscow, on 14 May 1958 and 5 June 1958, respectively. Following their tour, five delegates returned to London via Prague. Osborn flew to Warsaw to spend seven days in Poland, visiting planning offices and institutes in Warsaw and Kraków, and the latter's new town of Nowa Huta. He was hosted by Professor W. Ostrowski of the Polish Academy of Sciences, who he met in Paris earlier in the year, further demonstrating Osborn's standing in Eastern Europe at the time.

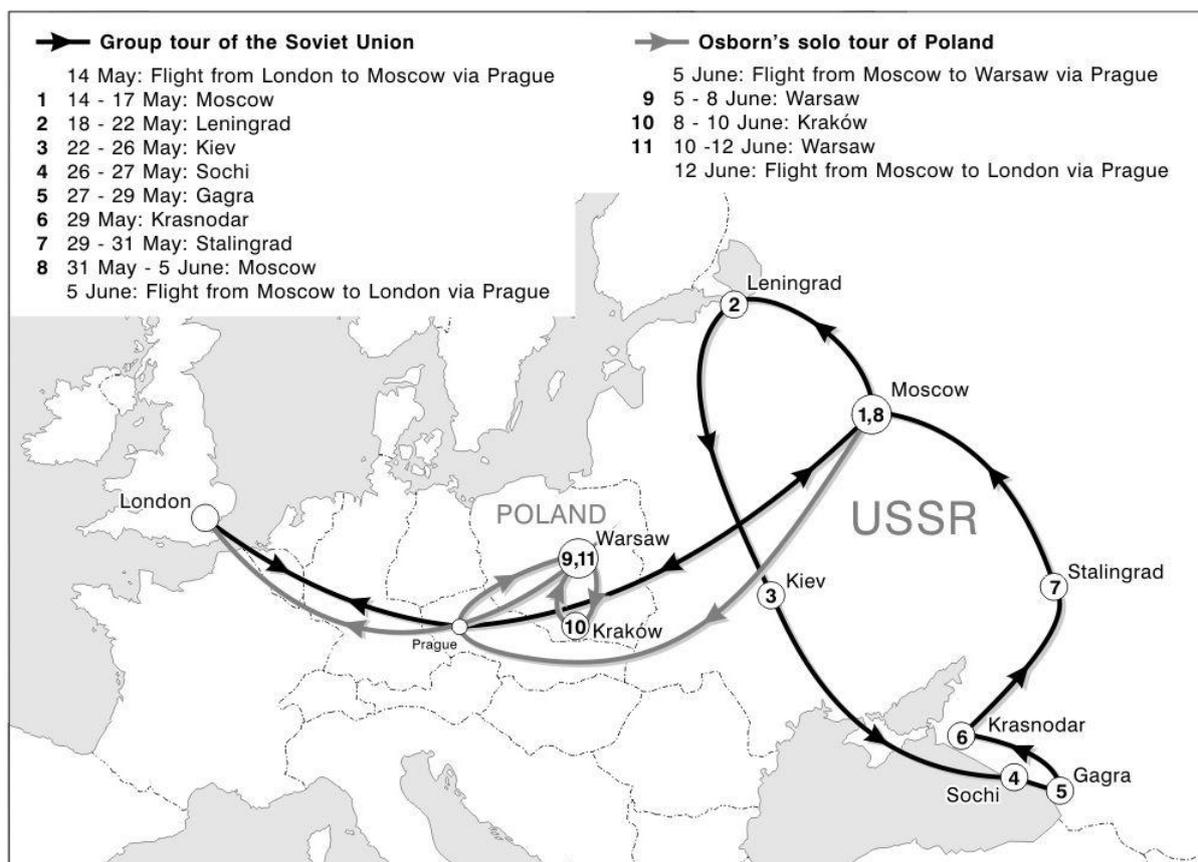


Figure 4: The journey of the British delegates in the Soviet Union, May-June 1958

We will concentrate on the group's Soviet experience here. In doing this, we echo González's (2011) analysis of modern day policy tourism in Spain by considering not only their 'learning destinations' but also the influences and constraints on their learning, mobilities and inter-personal relations. The destinations visited were all within the 'European' part of the Soviet Union, east of the Urals, visiting in sequence Moscow, Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), Kiev, Sochi, Gagra, Krasnodar, Stalingrad (now Volgograd) and finishing back in Moscow (see Figure 4). The publicly available accounts and letters never mention why the eastern Soviet Union was not visited. However this was probably because large areas (with nuclear and military facilities) were closed to visitors (see Shaw, 1991). In those places which were visited, the pattern was very similar to that followed in

the UK, visiting planning offices, city centres, existing housing stock, construction sites, and places of ‘historic interest’ and ‘natural beauty’ (see, for instance, Figure 5). They saw plans for three proposed satellite or ‘sputnik’ towns surrounding Leningrad – Sosnobraya Poniana, Otradnoye and Gorsky (Edmonds, 1958b). A significant amount of time was also spent inspecting plans, models and construction sites for the recently announced Industrialized Housing Programme (IHP).

The IHP had been launched by Khrushchev in July 1957 in a bid to end the nation’s chronic housing shortage whereby families frequently occupied just one room in a large flat, sharing bathroom and kitchen with other families. Solitary family living now became the mantra of Khrushchevian planning, provided quickly and at low cost. Borrowing techniques from France, Sweden, Denmark and Britain – where Soviet architects visited several factories producing housing components – the new Soviet housing would comprise five-storey apartment blocks with standardized construction dimensions and materials (McCutcheon, 1989). Millions of such dwellings were built, where, as Varga-Harris (2008: 565) later argued, “form was to follow function”, a shift from the extravagant ‘wedding cake’ style of architecture favoured under Stalin. Kitchens were small and ceilings low. Concrete panels, stairwells, landings and roofs were fabricated in factories and assembled on-site (McCutcheon, 1989; Varga-Harris, 2008; Reid, 2009). As shown later, they engendered substantial post-tour criticism by the British delegation.



Figure 5: Delegates and hosts observing a model of the redevelopment of the city centre of Kiev.

Source: Osborn (1958b: 387)

Among other sites, they also visited collective farms, coastal resort developments in Sochi, the USSR Agricultural and Industrial Exhibition in Moscow, a pre-fabrication housing plant in Leningrad, as well as the Volga Dam under construction. According to Edmonds (1958d: 8), “opportunities were given by our hosts for seeing something of the Russian way of life”. This included being able to see *inside* lived-in accommodation, rather than just seeing from the outside existing housing and new blocks being constructed. Here was a clear appreciation of the limitations of viewing only the ‘abstracted space’ of maps and models or exterior façades. In Kiev, for instance, they visited the home of an engineer and his family and, stopping briefly at a collective farm in Kozarichi, they saw inside a farm worker’s home:

“... a pleasant little wooden dwelling, cool within, spotlessly clean, and unlike any farmhouse I have ever seen. The children – three of them – peered at us from behind the curtain leading to the kitchen, but they came out cheerfully enough to take part in the photographic barrage” (Edmonds, 1958d: 69)

More leisurely trips – or as one ‘Planning Commentary’ in *Town and Country Planning* (1958a: 308) called it “VIP entertainment” – included numerous visits to the theatre and circus (seeing the famous clown Popoff) and the Soviet Union-England football match. Participating on the tour, therefore, involved work and leisure. It reflected a belief that the visitors should not only have ‘time-off’, but also that it was important to experience Soviet popular culture. It also echoed the intermittent use of the label ‘study-holiday tours’ by the TCPA for its policy tourism during the 1950s.

Delegates’ accounts of the tour spoke of generous hospitality, which Jayne *et al.* (2011) argue is central to civic networking. Edmonds, for instance, reminisces about “repeated [Anglo-Soviet] toasts to planning and to friendship” (1958d: 19) and “the genuine feeling of goodwill behind the whole proceedings” (*ibid*: 124). Yet accounts also highlight the formality and sense of decorum that accompanied this hospitality. Osborn, for instance, noted that conversations with their hosts “were all on a very high level of serious discussion, mutual respect, and friendliness” (*Town and Country Planning*, 1958a: 309). Although “propaganda was not entirely absent – there were of course pleas, which on both sides were obviously sincere, for peace and better understanding – but tendentious and controversial international issues never obtruded” (*ibid*: 309). Echoing prevailing impressions of planning professionals at the time, Osborn (1958a: 8) elsewhere maintained that “our mission, being technical, we did not discuss political issues”. It thus seems unlikely

that atomic weapons or the recent Suez or Hungary invasions were ever discussed. Osborn (1958b: 393) also admitted that he rarely made criticisms when in conversation with the hosts. His role in these settings was primarily to “inform them about what we do and why, and perhaps late in a convivial evening hazard a criticism about the other party’s practice and laugh when it is shot down”. There were, it seems, tacit rules of acceptable behaviour on the tour, echoing Cresswell’s (2006) argument that particular forms of mobilities are socially constructed as inappropriate and incongruous, while others are understood as being appropriate and ‘in place’.

Despite these understandings and wider Western representations of the Soviet Union as being secretive and repressive, the reports highlighted the delegates’ surprise about their ability to move and take photographs relatively freely (the camera was an important ‘mobile’ technology of policy tourism, as it is now, albeit in different ways). Discussing the itinerary, Wells (1959: 374), for instance, noted “I did not feel that we were only being allowed to see “what was good for us” although naturally the Russians wanted to show us those things that they were most proud”. Edmonds (1958d: 48) offered a more nuanced assessment of their freedom:

“In the afternoon members of the delegation took the opportunity to wander at will through the city [of Leningrad] unaccompanied and unfettered in every way, and certainly not followed. Both in Moscow and Leningrad this freedom of action has been most apparent, although in a full programme the chances for wandering at will are naturally limited. Photography is also unfettered; but the sensible traveller does not take pictures of bridges and industrial installations. If the point did arise his [sic] guide would probably insist on the visitor’s right to take the pictures”.

So while Riley (1959: 26) suggested that “[t]he magic word ‘delegation’ seemed to smooth our path wherever we went”, the reports do not reveal any behind-the-scenes negotiations and screening that allowed and facilitated such mobility. The biggest obstacles to learning according to the reports were language and time. With regard to the first, none of the delegates spoke fluent Russian and the group relied heavily on their interpreters. On the latter, although the tour was lengthy (at 22 days) compared to most study tours today and in the 1950s, some of their reports cast doubt on the depth of their learning. They echoed Osborn’s (1953: 649) sentiments following a previous TCPA tour to France in 1953 where he did not “cherish the illusion that after one fortnight in a country we come back with a complete picture”.

Neither these obstacles nor Osborn’s belief (revealed in notes for a Planning Club Rotary Forum talk on 7 July 1958) that “VIP travel could give unbalanced impressions” prevented most of the accounts being very critical of planning and construction in the Soviet Union. Aspects did receive some praise, such as Edmonds’ avid approval of the grandiose metro stations in Moscow and Leningrad and the architecture of the Kremlin and pre-Revolutionary Leningrad which featured “at every turn... something to catch the photographer’s eye” (Edmonds, 1958d: 38). Nonetheless, Soviet post-war reconstruction and the Industrialized Housing Programme in particular (see Figure 6) received stinging criticism in most of the delegates’ published reports.



Figure 6: Osborn’s photograph of pre-fabricated housing under construction in Kiev
Source: Osborn (1958b: 385)

Osborn’s comment that (1958a: 8) “[t]he constructional quality and finish of most flats are, by our standards, poor, and much of the architecture and layout dull and monotonous” typified many negative comments on ‘workmanship’. Wright (1958: 165) noted that it “ranges from the mediocre to the very bad”, while Wells (1959: 379) stated that “the finish is very rough; the plumbing poor. Internal woodwork and painting are generally very rough”. Nor were these comments, of course, without merit. As Reid (2009) notes, many Soviet citizens later referred to this housing as *khrushcheby*, merging ‘Khrushchev’ and the Russian word for ‘slum’.

Floor space, housing numbers, household occupations, wages, rents, industrial output (of housing and other units), among others, were extensively cited in the reports and Osborn’s various lecture notes, and quantitatively compared to those in the UK. Many of these statistics, of course, were continually being assessed and espoused by political leaders and the media in the East and West at the time. Combining these statistics with their more qualitative and mainly negative assessments of their site visits created a relational

comparative message and a sense of authority that the Soviet Union was lagging (far) behind the UK, with Wright (1958: 177) maintaining that “Russia is going through its Victorian period”. While the delegates clearly found the Soviet Union interesting, it was for them a nation that offered few, if any, prescriptions for UK urban renewal. Indeed, Wells (1959: 378) bluntly concluded that, “[i]n general, the Russians have nothing to teach us in principles of town planning”.

So while the delegates brought back memories of warm hospitality and encountering new and ‘exotic’ places, they brought no ‘positive lessons’ for British planning or, more accurately, models that British planners might want to emulate. Indeed, following the tour reports, the Soviet Union rarely appeared in any of the delegates’ subsequent written publications. It was not just that limited time in the Soviet Union, or language barriers, had restricted understanding and therefore their admiration. Nor was it that they could not divorce planning practice or construction work from the Communist political system, as they also believed in the technical, apolitical nature of planning (whether misguided or not). It was mainly that they were simply unimpressed with the technical implementation of Soviet housing and planning projects.

Nevertheless, this tour gave them stories to tell about what Wells (1959: 374) terms “the Russian enigma”. This is not something to overlook. They were able to write *their* accounts in reports, newspapers, a book and present their ‘adventures’ to audiences from the Women’s Institute (Osborn) to a General Meeting of the Town Planning Institute (Riley). They were part of a relatively small number of Westerners who had visited the often maligned but, most importantly, *much-talked about* Soviet Union. Their attendance could gain reputational capital for themselves, their organizations, and their nation. For Riley (1958: 26), they were the ones who could help unmask the “atmosphere of mystery as to what is really happening behind the Iron Curtain”. And in this sense, they differed little

from mainstream travel writers, reporting back from unfamiliar, exotic and 'dangerous' territories (Duncan and Gregory, 1999; Thomson, 2011). In addition, the interest Communist Soviet planners had in British planning and its new towns in particular was seen to enhance the status of British planning and planners, something that could provide flattering headlines such as "Russians emulate British planning" (*Manchester Guardian*, 1958) and "Russia tackles her housing jam with British ideas" (Osborn, 1958a). So while positive lessons were not in the returning suitcase, they personally came back with enhanced international reputations.

Conclusion

As a follow-up the TCPA finally arranged a 'normal' annual study tour to the Soviet Union in 1960, though none of the 1958 delegation returned (Maxwell, 1960). Other planning visits to the Soviet Union arranged by government agencies and other planning interest groups followed intermittently in the 1960s and 1970s (S. V. Ward, 2012). But no later visits generated as much interest as the 1958 or earlier trips. Less and less did British planners think that they might ever draw positive lessons from Soviet planners. With the British legacy of wartime collectivism fading, it was the United States that seemed to entice planners in the UK with a new urbanism based around an affluent, motorized, consumer capitalist society (S. V. Ward, 2007). Furthermore, British interest in Soviet urban and regional development became increasingly academic – a process led by geographers (see Oldfield *et al.*, 2011). Where British planners continued to interact with the Soviet Union, the focus was far more on showcasing British planning rather than reciprocal learning.

Many of the aspects of policy tourism in the 1950s (and earlier) described here are familiar to those investigating more recent episodes (Cook and Ward, 2011; K. Ward, 2011; González, 2011). Visits were organized through government and professional groups, and were a way for those involved to learn from each other. The choreographing of visits was negotiated between officials in both countries and various state and professional sponsored intermediaries. Activities included room-based meetings and tours around cities and neighbourhoods. Conviviality and hospitality clearly suffused these visits, in a way highlighted by some working on contemporary relations between city actors (Jayne *et al.*, 2011). There were not purely transactional. Yet these aspects also highlight profound differences in the wider frameworks within which policy tourism occurred. The larger sense of planning visits forming part of a wider cultural diplomacy intended to reduce the chill of the Cold War is strikingly different from their place today in policy tourism associated with neo-capitalist urbanism. The consciously pro-Soviet basis of earlier visits orchestrated by the SCR which the British Council-system largely replaced in the 1950s shows yet another approach. Both types had larger and more consciously ideological purposes than the far more focused and in some ways simpler preoccupations of today's policy tourism.

This paper, we hope, demonstrates the need for scholars of policy mobilities as well as those who have studied the trans-nationalization of planning and architecture to come together in productive dialogue (Harris and Moore, forthcoming). It has shown how studies of policy mobilities need to think about path-dependency, evolution and the contexts through, and places in which, policy learning occur. It has made a case for moving away from a preoccupation with the neo-liberal present, important as it is, to decentre – historically and geographically – our understandings of policy tourism and the production of the city. More specifically, the paper makes three points. First, we have shown how the

current circulation of expertise and ideas, models and policies has a series of historical precedents. While there is much that is different about the current era of policy mobilities, there are nevertheless significant continuities with past ways in which urban policy-makers learnt from one and other. Second, the paper argued that policy tourism is geographically and historically contingent, shaped by particular territorial and relational networks, relations and processes. Third and finally, this paper has demonstrated, we would argue, the potential of archival research to offer an insight into past experiences, performativities and contexts of policy tourism and urban policy mobilities more widely.

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