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Problems of sustainable development. Real estate development after the pandemic (based on the materials of the Gaidar Forum – 2021)

We quote Lenin more and more often and recall Stalin realizing that it is impossible to lead the humanity to happiness “with an iron hand”. By speeding up and slowing down, stumbling, and getting up, deluding and enlightening, it must realize: happiness is development, devotion to the good, the love and the joy of understanding Creator’s ideas!!!

A participant of the Gaidar Forum – 2021

Recent development trends are formed under the influence of multiple factors. They move in different directions and make completely unexpected turns, adjusting standard settings and expectations of the population. Meanwhile, the rapid development of anthropology, futurology, information modeling against the background of the effective and timely implementation of state support measures, international community’s efforts to promote valuation technologies of sustainable development, the expansion of “green” financing and the demand to impose social responsibility on large businesses allows to assume that all sectors of the national economy, including real estate and construction, will be exposed not only to digital transformation, technological upgrade, institutional and socio-economic reboot, but also to the re-evaluation of efficiency criteria of business models. In this regard, the implementation of the requirements of the National Project “Housing and Urban Environment” is complicated not only due to the budget constraints, the decline in production, the outflow of migrants due to the pandemic, but also due to the need to significantly reconsider the model of economic development. It is necessary to restructure not only the industrial and infrastructure framework of capital funds, but also to develop fundamentally new approaches to the management of the life cycle of real estate. The growing singularity of economic processes forces us to make flexible decisions and create different types of real estate with regard for emerging cultural and anthropological preferences. At the same time, information and construction processes have already merged together within the framework of the construction industry that creates new items of real estate and capitalizes the existing ones. Digital design, acting together with new investment mechanisms, generates a promising model for the accelerated implementation of design and construction cycles. The Internet of Things creates not only “smart homes”, but also “smart cities” and “smart agglomerations”. The “New Normality” will trigger systemic changes in real estate management in order to provide it with self-optimizing properties of sustainable development, a new culture of efficiency, the implementation of principles of “Economics of Trust” and interaction with development institutions, as well as the accelerated introduction of environmental-information technologies and preventive mechanisms used to resolve the contradictions arising between construction process participants.

Keywords: sustainable development, real estate, construction, development trends, strategic focusing, information transformation, business model

The present-day environment and attempts to resist the spread of the coronavirus, which cannot provoke excessive optimism so far, have revealed not the evident problems, but the carefully disguised holes in the economic management mechanisms of all countries of the world without any exception. And initially cheerful messages about the successes of the best healthcare systems, effective incentives and support measures gave way to anxiety and panic. The consequences turned out to be too unpredictable, both in material and spiritual spheres. In order not to repeat the rhetoric of the whole of 2019, we will focus on the analysis of the expert points of view expressed at the Gaidar Forum – 2021.

1. THE MAIN CHALLENGES TO STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT

The most important questions dealing with the potential achievement of sustainable development goals, Russia’s place in the new landscape of international division of labor, promotion of digital ruble, problems and technologies of human capital management, new business rules amid uncertainty, the future of the taxation system, the evolution of the state control, the impact of the pandemic on urban development and National Projects, the future of universities and education, physical and mental health, populism as a sustainable modern trend, the future of industries and regions, were asked of the invited experts. The above list of issues is far from being exhaustive. Although the list is presented in this (partially reduced) form, it is clear that in the conditions of the new normality, these issues not only encompass the structure of the national economy, its drivers and meters of growth, but also reveal its reserves and new niches where development promises to be as rapid as possible.
A collective demand for structural reforms and accelerated capitalization of their results, specified in the National Projects, was suspended by the epidemiological situation. Nevertheless, national development goals were not removed from the agenda, but upon the initiative of the President of the Russian Federation, they expanded the horizon from 2024 to 2030. In spite of the public concern about short-term problems, according to the Nobel Peace Prize winner Rae Kwon Chung, a participant of the expert discussion “Sustainable Rae Kwon Chung”, the planning horizon should not go down, and the logic that reads as “we will think about it if we survive” is more dangerous than viruses and wars. The scientist spoke about a change in Russia’s role in the world in the direction of leadership in the hydrogen economy. According to the scientist, Russia can become an expert in hydrogen and play a crucial role in the formation of a new market of “clean energy”. According to Jürgen Rogel, World Bank’s Vice President for Sustainable Development, our country needs to focus on the competitiveness of the domestic industry. He suggests that development priorities of the national economy will include high-tech industries, ecosystems, forestry 1. The unlocking of the biotechnology potential, the formation of industrial investment platforms, the employment of big data analytics in industries, as well as the practical unlocking of Russia’s transit potential are not removed from the agenda, but, according to academician B.N. Portiriev (Director of the Institute of Economic Forecasting of the Russian Academy of Sciences), the main problem consists in the passivity of development drivers, structural and technological backwardness and unacceptably slow development of the green economy 1.

The assessment of the post-pandemic situation in Russia by the foreign participants of the Forum was characterized by reasonableness and understanding of the difficulties that accompanied the recovery from the coronavirus. It was emphasized that this regularity applied to the economies of all countries. According to Robert Youngman, chief analyst of the OECD Directorate, the situation in the countries, that are giant suppliers of raw materials, will certainly become more complicated against the background of the shrinking manufacturing sector and restructuring markets 2. Representatives of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) positively assessed the integrative response to challenges of European development. Moreover, the OSCE analysis showed that “the globalization trend is returning”. Thus, Franco Frattoni, a special representative of the OSCE Chairman, pointed out that in the context of “permanent pandemic threats, only an integrative response, given with the involvement of Russia, is possible”. Wolfgang Schussel, ex-Chancellor of Austria (from 2000 to 2007), focused on “green growth” and the sharing of European values with Russia. However, cautious optimism, expressed by foreign participants in respect of the expansion of economic collaboration, dealt more with mutual projects in the field of medicine and health care sustainability in the context of external challenges.

1 Dunning H. Shifting the focus of climate-change strategies may benefit younger generations. URL: https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/192968/shifting-focus-climate-change-strategies-benefit-younger
2 Gaidar Forum “Russia and the world after the pandemic”. Expert discussion “Sustainable development: a perfect vision or a realistic projection?” URL: https://gaidarforum.ru/en/program/926/
3 Gaidar Forum “Russia and the world after the pandemic”. Expert discussion “Green finance: make money or preserve nature?”. URL: https://gaidarforum.ru/en/program/929/
6 Presentation of the center for advanced research on human potential. URL: https://gaidarforum.ru/en/program/951/
7 Gaidar Forum “Russia and the world after the pandemic”. Scientific discussion “Humans in the post-covid world”. URL: https://gaidarforum.ru/en/program/960/

A human in the post-covid world has become a subject of activity. His tasks include humanitarian and social studies of behavior, habits, relationships, assessing their impact on economic strategies, forms of employment, labor preferences, as well as the assessment of preparedness for new challenges. Participants of the discussion of the human capital problems V. Spiridonov (RANEPA), A. Baykov (MGIMO), M. Butovskaya (Miklukho-Maklay Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences), L. Ovcharova (HSE), S. Zuev (Moscow Higher School of Social and Economic Sciences) focused on various changes in the behavior, habits, forms of employment, preferences in the context of technological challenges, natural anomalies, imperfection and inertia of social tools, etc. 2

The systematic analysis of discussion platforms has shown that a change in the development paradigm from “accelerating wealth growth” to “activities of people for people” has a bipolar structure. One pole is the community of living organisms (biocenosis), the other one is the habitat (biotope). They are united by a system of connections that performs the exchange of substances and energy. The economic projection of their research focuses on the evolution of Human/society and Nature/habitat. At the same time, all evaluative aspects of the human capital development are accumulated within the framework of the evolution of the habitat. Moreover, when discussing the new structure of the economy, K. Dmitriev, General Director of RDIF, D. Manturov, Minister of Industry and Trade, A. Repik, Chairman of the All-Russian public organization “Delovaya Rossiya” (“Business Russia”) assessed the existing and future formats of economic activities (remote employment, platform-based solutions, digital finance, new economic niches and segments, etc.). At the same time, in their opinion, the pandemic did not slow down the pace of digitalization [2–4]. Undoubtedly, it has accelerated, but, according to the experts, the pace is not revolutionary. At the same time, according to the Minister of

Industry and Trade, almost all branches of material production were affected. The exceptions were pharmaceuticals and the construction industry, including the production of building materials. In the real estate sector, the increasingly critical issue of the habitat compliance has become more acute. In this regard, almost every discussion was focused not so much on the pace of the post-crisis recovery of Russia and the world, but on substantial changes in the world order, creation of new business models, a fight against poverty and attainment of the new quality of life.

3. RESTRUCTURING THE LIVING SPACE AND CHANGING THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

The whole range of issues of sustainable development, green financing, new quality of integration and business models, forms of employment and methods of its regulation, digital beneficiaries and personnel-related solutions, social responsibility and trust, justice and inequality, strategic focus and future education will certainly require a restructuring of the living space and a change in the urban environment, which, according to the OECD estimates, is home to more than 60 % of the world’s population. The consensus in understanding the directions of technological breakthroughs (leaps), remote contactless ways of interaction, the need for new types of joint activities, etc. could be observed both among the experts of the research community, the government, and representatives of the business community. The problems of much-needed top-priority changes in the urban environment, formation of the infrastructure frame, establishment of industrial zones, development of the raw material base, etc. were discussed on various platforms. Practical aspects of the restructuring of habitat were formulated in the course of expert discussions about the future of energy, the development of the healthcare system, northern regions and the Arctic, as well as the improvement of urban spaces. New challenges of urban development were highlighted by S. Sobyanin, Mayor of Moscow. Cities were forced to quickly reengineer the operation of their integrated systems, including healthcare, education, transport, construction, housing and utilities within an extremely short period of time. Rapid digitalization, together with social distancing requirements, has changed not just the everyday life, but also the consumer behavior. And if the deployment of new services turned out to be within the scope of abilities of private businesses, the restructuring of capital funds required state involvement and coordination. Marat Khusnulin, Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, highlighted these issues. When the results of 2020 were analyzed, it was noted that the coronavirus did not merely accelerate, but forced changes in construction business models. Mobilization measures taken in a timely manner allowed to exceed the planned amount of road construction work, adjust the parameters of the Comprehensive Plan for Infrastructure Modernization and Expansion (CPIME) with unprecedented large-scale investment and construction activities and the total budget of 11.6 trillion rubles by the end of the decade (by 2030). As for the housing construction, contrary to pessimistic expectations, it “did not sink”, remaining at the level of 2019, but significantly supported the industrial production. Deputy Prime Minister emphasized the undeniable effectiveness of timely measures taken to keep the preferential mortgage rate at the level of 6.5 %. One million three hundred thousand families have improved their living conditions, and this is the main result of the industry’s activities. Rural, family, and Far Eastern mortgages enjoy continued support.

As for the prospects of the construction sector, M. Khusnulin clearly outlined the tasks of the regulator. Their focus is to remove bureaucratic obstacles and maximize the acceleration of processes of initial and final phases of construction, the transition to a seamless technological cycle and the synchronization of project tasks and investment opportunities. G. Nikitin, Governor of Nizhny Novgorod, made a point that the emerging enthusiasm in the housing sector, the same as the new roads, is seen and appreciated by the residents, but any further development of the real estate sector in the conditions of tight federal and regional budgets requires new approaches. This is true for unlocking the potential of infrastructure bonds. According to the expert, the value of this market tool, applied to generate an investment resource, exceeds 1 trillion rubles. And if the pilot projects in Nizhny Novgorod show the effectiveness of infrastructure bonds, it will be possible to easily implement, for example, a new model of road construction projects in all regions of the country. In 2020, the Government of the Russian Federation made a radical change in the pattern of implementation of road construction projects. The public–private partnership model was replaced by the contractor model that used the budget proceeds and own funds, as well as the support provided by the so-called infrastructure mortgage. In general, the construction industry, being an integral part of all National Projects without exception, has not only become the driver of major anti-crisis trends in the field of material production, but it has also succeeded in the digitalization and the use of information technologies at all stages of the real estate life cycle, while experiencing many problems with labor resources, technical equipment, and technological backwardness. Its vitality and ability to meet challenges could only be compared with those of the representatives of the healthcare sector at the Forum who showed unprecedented mobilization abilities in rendering medical services, as well as in the organization of construction and equipping of pre-fabricated medical institutions. It has once again proven the mobilization capabilities of Russia, as it was repeatedly pointed out by foreign experts.

4. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND EDUCATION

The coronavirus, in the opinion of virtually all participants of the Forum, has exacerbated the need for digital transformation. Almost all industries and spheres of life are currently undergoing a radical transformation based on digital technologies. As a result, all markets (construction, food, transport, banking and medical services, etc.) have increased their accessibility and convenience for people. M. Shadaev: Minister of Digital Development, stressed the need to digitalize not only business processes, but also public administration, healthcare and education. It is difficult not to agree with numerous representatives of the IT industry who highlight its huge potential to accelerate analysis and decision-making processes, to ensure the subjectivity of responsibility, interaction and feedbacks, the availability of different forms of training and development drivers. For sure, digital technologies will become an important resource that will eliminate the main “deficits of our time”. They were literally “dissected” at the Forum by A. Asmolov, A. Kudrin, A. Smirnova and others. It is the awareness of the lack of trust, understanding and

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11 Gaidar Forum “Russia and the World after the Pandemic”. Dialogue in three
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activities. The analysis of the expert points of view, 

provided at the Forum by the rectors of leading Russian universities, 

showed that Russian educational institutions have adapted to the real-

ity of distance learning, since they have shared the conceptual funda-

mentals of the need to convert universities into research, educational 

and practice-oriented centers of regional development. They should 

provide a theoretical substantiation for the reformatting of the future. 

Towards this end, the educational cluster of the national economy 

should become a carrier of new competencies and provide the na-

tional economy with the main driving force, that is, competent person-

nel.

BASIC CONCLUSIONS

In general, an unprecedentedly large number of discussion plat-

forms at the Forum indicate the severity of problems of the “new nor-

mality”. We will try to identify its main features in the context of our 

focus on real estate and construction sectors. So, let us point out the 

following:

1. The actively developing “culture of efficiency” as a hierarchi-

cal and integrated concept. Anything that harms future generations 

cannot be considered effective in the present and, passing through 

the filters of the regulator and the public opinion, it cannot be ac-

cepted. The above-mentioned feature is directly related to the de-

velopment of the real estate sector, the implementation of invest-

ment and construction activities, and the formatting of the habitat.

The economic component, the required acceleration of construc-

tion in the present-day context cannot determine the parameters of 

construction processes and the “appetite” of their participants. In 

this case, the point is not only the symmetry of risks, but also the 

equal rate of return for the actors. Distortions force the parties in-

olved in the construction and operation of real estate to seek ad-

ditional opportunities, that are most often found beyond the legiti-

mate boundaries of investment and construction activities or at the 

account of social and environmental components. The new content 

of efficiency requires immediate amendments to the legislation 

regulating the formation of real estate development programmes 

and projects.

2. The fundamentals of anthroponomics, a set of sciences (eco-

nomics, sociology, urban studies, etc.) about the human, his needs, 

motives, preferences, behavioral stereotypes, place and role in the 

society and the environment, intellectual mobility and the level of pro-

fessionalism, etc. As for real estate and construction, here anthro-

ponomics sets the goals of spatial arrangement, apartment layouts, 

forms of employment, recreation modes and requirements applica-

ble to public spaces, aesthetic preferences, etc. The anthropogenic 

optics of absolutely all processes in the field of real estate becomes 

an integral part not only of strategic planning, but also of operational 

actions aimed at the arrangement of operation and renovation of 

capital construction facilities.

3. The changing role of regulators and development institutions. 

The support for sustainable development is being transformed into 

the demand for the responsibility for sustainable development. This, 

in turn, causes the elimination of the incompleteness of instruments 

(for example, by means of ensuring the continuity of investment cy-

cles), and the generation of a sufficient set of liabilities to support 

long-term growth. Towards this end, organizational regrouping of 

development institutions is already underway. A solution to the prob-

lem of development of a group of institutions reporting to VEB.RF 

state corporation is particularly important. This group includes insti-

tutions, most of which are state corporations or non-profit organiza-

tions incorporated in furtherance of special laws or budget-related 

regulations. The strategic goals of these institutions are urban and 

infrastructural development (VEB.RF, “DOM.RF”), as well as the sup-

port of entrepreneurship (Corporation of Small and Medium Busi-

ness, Russian Export Center, “Skolkovo”, Fond of Industrial Develop-

ment). The main types of their investment activities are debt financing, 

maintenance of the creditworthiness of investment projects and pro-

vision of non-financial assistance. Sources of financial resources are 
capitalization of budget allocations and raising debt on the capital 

markets with some state support and regulatory assistance from the 

Central Bank of the Russian Federation. It is also important to use the 
experience of “DOM.RF” to ensure the development of the financial 
mortgage market aimed at developing infrastructure and municipal 

bond markets, increasing the intensity of similar activities carried out 

by the Corporation of Small and Medium Business. The implementa-

tion of the initiative to create a National Association of organizations 
in the field of information modeling technologies, designed to de-

velop and accelerate the introduction of information and communica-

technologies at all stages of the life cycle of capital construction 

projects, is of crucial importance.

4. The required expansion of the time limits for defining real es-

tate development strategies, with regard for the new “culture of effi-
ciency”, anthropological requirements and institutional support of 
development processes. The latter also have new contexts that per-

sistently permeate the practice. Thus, the uncertainty of goals, ob-

jectively accumulated development contradictions, and fundamen-
tals of the present-day world order that clearly require, at least, major 

repairs, on the one hand, return society to basic values, but, on the 

other hand, strive for a new technological order. Huge opportunities 

are “hidden” in its digital structures. But their implementation in the 

previous configurations of the real estate sector, as shown by the 

period of the fight against the coronavirus, is impossible. For exam-

ple, the remote mode of activity of a huge number of managers, ac-
countants, lawyers, designers, etc. required the arrangement of 

workplaces in residential premises. According to the experts (11th 

Gaidar Forum), there is good reason to believe that up to 30 % of
CONCLUSION

The zones, featuring the concentration of technology-intensive businesses, and sparseness zones have been identified. Concentration zones may mean the availability of favorable conditions for a particular type of business, while sparseness zones indicate the insufficiency of initial conditions needed for new clustered production facilities.

There exists a positive interrelation between business activity growth in a given territory, including the economic activity of clusters, and the cost of residential and office premises.

Clusters are powerful centres of attraction, as well as centres of culture and science in any city.

The main decision-making factors, that impact the choice of location for new industrial production facilities in a historical industrial zone, are the availability of a focal industrial facility in operation, and, to a smaller extent, the environmental situation in the territory adjacent to the industrial zone.

Old industrial zones are not attractive for new production facilities; they need comprehensive renovation.

Sokolinaya Gora and Kalibr industrial zones are the most attractive industrial areas for new types of industry.

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