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Urban environment design based on a producer approach to the development of small towns

The paper examines the problem of small towns degradation and substantiates the necessity of applying a new managerial approach — the producer model — for their sustainable development. The relevance of the topic is driven by the persistence of negative trends, such as population outflow, economic stagnation, and the loss of cultural identity in small towns, despite the implementation of state programmes. The aim of the research is to analyze the conceptual foundations of designing a comfortable urban environment for small towns based on the principles of producing. The study reveals the essence of the producer approach, which implies a transition from administrative management to the creation and implementation of an integrated territorial “product”. Key principles of the approach are identified: forming the city's unique selling proposition, implementing participatory design with resident involvement, and applying project management and crowdfunding tools. The stages of implementing the producer model and the expected results are outlined, including the creation of economic growth points, increased investment attractiveness, and the formation of a comfortable, distinctive urban environment. The novelty of the approach lies in adapting producing tools, characteristic of creative industries, to the practice of urban development for small towns. The practical significance is that the proposed mechanisms can be used by municipal government bodies and investment-construction companies to develop and implement effective territorial development strategies.

Keywords: *small town, urban environment design, producer approach, sustainable development, territory development management*

The development of small towns remains one of the most pressing issues in the spatial development of the Russian Federation. Despite the existence of state programmes and national projects such as “Housing and Urban Environment”, many small towns continue to face complex challenges: outflow of the working-age population, degradation of economic potential, deterioration of the housing stock and public spaces, and loss of cultural and historical identity [1, 2]. Traditional administrative management methods, often reactive and subsidized, are unable to fundamentally change the situation. Under these conditions, new, proactive approaches to development management are required that would harness the inherent potential of the territory and transform it into an attractive and competitive “product”. One such approach, which has significant potential, is the producer approach, which has proven itself successful in the creative industries and complex project management.

The aim of this study is to use the principles of the producer approach in the design of a comfortable urban environment for small towns. To achieve this goal, the following objectives were set: to reveal the essence and content of the producer approach as applied to territorial development. To identify key principles and tools for producing and to propose a model for its implementation in urban planning practice.

The study is based on a systemic and project-based approach, which allows us to consider a small town as a holistic, complex system, the development of which requires integrated management, as noted by domestic and international scholars in the fields of urban studies, territorial marketing, and project management [3–5].

Let us consider the essence and principles of applying the producer approach to the development of small towns. The producer approach, in the context of small towns development, is a management system in which the manager (producer) acts not as a bureaucratic administrator, but as the creator, organizer, and implementer of a comprehensive “project” for the transformation of the territory. Its key objective is to identify the city's unique potential (human, cultural, historical, natural) and create conditions for its capitalization through the design of a comfortable and functional urban environment [6].

Based on the need to combine many diverse functions, the key principles of the producer approach can be formulated as follows.

1. Developing a city's Unique Selling Proposition (USP). Every small town possesses unique assets: historical heritage, natural landscape, location on a tourist route, and the presence of unique artisans or industries. The producer's task is to find this “golden key” and turn it into the foundation of the brand and economy [7]. For example, successful cases include Vyksa (Nizhny Novgorod Region) — urban development through culture — and Divnogorsk (Krasnoyarsk Krai) — with an emphasis on nature-based tourism and active recreation.

2. The principle of participatory design and crowdsourcing. The producer does not impose a vision from above, but rather acts as a moderator, identifying the needs and potential of the residents themselves. Through workshops, public discussions, and online platforms, ideas are collected and local activists and volunteers are united [8]. This creates a sense of ownership and responsibility for the city's transformation, which is a key factor in project sustainability.

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3. The principle of project management and attracting funding. City development includes specific, achievable projects (e.g., "Creation of a Historical and Crafts Cluster", "Development of the Embankment as a Public Space", "Launch of an Urban Culture Festival"). To finance these projects, alongside budgetary funds, extra-budgetary sources are actively involved: fundraising, private investment, and grants [9, 10]. The producer is responsible for creating an attractive investment package and finding partners.

Vyksa, a city in the Nizhny Novgorod region, provides an outstanding example of how culture can become a catalyst for economic growth. Here, thanks to a forward-looking strategy, the city-forming enterprise (United Metallurgical Company) took on the role of producer, investing not simply in infrastructure upgrades but in the creation of new meanings and values.

Key factors in the success of this model:

- Art-Ovrag Festival: This festival became the foundation of transformation, turning an industrial city into a magnet for contemporary art lovers;
- Co-design: Residents actively participate in the transformation, becoming co-creators of change rather than mere observers;
- Cooperation between business, government, and society: UMK, acting as producer, pooled the resources and expertise of all stakeholders.

As a result, Vyksa has transformed from an ordinary single-industry town with a negative image into a cultural center renowned throughout the country. This has led to increased tourism and, most importantly, increased pride among residents in their city. This experience clearly demonstrates that investments in culture and community development bring tangible benefits, improving the quality of life and the investment attractiveness of the city.

The expected results of this approach are: the creation of economic growth opportunities based on the uniqueness of the territory; increased investment attractiveness; the creation of a comfortable, consistent urban environment that motivates people to stay in the city or return; and the development of local community and civic engagement.

One of the risks is resistance from the traditional bureaucratic system, which requires political will at the regional and municipal levels to empower producers with the necessary authority.

The producer does not impose a vision from above, but rather acts as a moderator, identifying the needs and potential of residents themselves. Through workshops, public discussions, and online platforms, ideas are collected, and a pool of local leaders and volunteers is formed [8]. This creates a sense of ownership and responsibility for the transformation of the city, which is a key factor in the sustainability of projects.

The implementation of the producer model can be divided into several stages:

1. Diagnostic stage: a comprehensive audit of the territory, including urban planning, economic, social, and cultural analysis. Identification of key stakeholders and their interests.

2. Strategic stage: developing a unique selling proposition and city development concept. Formulating a roadmap with a package of specific projects for urban development.

3. Project stage: implementation of pilot projects with maximum visual and social impact (tactical urbanism, launching event-based activities). Active community engagement.

4. Integration and scaling stage: implementation of successful practices in the municipal governance system, attracting major investors for large-scale projects. The expected results of this approach are: creation of economic growth opportunities based on the uniqueness of the territory; increased investment attractiveness; creation of a comfortable, consistent urban environment that motivates people to stay in the city or return to it; development of the local community and civic engagement.

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Проектирование городской среды на основе продюсерского подхода к развитию малых городов

В статье рассматривается проблема деградации малых городов и обосновывается необходимость применения нового управленческого подхода — продюсерского — для их устой-

чивого развития. Актуальность темы обусловлена сохранением негативных тенденций оттока населения, стагнации экономики и утраты культурной идентичности малых городов, несмотря на реализацию государственных программ. Цель исследования — анализ концептуальных основ проектирования комфортной городской среды малых городов на принципах продюсирования. В результате исследования вы-

явлена сущность продюсерского подхода, предполагающего переход от административного управления к созданию и реализации комплексного «продукта» территории. Выделены ключевые принципы подхода: формирование уникального торгового предложения города, реализация соучаствующего проектирования с вовлечением жителей, применение инструментов проектного управления и краудфандинга. Изложены этапы внедрения продюсерской модели и ожидаемые результаты, включая создание точек экономического роста, повышение инвестиционной привлекательности и формирование комфортной, идентичной городской среды. Новизна подхода заключается в адаптации инструментов продюсирования, характерных для креативных индустрий, к практике градостроительного развития малых городов. Практическая значимость состоит в том, что предложенные механизмы могут быть использованы органами муниципального управления и инвестиционно-строительными компаниями для разработки и реализации эффективных стратегий развития территорий.

Ключевые слова: малый город, проектирование городской среды, продюсерский подход, устойчивое развитие, управление развитием территорий

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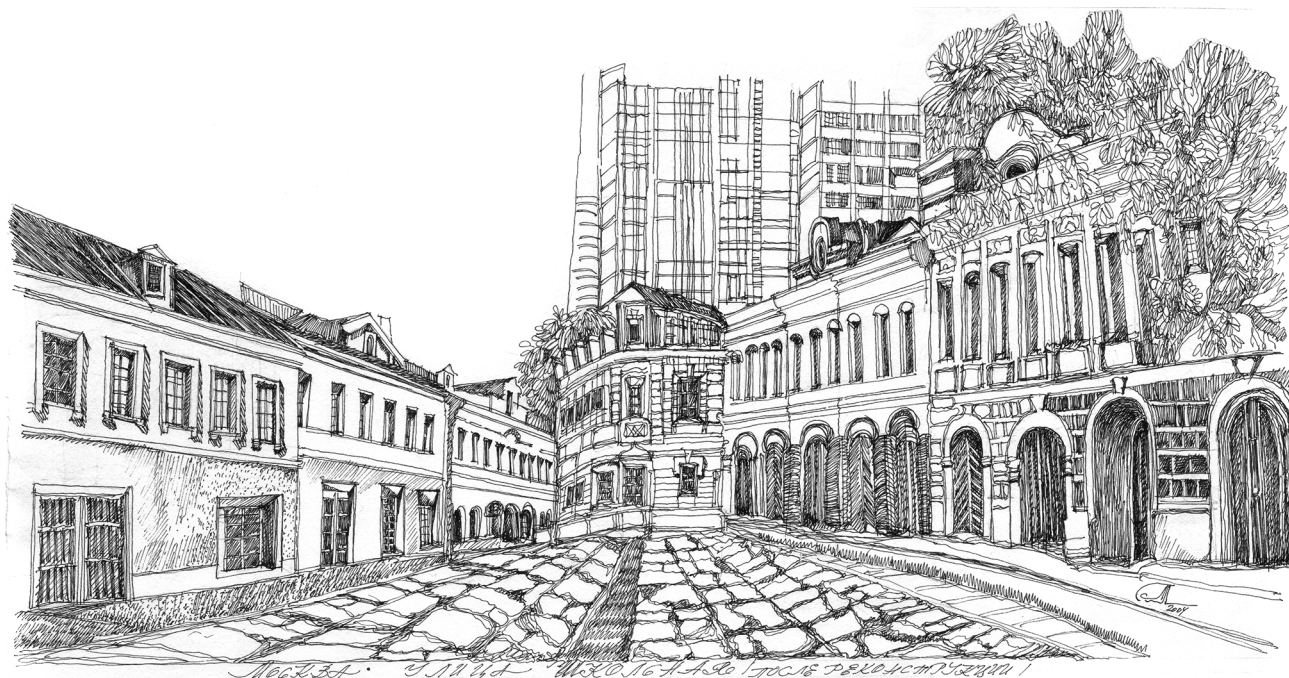
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