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Remont: do-it-yourself-urbanism in post-Soviet Tajikistan

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Abstract

The proposed paper deals with multiple facets of the notion of *remont,* exploring urban space production in contemporary Tajikistan – on the crossroads of post-socialist urbanism and the Global South. *Remont* has come to bear in the post-Soviet Tajik context a wide range of meaning, in some way parallel to a Lefebvrian tripartite understanding of the production of space: *Remont* as perception refers to a good or a bad state of upkeep. *Remont* as conception refers to the desire to attain a certain *remont* status. *Remont* as adaptation refers to the activity being undertaken to reach this status. In this regard, *remont* is not only about attending to shortcomings, but is an active engagement with space, and a culturally embedded creative practice, aimed at reaching a normative set of spatial morality. I argue that the measure against which the need for *remont* is weighted, is *obodi* – beauty and habitability created by men's hands. By means of *remont, obodi* is being enacted in Tajikistan's urban space. Being a vector of spatial morality, *remont* is intimately tied to life-cycle rituals such as circumcisions, weddings and funerals, and thus takes part in projections and negotiations of modernity in post-Soviet urban Central Asia.

Keywords: *Remont, Central Asia, Tajikistan, spatial morality, life-cycles.*

Introduction

Two peculiar notions permeate the social production of space in Khujand[1]: *remont* and *obodi.* In the course of my fieldwork in Khujand[2], I have stumbled upon this word on dozens of occasions. This word came to the Russian language from French, where it originally meant the provisioning of horses to the cavalry. Understood as a completion of losses, *remont* began to mean in the Russian language all sorts of repair and upkeep activities. The notion of *remont* encompassed the repair of watches and cars, as well as renovation works in offices and apartments. In the Tajik language, *remont* has come to signify construction-related activities only. For petty repair works, the word *ta'mir* is used, such as in *ta'miri pojafzol* – shoe repair.

Yet at least in Khujand, *remont* has acquired a number of meanings its Russian predecessor did not have. First of all, remont signifies a status, a condition. This can be a positive one and a negative one, too. With a friend, I passed by a long-abandoned building, and asking what it is, I got "In remont ast" (That's a remont) as an answer (Interview Khurshed, 2010). Yet in most cases, remont refers to the condition of good upkeep, past and present: "The remont (in that room) is already broken" *(Remont tam uže isportilsâ)* (Interview Iroda, 2010, 00:33:37-5). The understanding of a broken *remont* leads to the desire to reach the wished status of *remont*. The activity to reach it, is called: to make *remont* – Tajik: *remont kardan;* Russian: *delat' remont: "You have to do* remont *everywhere"* (Interview Muhiddin), *"We will have to do a fundamental* remont" (Interview Iroda, 2010, 00:36:09). Basically, *remont* is the activity which transforms *remont* into *remont:*

> *We had an old house but we made remont there. It's a normal Tajik house, but now there is a remont like in Europe. […] We have done all the remont already, it looks like new. But [...] we will do another remont when we have a wedding. Then we will renew the remont* (magar tui nav mekunand, remonta nav mekunand) *(Interview Khurshed, 2010, 00:09:32- 5)*

[1] Located in the northern part of Tajikistan, on both banks of the Syrdarya river leving the Ferghana Valley, Khujand has roughly 160000 inhabitants, which makes it the second-largest town in Tajikistan. On the southern shore of the Syrdarya river, densely built-up quarters with an irregular street layout form Khujand's old town. On the northern bank the city looks very much different: no more detached houses, no more crooked streets, but large housing estates consisting of prefabricated multi-storey houses from the Soviet period – the *microraions.*

[2] In the course of the years 2009 and 2010, I spent seven months in Khujand doing fieldwork for my PhD thesis. I collected roughly thirty lengthy interviews and eighty mental maps, as well as additional information by means of participant observation and archive research.

Remont runs in some way parallel to the Lefebvrian three-piece understanding of production of space, which I would sum up as the interplay between conception, perception and adaptation of space. The three parts of a social production of space – conceptions, perceptions, and adaptations of space – are not isolated from each other. In the process of their interaction, space is being produced. They should not be understood as stand-alone segments, but as interwoven entities which re-enact the production of urban space in Khujand.

Remont as perception refers to a good or a bad state of upkeep. *Remont* as conception refers to the desire to attain a certain *remont* status. *Remont* as adaptation refers to the activity being undertaken to reach this status –.

Remont is not only about attending to shortcomings, not about mending something broken, but is a culturally embedded creative practice. These multiple facets of the term characterise very well the production of space in Khujand – even if taken together, they are too disparate to possess an explanatory value. In the following, I will argue that the measure against which the need for remont is weighted, is, *obodi* – beauty and habitability created by men's hands, understood as a set of norms of a spatial morality. By means of *remont* – among others – *obodi* is being enacted in Khujand's urban space. In this vein, the paper will take a close look on remont as adaptation of space. After a discussion on theories of spatial adaptations, I am going to present strategies of building expansion as reaction to shortages; their embeddedness in life-cycles; the opposite strategy of building contraction; and the negotiation of modernity by means of a remont "European style".

The art of the *possible:* transduction in action

Remont not only about attending to shortcomings, as I stressed beforehand. Why is this important to me? Where change takes place, it takes place through practice, mirroring Lefebvre's claim of the pre-eminence of everyday practice for bringing about change. To Lefebvre, a study of the everyday life had to point to the "precise problems of production-at-large" and engage in a critical analysis of abundances, constraints and determinisms (Lefebvre, 1968, p. 50). This analysis of changes to urban morphologies will therefore look into underlying motivations – and shortages are one very prominent motivation, as we will see in the following. From a normatively transitological perspective, urban change in Central

Asia appears as some kind of defectiveness which eventually gives way to improvisation. The explanatory notes to an exhibition on urban landscapes in Uzbekistan read: “the change from a socialist planned economy to modern city management is barely accomplished, and the old plans and norms are no longer valid. Improvisations and short-term solutions have to fill the vacuum. New centres emerge spontaneously” (ifa-Galerie, 2009, p. 93). In my opinion, this widespread point of view distorts the picture. First of all, it naïvely attributes to the state and the “modern city management” the capacity (and the will!) to set out plans and norms which benefit the urban population. It also devalues the aspirations and capacities of individual actors. From my observations in Khujand, their aspirations are by no means short-term, but are guided by the will to sustainably improve their way of living. 'Improvisation' falls short in describing their actual capacities, which rely on an own logic of planning and implementation (Brown, 1998, p. 627). It needs therefore another framework to grasp the knife-edge between wishes and the limits to them.

Bouzarovski et al. have suggested the concept of *resilience* to analyse everyday life coping strategies in post-socialist settings (Bouzarovski, Salukvadze, & Gentile, 2011, p. 2690). They understood it as a “capacity to adapt” and an “ability of cities to transform their political, economic and technical structures in line with the demands of a more challenging future environment”, and proposed to conceive it in terms of a “complex network of socioeconomic practices and material sites” (Bouzarovski, Salukvadze, & Gentile, 2011, p. 2690). This concept takes into account the complex negotiation process and acknowledges the actors' room to manoeuvre. Yet adaptation is rather seen as a passive reaction to external impulses. This is consistent with a straightforward idea of *remont:* mending and repair indeed takes place when something is broken and needs to be fixed. Some spare part is being replaced, the *status quo ante* is being restored. Yet I will insist in the following that *remont* is not about mending broken spaces: it is a creative production of space in its own right.

This consideration brings to mind the process of transduction. Transduction, following Lefebvre’s argument, “targets a virtual 'object' and its realization on a path heading toward a 'pro-posed' horizon. […] *Proposing* does not amount to *producing,* but *propositions* open the way for those who will produce” (Lefebvre, 2009c, pp. 197–198). Transduction is therefore more than the “refashioning of urban space to meet the exigencies of the users” (Parker, 2004, p. 164), but a negotiation of the possibilities of the production of space: “As new theoretical imaginings are given concrete form, the feedback mechanism ensures that subsequent projections / projects are informed by this newly altered reality in an endless loop of

speculation-investigation-critique-implementation"(Parker, 2004, p. 178). This practice is grounded in the local cultural context. In Lefebvre's terms, it can be framed as "a creative and expressive negotiation between the spatial affordance and the cultural significations" (Stanek, 2011, p. 93).

In order to implement this idea of a *negotiation of possibilities* of urban space production into the discussion of urban landscape change, I suggest looking at de Certeau. He has proposed to distinguish between strategies and tactics when looking at everyday life practices (Certeau, 1984, p. 365). Strategies are understood as a "calculation of power relationships". Those who are able to employ them, pro-actively shape the spaces they operate in. Tactics however, are negotiations with these spaces and negotiation with those who possess power and wealth which allows them to create space strategically. The distinction between strategies and tactics helps to clarify Lefebvre's understanding of social space. He has expressed the distinction between wishes and limitations with the terms of the 'dominated' and the 'appropriated' space. They co-exist and engage in constant negotiation:

> *Dominated space and appropriated space may in principle be combined – and, ideally at least, they ought to be combined. But history – which is to say the history of accumulation — is also the history of their separation and mutual antagonism. The winner in this contest, moreover, has been domination […] Not that appropriation disappears, for it cannot: both practice and theory continue to proclaim its importance and demand its restitution (Lefebvre & Nicholson-Smith, 1997, p. 166).*

Out of this understanding, Bertuzzo has described the social space as the "field of a dominated, and hence passively experienced, space, whereby 'desire' and imagination seek to change and to appropriate it" (Bertuzzo, 2009, p. 31). Using de Certeau's terminology to describe this line of thought, the strategical handling of space forces those who have no access to it to experience it passively. Having no means for a strategical handling of space, people engage in tactics within the limits of their possibilities. At the same time, they will not renounce the opportunity to behave strategically when they have the capacity to do so. There is, however no clear-cut distinction between those who are able to produce space strategically and those who do not. Round argues that the relationship is neither dualistic nor fixed. To the contrary, the "relationship between strategies and tactics is not a static one: they can operate within the same space, through the same people and at different scales" (Round & Williams,

2010, p. 187). Looking at urban change through the lens of tactics and strategies means therefore to reflect the dynamics between constraints and possibilities.

Czepczyński argues, post-socialist urban landscapes are "no longer typical for the previous regime and planning, but at the same time quite different from the aspired ones" (Czepczyński, 2010, p. 18). To my understanding, they will never be as the aspired ones, for transduction targets a horizon. *Remont* appears in this sense as transduction in action. This is what we will see in the following, looking at space production processes in Khujand within the social field of space production.

Soviet and post-Soviet shortages

Soviet promises of modernity, as laid out in the ambitious planning documents, remained in part unfulfilled. This was surely due to the unexpected demise of the Soviet Union and the subsequent breakdown of the economy; but also to inherent inertia and frictional losses from the Soviet planning practice which prioritised industry needs to the detriment of housing and infrastructure. The shortcomings of the planning process left many construction sites unfinished. Khujand's 3rd microraion virtually stands in the middle of nowhere, ten blocks surrounded by dust, halfway between the 8th microraion and an abandoned industrial estate. Yet in the Soviet conception of space, also construction sites – and not the finished structures – stood by themselves as symbols of progress. They heralded "development as forever" (Alexander, Buchli, & Humphrey, 2007, p. 51). Unfinished construction sites were therefore paradigmatic for the Soviet city, in the same way as on-going renovation and improvement works – the "eternal remont". Following the Soviet anecdote – "I hope that in hell they will have an eternal fire and not an eternal remont" (Interview Sergei, 2010). Remont, as I observed it in the years after independence is therefore strongly rooted in a Soviet heritage.

Gerasimova argued that already the Soviet society could be described as a "society of *remont"*. Since the political and economic system was not conceived as an auto-regulating one. State authorities constantly made forays of "improvements, experiments and anti-crisis campaigns". The citizens, too, contributed to this "society of remont", either through low-key political activism within the allowed framework of grievances and petitions, but also on an everyday level, through adaptation of the material world around them (Gerasimova &

Čujkina, 2004). Looking at Central Asian societies via the prism of liminality allow to conceive of them as 'societies of remont' as well. State authorities attempt to come by the permanent crisis situation through large-scale campaigns which leads to unsustainable outcomes – such as the Roghun share frenzy or the Dushanbe trolleybus purchases (Sgibnev, forthcoming). The citizens take part in this system by means of housing adaptations – as we will see in the following.

With the onset of Soviet large-scale industrialisation since the 1930s, the population of Khujand rose dramatically (see chart 2). To the detriment of housing construction, the heavy industry was assigned a higher priority, as discussed beforehand. Housing construction did therefore by no means keep up with population growth. Bouzarovski et al. argue that "communist policies forced industrialisation on an urban system that was by no means able to absorb the population expansion […The prioritisation of heavy industry] implied that the nationalised housing stock not only failed to expand to meet the needs of urban growth, but deteriorated in quality as well. (Bouzarovski, Salukvadze, & Gentile, 2011, p. 2692).

In cities of the European part of the Soviet Union, the housing needs were addressed by 'densification' *(uplotnenie),* which meant in practice that a number of families shared one flat. This heralded the emergence of the *kommunalka* phenomenon. Until the mid-1960s, 80% of the urban population lived in kommunalkas. The construction boom under Khrushtchev significantly lowered this proportion, but still in 1993, 1,5 million people in Moscow lived in communal flats (Messana, 1995, p. 9). The widely told stories of overcrowding, quarrels and unhygienic conditions of the kommunalkas (Evans, 2011, Gdaniec, 2005, Messana, 1995, Utechin, 2004) are mirrored by the same kind of stories set in the *havlis* of the Central Asian old towns. Tatiana recalls the distress of her grandparents who came to Khujand in the 1930s: "For twenty years they vagabonded from one private house to another. They arranged everything, painted the walls. Then the owners came and told them: 'well, our son is getting married, you've got to go' *(Remontirovali, belili, potom prihodili hozâeva i govorili: 'da, syn ženitsâ, davajte uhodite')"* (Interview Tatiana, 2010, 00:01:08). It was only in the late 1950s that her family was able to obtain an apartment in a newly-built block in the city centre.

Indeed, the 1950s finally saw the onset of an industrialised housing construction, which in Khujand led to the construction of microraions on the right bank of the Syrdarya river. This only partially alleviated the pressure on the housing sector. The Soviet legislation had defined in 1926 already, that each person was entitled to a living space norm of nine square metres.

Yet this official norm was not met until the late 1970s (Bouzarovski, Salukvadze, & Gentile, 2011, p. 2700). The housing allocation system for the newly built apartments was plagued by inefficiency and corruption (Bouzarovski, Salukvadze, & Gentile, 2011, p. 2692), (Brown, 1998, p. 614), (Gentile & Sjöberg, 2006, p. 710). The waiting time for a state-allocated flat lasted for years – unless one matched specific conditions: being employed by the silk factory, for instance. Thus, the key industry enterprises continued to influence housing allocation (Gentile, 2003, pp. 5–6).

After independence the privatisation of apartments took place rather chaotically. The outmigration of the Russian-speaking population left many apartments in the microraions in an unclear property situation. At the same time, the outmigration somewhat decreased the housing shortage in Khujand, as the population did not grow, very much in contrast to of the capital Dushanbe. The legislative acts for apartment privatisation were either insufficient or ignored. Processes and norms of real estate management were negotiated on a day-to-day basis. The legislation stipulates that common premises – that is the roof, the staircase, heating and plumbing – are meant to be jointly managed by all owners. A new law on common ownership was adopted in July 2009 (Republic of Tajikistan, 2009), yet is hardly being implemented (TSŽ v Tadžikistane, 2010). In reality, the management of common premises does not abide by the law, at least not in Khujand. This lack of coordination results in a general neglect of common premises and in declining housing quality. Leaking roofs are one particularly salient issue[3]. Iroda argues "You've got this problem in every house. In this flat which I bought, too, the roof is leaking. I was told already that I had to fix it myself. So I will start with the roof, and then go on to a *remont* of the apartment" (Interview Iroda, 2010, 00:36:09). This case is common to other post-Soviet settings. As Bouzarovski et al. observed in Tbilisi, "the inability and unwillingness of most tenants to pay for repair and maintenance

[3]Description of dire accommodation is an inalienable part of novels of the time, from Il'f and Petrov's "Twelve chairs" to Habur's "Peaceful times", set during the establishment of Soviet rule in Tajikistan in the early 1920s: "In the courtyards where the patriarchal Tajik families lived, gas stoves were roaring, and Russian women grouched on light-haired suntanned children. Tenants were living in each and every courtyard. On the quick, they built wooden topchans, they bought quilted cotton blankets and colourfully painted teapots. Twisting Russian and Tajik words, they somehow agreed with the owners, and built their family nests. […] The people of the new city lived in cramped mud-walled huts, and sometimes even in tents, but they went working into bright houses built of stones, with shiny floors and large windows" (Habur, 1962, pp. 42–43). Even high-ranking officials struggled to get a place to sleep: "In one of the new houses Gulyam managed to get a room on his own – not without the help of Kasym-aka. This white cube with one window and chipboard ceiling appeared to Gulyam as some wonder from a fairy-tale" (Habur, 1962, p. 75).

resulted in a rapid deterioration of almost all apartment buildings in the city" (Bouzarovski, Salukvadze, & Gentile, 2011, p. 2693).

In this regard, the individual composition of a house or a staircase community is decisive. Houses with a majority of apartment owners are managed in a distinctly different way than houses where many flats are rented out. Buildings with a majority of one- or two-rooms apartments are in general terms not very well kept. These apartments do not suit the average extended family. The previous owners opted to buy larger apartments in the neighbourhood as 'Europeans' moved out, and to rent out the smaller apartments – either to students or to internal migrants. Generally speaking, owners of rented apartments refrain from large investments. At the same time, the rapidly changing tenants do not cooperate in order to obtain better living conditions. In the staircase where I used to live in Khujand while on fieldwork, half of the flats were occupied by owners, the other half being rented out. On the first floor, all three flats were occupied by owners and had access to garden plots in the courtyard. Both smaller flats on the second floor were rented out to students, the larger flat was owner-occupied. On the third floor, one flat was rented out to students, while two adjacent flats were owner-occupied by an extended family. On the fourth floor, finally, two flats – a larger and a smaller one – were rented out, while one flat was owner-occupied. This owner though – a secluded and run-down middle-aged professor of mathematics – did not participate in house management affairs. With two apartments with frequently changing tenants and one eccentric professor, the fourth floor had no authority in the management of common premises, and had to live with leaking roofs and sordid plumbing. The inhabitants beneath were unimpressed if it rained through the roof, as long as those above collected the rainwater in buckets.

This example illustrates that microraion neighbourhoods are mixed in terms of income and status. As Gentile argued, "socioeconomic differentiation is more likely to be reflected in segregation by housing tenure, quality and size rather than at the neighbourhood level" (Gentile, 2003, pp. 5–6), as this was the case in Soviet times already. The adjacent staircases are overwhelmingly owner-occupied and therefore in a significantly better state of upkeep. Another reason for better management is the presence of 'natural' authorities – retired professors, politicians or sport champions who are able to convince the neighbours to contribute to common investments. As far as I was able to observe, such engagement was disinterested indeed, for neither of the 'authorities' lived on the upper floors and was directly threatened by leaking roofs. This underlines the importance of community structures and

person-to-person negotiations on the neighbourhood level for the negotiation of spatial arrangements.

Housing extensions in the rhythm of life-cycles

The creative practice of housing adaptations now comes into the focus of attention. This topic already stood at the forefront of Lefebvre's theory of the social production of space. Speaking of a housing estate in Bordeaux, he exclaims:

> *And what did the occupants do? Instead of installing themselves in their containers, instead of adapting to them and living in them 'passively', they decided that as far as possible they were going to live 'actively'. In doing so they showed what living in a house actually is: an activity. They took what had been offered to them and worked on it, converted it, added to it. (Stanek, 2011, p. 92)*

Housing adaptations are therefore “a social and yet poetic act” (Aronowitz, 2007, p. 147). These interpretations sound to me as a rejection of a purely functional understanding of housing as 'machines for living' – or, additionally as machines for educating the masses, as in the Soviet case.

The massive construction programme of the Soviet era surely did produce a large amount of square metres, but the problem of overcrowding was at best only alleviated. The slight decline in Khujand's population after independence has barely suppressed the need for more housing: *In Soviet times it occurred in prefabricated houses that three families lived in a three-room apartment. But it's the same today. At a friend of mine's, there are seven people living in a two-room apartment, and he himself sleeps on the balcony (Interview Muhiddin).* This sentence witnesses not only the fact of a densely packed apartment, but also one solution which the inhabitants have attempted in order to expand the available living space: they transformed the balcony into an additional room. As we will see in the following, this is a very common adaptation of the built environment.

Another motivation for individual housing changes is the fact that the apartment layouts were – intentionally – not well adapted to the customs of the persons who were meant to move in. The apartments were designed to support the emergence of nuclear families. After marriage,

young couples were intended to move out to their own apartment, where they would be secured from their families' influence (Stephan, 2010, p. 60). Through this support for *neolocality,* Soviet authorities intended to bring at least the younger generations in line with a common Soviet urban way of life. This aspiration was rooted in the conviction that space could be used as an instrument of education: "carefully designed living quarters (...) could eliminate the conditions for individualistic and *meshchanskie* (petty-minded bourgeois) ways of life, and on this basis a new human type would become the norm" (Humphrey, 2005, p. 39). Still, most young couples do not have the opportunity to move to their own apartment – in Soviet times because housing construction did not keep pace with housing needs; and after independence because of a lack of money to buy an apartment. It is therefore not unusual for a young couple to stay in the apartment with the bridegroom's parents, which is not an easy task: "It is very difficult for the newly-wed in an apartment. Their private life must be kept" (Interview Muhiddin). In the old town havli, the solution would have been to build another room or another storey, if the space and the means were available. In this regard, the "unstable materiality" of loam constructions. Only in the late 1980s, architects turned towards acknowledging the housing needs of multi-generation families. A series of projects saw the light (Veselovskij & Mukimov, 1987, p. 182, p. 275), yet none of them was implemented to my knowledge.

This does, in my view, not point to "the failure of social relations and moral orders" (Alexander, Buchli, & Humphrey, 2007, p. 47). To the contrary, it allows for a relative flexibility of the layout at a relatively low cost. Anyway, the house had to be strengthened or entirely rebuilt every decade or so due to its being built of loam. As rooms open to the courtyard and not necessarily to a corridor, another room can be stuck into the havli, where possible. Bakhtovar recalls his grandfather building a room on his own when his son – that is Bakhtovar's father – was four or five years of age, in 1894 (Interview at the Shoemaker's place, 2010, pp. 00:07:44-4). Bakhtovar himself built a room for himself and his family in the 1960s, but admits that it was of low-quality, because construction material was difficult to come by. The room which Bakhtovar's father built back then was since transformed into the living-room until it burnt down on New Year's eve 2008. The family decided to build a new structure on the site, this time of bricks and concrete, in order to provide a place for Bakhtovar's son and his family.(Interview at the Shoemaker's place, 2010, 00:14:37-5). This account shows the flexibility of the havli-type spatial arrangement. The space of the havli takes part in the family's life cycle and lives on together with its inhabitants, while the

inhabitants actively live this space. Yet here as well, modern construction methods and fashions are about to preclude this flexibility for the future. The concrete structure built for Bakhtovar's son will surely last for a couple of decades. The other loam buildings in the old town will also be replaced by more enduring structures. Those who can afford it, altogether build large mansions in the old town which rise three or four storeys. This surely provides enough comfortable living space for the extended family, but clamps the lid on the flexible and creative handling of living space which was possible with loam structures.

In a microraion, the adaptation of the apartment layout to the needs and aspirations of a family is more difficult. Yet in light of a largely unregulated legal environment, as we have seen above, it still can take many forms. Buying or renting an additional apartment is an evident remedy, but it is clearly affordable for higher incomes only. The emigration of Russian-speaking families in the early 1990s has allowed many families who decided to stay to buy apartments relatively cheaply – I was told of prices of two or three thousand US$ for four-rooms apartments in the attractive 18th or 19th microraions. It is therefore not very rare to see an extended family to occupying two or three apartments on the same floor or at least in the same staircase. With two or three apartments on one floor, all doors are generally kept open and the staircase space is being transformed to a havli-type arrangement. If the possibility of buying several apartments in one staircase is not available, moving would be another option. Still, this only rarely occurs in practice.

Real estate prices have considerably risen in Khujand[4] over the last years, making it prohibitively expensive to move out into a larger apartment if the need arises. Furthermore, even if a real estate market does exist since Soviet times, the banking sector is embryonic (Brown, 1998, p. 614). Large parts of the population do not have access to any mortgage systems and therefore cannot ante up the required amounts of cash. Since the banking sector is underdeveloped and mistrusted, investments in one's own apartment is a common way to put surplus capital to service and to increase the apartment's value (Bouzarovski, Salukvadze, & Gentile, 2011, p. 2702). In this vein, housing adaptations appear as a “material manifestation of alternative economic practices” (Bouzarovski, Salukvadze, & Gentile, 2011, p. 2691).

[4] One particular arrangement where no land is available and the existing structures would not support a second storey built on their top is the *bolo-khona* (house on the top). It is being built above the gates to the havli and profits of the pre-existing walls leading to the gate. Due to this fact, the structure is limited by the width of the gate and therefore in general very small.

Cultural factors also play a role in the decision to stay rather than to move. Bouzarovski et al. argue that "rural migrants prefer to stay and expand rather than move", feeling a "strong emotional attachment to their homes and thus refused to move to other dwellings even if they had the financial capital to do so. Having adapted to their urban apartments, they preferred to increase their size and function, and inhabit them as extended families" (Bouzarovski, Salukvadze, & Gentile, 2011, p. 2705). A further argument for the tendency to remain in the apartment is the high role of social capital in survival tactics. Round states that this "demonstrates the importance of place in everyday life as social capital flows through" (Round & Williams, 2010, p. 188). Taking these arguments together, extensions to existing apartments are the most widespread answer to mitigate living space needs. Bouzarovski et al propose to understand this process as an alternative to residential mobility in the traditional sense (Bouzarovski, Salukvadze, & Gentile, 2011, pp. 2690–2691). Inhabitants experience "multiple housing events without changing their residential location" in a context "where 'non-market options' play a key role in the progression of housing careers" (Bouzarovski, Salukvadze, & Gentile, 2011, p. 2693).

In the context of apartments in large housing estates, balcony enclosures are the most widespread adaptation of the built environment. The existing concrete balcony casing is being extended up to the bottom of the following balcony. A row of materials is used for these purposes. An all-glass solution was more widespread in Soviet times, but is employed still today for smaller balconies too. Large balconies are often walled in with bricks of various sorts. Households with lower income might opt for plasterboard, corrugated iron sheets, wood or chipboard, although these are rather perceived as provisional arrangements. Bouzarovski et al. report that this practice was widespread in the Soviet Union since the 1960s (Bouzarovski, Salukvadze, & Gentile, 2011, p. 2697). Then as today, state authorities tolerated these types of adaptations and did not request formal planning documents. Indeed, these adaptations came up to meet state aspirations – helping "to alleviate chronic housing shortages, while improving the living conditions of the population" (Bouzarovski, Salukvadze, & Gentile, 2011, p. 2698). The extra room was often adapted as a kitchen – while the original kitchen which often was adjacent to the balcony was transformed to a living room. The living room, in turn, could then be transformed into a bedroom. Looking at examples from Skopje and Tbilisi, Bouzarovski et al argue that the additional living space did not serve as bedrooms, because of difficulties into introducing heating to the extensions (Bouzarovski, Salukvadze, & Gentile, 2011, p. 2703).

In Khujand though, I have regularly witnessed another arrangement when the enclosed balcony is used as the men's living part. At times, it is shared with one of the sons. On very rare occasions I have encountered the enclosed balcony as being used as the women's part – the argument was its being next to the kitchen. Provided the enclosed balcony is on the first floor, it is also possible to transform it into a small kiosk. Then it would require an additional staircase from the street level. Additional entrances are possible up to the second or third floor if commercial space needs to be made accessible. Apartments located on the first floor at times have the opportunity to expand greatly beyond the original balconies and to add dozens of square metres to the surface with the help of additional walls and extra roofing. In contrast with Dushanbe, I did not encounter this practice on a widespread basis, and if, then almost exclusively for commercial purposes. The possibility to engage in urban agriculture is more important than the need for additional living space, as it seems.

Multi-storey building extensions on frames of steel or reinforced concrete, as can be founde in the South Caucasus or on the Balkans, did not come to my eyes in Khujand. This absence might possibly be linked to seismic hazards, as the extensions considerably affect the static of the original buildings. Yet already minor extensions such as balcony enclosures can have an adverse effect on living quality. They might obstruct ventilation and introduce mould and moisture to the apartments. But the biggest issue are problems with DIY-adaptations to plumbing and isolation. Iroda recalls:

> *My neighbour is flooding me regularly. Something is broken at her place and water seeps down to my balcony. Every time I go to her and tell her that she has to fix it* (čtoby sdelala remont), *but she tells me: 'I don't have any money'. Her husband is somewhere, working, and she doesn't have sons. Well, I can't pressure her. I don't know. I live with it. I have done some repair work at my balcony, but it didn't help* (Â delala remont, no on uže isportilsâ) *[...] The problem is that she has transferred her kitchen to the balcony and apparently something was not done the right way. Now, water seeps through. Whatever I do, it doesn't work (Interview Iroda, 2010, 00:33:37-5).*

Adaptations of the built environment come in a plethora of variants and styles. Yet as a matter of fact, the apartment extensions do not match the style and colours of the original apartment buildings. All individual balconies combined on one façade transform the previously monolithic blocks into a mosaic of sometimes sloppy and sometimes affectionate

workmanship and decoration. These extensions come as signs of social status (Bouzarovski, Salukvadze, & Gentile, 2011, p. 2706), but also of individual taste. When asked why he painted his balcony in a bright yellow, Murodali exclaimed "There are no comrades when it comes to taste and colour!" *(Na vkus i cvet tovarišа net),* and the shoemaker sided with him: "This cheerful colour is there, because grandpa is a cheerful guy himself!" (Interview at the Shoemaker's place, 2010, 00:16:46-4). Popescu has argued that this "patchworks of diverse patterns" is an expression of a "yearning for individualization, combined with a progressive social demarcation" which reduces architecture to "the role of a support mechanism" (Popescu, 2010, p. 188). I would not go that far toward this interpretation. I do rather see them as answers to precise practical needs and as attempts to fulfil aspirations. Coping appears here to be more important than self-fulfilment. In this regard, I would support Alexander & Buchli who sum up that while "a new uniformity is emerging where it is hard to distinguish the house and lifestyle of the 'new Buryat' from that of a 'new Kazakh' […], the lives of the poor and methods of 'getting by' […] are more distinct" (Alexander, Buchli, & Humphrey, 2007, p. 33). The described examples of *remont* such as building extensions are, I would argue, by no means less important than "Starchitecture" (Basten, 2009, p. 7). They emerge as spatialised expressions of culturally embedded household coping strategies.

Infrastructure failures: contraction of space

Now that we have seen the practice of building extensions, I will briefly present the opposite practice – that of spatial contraction. This does not only mean living with many people in one apartment. I will refer here to a spatial reaction to infrastructure failures which are widespread in Khujand since independence.

The microraion apartments were at the time of their construction connected to a central heating system which provided electricity, warm water and heating to the housing estates. This system collapsed after independence, first of all because of lacking energy imports. In Soviet times, Khujand was linked to the Uzbek power grid and was isolated from the rest of Tajikistan after Uzbekistan left the common Central Asian grid in 2009. Yet already since independence, Tajikistan was struggling to receive fossil fuels from Uzbekistan to keep its electricity stations running in winter. *Barqi Toğik,* the state electricity provider, is therefore

constrained to impose electricity rationing, running every year[5] approximately from November to March. This means that electricity is provided two or three hours a day. Rural areas are often completely cut off from electricity provision in these times. Alexander and Buchli have argued that the breakdown of infrastructure led to a definite loss of trust in the state. As "continuing flow within the pipes [...] literally and metaphorically [constitutes] the body politic" (Alexander, Buchli, & Humphrey, 2007, p. 23), the end of infrastructure provision sounded the disintegration of society. The unstable provision was coupled with steadily rising costs for a miserable service. This is, in my view, the most important single factor for the still prevailing nostalgia for the Soviet Union.

In order to substitute for the warm water provision, virtually all apartments are equipped with water boilers locally known as "Ariston", after the Italian firm which used to be the brand leader on the post- Soviet market in the 1990s. The heating problem, though, is much more difficult to solve. As most other households, Iroda's family has bought an electric heater, but also keeps a coal oven as reserve:

> *Sure, I have an electrical heater. There is no (central) heating in my house. Since a lot of years already. […] Before I had a small child, we had a coal oven* (buržujka) *and a chimney installed there. That's how we did it. But now I am worried: he is such a hooligan, he has to touch everything, and the oven is too dangerous for a child. This winter, I won't heat the oven. I will just hope that we will have light (i.e. electricity) and that we will be able to use the electrical oven […] But I still keep a sack of coal at the balcony and all the necessary stuff. If you come, I'll show you (laughs). I still have the whole equipment. The coal oven is still at the balcony. I do not exclude any eventuality. I have no idea how the provision will be this year. There was a time when we almost had no electricity at all: one hour in the evenings and one hour in the mornings, then I used the coal oven (Interview Iroda, 2010, 00:44:09-6).*

[5] In times of the common grid inherited from Soviet times, the upstream countries Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were supposed to provide electricity from their hydroelectric plants to the countries downstream – i.e. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan – in summer, during the cotton watering season. In winter, they were supposed to receive thermically generated electricity as well as gas and coal for domestic energy production in exchange. Since the collapse of the system, the upstream countries are forced to run their hydroelectric stations in winter as well. This depletes domestic water resources and spoils the soils downstream.

Iroda is about to buy a one-room apartment in the 32nd microraion. As the four-rooms-apartment she lives in belongs to her parents, she will have to move out in a couple of years when her brother marries. They could not afford a larger one and decided therefore that a one-room-apartment on their own is better than nothing. Furthermore, this apartment is close to her daughter's school, which will spare her a lengthy trip on the minibus. Yet heating considerations also contributed to her decision: "We think, we all will move there for the winter. It is easier to heat when you are all in one room" (Interview Iroda, 2010, pp. 00:31:42-4).

Other interview partners confirmed this practice: in winter, the whole family moves to the living room where the coal oven is being installed for the time being. They seal up the windows casements with cotton wool and close all other rooms in order to improve insulation: it is already bad in the original houses, but even worse in the apartment extensions. In winter time therefore, life in the microraion apartment approximates the traditional life of the havli. There as well the family gathers in one central room where the oven is located. Additionally, a low table combined with a recipient for smouldering coal called *sandal* is being installed. The table can be covered with a blanket which then also shelters the people that sit around the table (Interview Nazirjon, 2010). Similarly to apartment extension, contraction must therefore also be seen as a particular spatial tactic of getting-by. Yet another noteworthy instance of spatial contraction occurred with the strengthening of the border regimes and increased costs of mobility – yet this was most saliently felt in rural areas.

Evroremont: negotiating modernity

In the following last case of adaptation of space, I will expand on space production through upkeep and embellishment – that is through *obod*-ness – on the level of the private home. In general, this process is called by the Russian word *remont,* yet, as mentioned, remont seems to me not only as a mending of broken objects, but is an implementation of dreams and aspirations against a background of constraints: transduction in action. *Remont* furthermore gains cultural significance: it is rhythmically performed enactment of *obodi* in the course of life cycles.

Remont is understood as an activity which must be performed at regular intervals, according to the situation. Iroda compares the remont in her mother's havli in the town of Asht with the remont she is used to in the apartment she lives in:

> *In the havli, my mother has to do remont two times a year. It's necessary. Because they keep the doors open at all times, and the windows are open, and everything decays very quickly. I don't know why this is so. You have to put the walls in order, to paint them or to hang new wallpapers. In the apartment* (v sekcii) *it's less often, perhaps once every four-five years. Even if it's some cosmetic remont, it still has to be done. (Interview Iroda, 2010, 00:36:09).*

Iroda considers remont to be an obligation – it just has to be done. Neighbours condemn the person who fails to perform it regularly, she says. She concedes that one has to do a remont when you move into a new house, but still it does not mean to do everything from scratch. She does not conceal her anger when she recalls the condition of the apartment she is about to buy: “The apartment is in an appalling condition. The owner is a terrible woman. She turned her back on everything, the whole apartment rotted away. We had to remove everything, even the floor. We will have to do some fundamental remont” (Interview Iroda, 2010, 00:36:09).

Yet the practice of remont does not only mean a regular upkeep of the house. In the same way as building extensions, it is prominently linked to life cycle rituals. Yet while building extensions should accommodate the housing needs of an enlarged family, remont should also accommodate the needs of the family's representation in front of the community. In this vein, *obod*-ness goes hand in hand with modernity. The home should appear as state of the art. This goes for apartments in multi-storey blocks as well as for havlis:

> *The house was built one hundred and fourteen years ago. From raw loam bricks. And it still stands, thank God. But from the outside you would not say that the house is more than hundred years old. The façade is done in the modern way, all around the courtyard. It's plastered and painted, the best remont. No one could say if it's made from burnt bricks or from raw bricks (Interview at the Shoemaker's place, 2010, 00:07:44-4).*

Through the practice of remont, the wish for *obod*-ness is particularly articulated on the occasion of life-cycle rituals.

> *It is advisable to do remont before weddings, so that everything looks decent* (prilično), *that is* obod, *one would say,* (obod ki šavad, meguând) *when people come courting or for the celebration. The rooms where the guests come in must be spacious, well-lit, not moist or anything. With windows to the east, if possible […] In prefab houses, you choose one of the rooms, but you have to do remont everywhere, because people pass through the entire apartment (Interview Muhiddin).*

There is no discussion whether remont must precede a wedding *tuy.* It appears as a logical consequence: "My wife says: we've got a son to marry. So I go and make remont" (Interview Nazir, 2010).

The equipment necessary for remont and construction work can be easily bought in Khujand. Currently, plasterboard is a favourite material for a remont, "as it should be" (kak nado) (Interview Mavluda, 2010). It is cheap, versatile, easy to work and easy to paint. It serves to subdivide rooms, but also to produce elaborate suspended ceilings with discrete background lighting. There is a handful of dedicated bazaars in the city, and the choice is very large. Nevertheless it's an expensive enterprise:

> *At Jum'a-Bozor there you find wall colours and lustres. At Guliston, you have almost no colours, but instead you have plastic and armstrong*[6]*, and you also have pipes. If you need long ones, you get them only at Guliston*[7]*. Or perhaps on the road to Unji, there might also be some. But it's expensive. You don't have factories here; colours always come from abroad. You have a candy factory, or vodka, then you have juices and carpets at Qayroqqum. You also have plastic windows and doors there, since recently. But the machines they have to buy abroad, so it's expensive (Interview Khurshed, 2010, 00:26:36- 6).*

The remont expenses surely increase the cost of the wedding. These expenses are not regulated by the newly adopted law; conspicuous consumption in regard to housing does therefore exist, and is likely to grow in the near future (Interview Muhiddin). Yet regardless of all expenses, remont only addresses the surface of things and not to their essence, and

[6] Armstrong designates a mineral fibre panel used for suspended ceiling and, rarely, walls. Pennsylvania-based Armstrong World Industries is a major producer of this material.
[7] This is also the place where *mardikor* – day labourers – gather and wait for patrons

therefore cannot solve all problems: “At times there are simply unlucky rooms. Remont does not help against the bad eye; even a *mushkulkushod*[8] can't help” (Interview Muhiddin).

Apart from representational purposes for life cycle rituals, remont also refers to a quest for modernity. Contrary to the capital Dushanbe, there is little construction activity going on in Khujand. The houses which are being constructed, though, are strongly rooted in Soviet styles and techniques. Two multistorey buildings recently joined Khujand's microraions, but both are structural copies of Soviet housing series of the 1980s, somewhat refined in their outer appearance with the help of plastic and aluminium panels. Architectural 'modernity' with its glass façades is very slow to arrive in Khujand. One hotel at the main street is currently the sole example of this style. Yet it remains empty, after the city government had to complete the glass façade on its own, in order to save its face after the investor filed for bankruptcy. The unfulfilled Soviet promises of modernity remain also unfulfilled after independence. By virtue of the old zoning plan, the city still expects to replace the old town with housing blocks in the long run. For this reason there is no concept of how to integrate the old city into the general fabric, and thus Khujand's two parts continue to exist alongside each other.

Meanwhile, the desire for modernity finds its expression on the intimate level of the household. On every noticeboard in town, you would find advertisements for firms which propose *evroremont* – best quality at the best price. This term defies a precise definition: the already broad range of possible meanings of remont is joined by all possible connotation of its allegedly 'European' character. Akpar wonders: “I don't even know where this word came from […] Perhaps in Europe too, people do this kind of remont as well. Perhaps?” (Interview Akpar, 2010, 00:43:13-1). The expression emerged in the early 1990s. Ex-Soviet middle classes, wary of the meagre offerings in hardware and construction material they were used to (Borén & Gentile, 2007, pp. 97–98), crushed on newly available Western imports (Danilenko, 2011). Some years later, evroremont had conquered Tajikistan:

> *We did not have plastic windows previously. You didn't have a choice. Everyone had wooden windows, like standard wooden windows, because there weren't any companies which would produce plastic ones. But now, there are some. And the price is the same. (Interview Akpar, 2010, 00:43:13-1).*

[8] A religious ritual practised by a group of women in order to provide solutions for difficult situations in life

Labour migrants working on Russian construction sites brought those materials to Central Asia. They spread the newest interior design fashions with the help of printed catalogues which widely circulate in Khujand. I saw Mavluda arguing about colours and designs proposed in a catalogue with her colleagues at work in a copy shop. When I asked her, she told of having a pile of these catalogues at home, spending her evenings flipping through them (Interview Mavluda, 2010). She has married recently and is about to choose the design for their bedroom. Her favourite is a suspended ceiling in a heart-shaped form painted red against a pink background, with, of course, indirect lighting installed behind the plasterwork.

Among the emerging middle classes, the choice of designs and colours is, as far as I have experienced, generally done by women. Their accounts have a sincere feeling of pride in common: "the colours and the lustres, I have chosen them myself. You like it?" (Interview Gulanjom, 2009). The dominance of women does also work for enforcing less elaborate designs:

> *But I don't want any of these modern things. (Although) my husband loves it. (In the old apartment) he has built some plasterboard walls, some ornaments, but I don't want. I said 'stop', and it stopped there. We will just hang some wallpaper or paint the walls and do the floors. That's all. I just want to move in quickly (Interview Iroda, 2010, 00:36:09).*

Khurshed occasionally did some odd jobs at construction sites. He is a great fan of Evroremont and could speak endlessly of the various possibilities it offers:

> *Evroremont in the Soviet Union, it was just colours on the walls. The painter came and put the colours on the wall, then the colours went away and you coloured anew. This was the old remont. (But now) you buy spackle for the surface, you buy the colours, you buy the armstrong and then you work with all that.. It takes a lot of time, one month at least. So they do remont, spackle the surface, they lay the skirting board, and this will be an evroremont. And they might want to put armstrong sheets, or Al Capone[9] sheets, or tiles. (Interview Khurshed, 2010, 00:12:14-3)*

[9] It took me a lot of time to figure out where the word Al Capone came from and what it originally meant. It is a kind of a metal sheet covering the façades of almost every new or newly renovated public or business building. Every child knows that this sheet is called Al Capone. Only by accident I stumbled upon the origin of the term: 'Alucobond' was the leading brand of this kind of material. On European construction sites, the material might be

Indeed, compared to the Soviet era, when wall colours and lime plaster were the only available materials (Dejhina, 2005, p. 81) – and they were already hard to come by, the wide range of material available appears today as a promise of modernity. Khurshed also helped in doing evroremont for his own house, bringing it in line with a perceived European modernity. He, too, sees remont as being a necessary and unavoidable part of a housing career, embedded in life cycles:

> *We had an old house but we made remont there. It's a normal Tajik house, but now there is a remont like in Europe. We have evroremont now, you understand. […] It's a Finnish house and we have done all the remont already, it looks like new. But [...] we will do another remont when we have a wedding. Then we will renew the remont* (magar tui nav mekunand, remontro nav mekunand). *So, here the evroremont is done (already), but we still have a house in Dehmoy, where my grandmother lives and my uncle, we will make it* obod *there too* (inğo obod mekunem ham) *(Interview Khurshed, 2010, 00:09:32-5).*

Together with construction business, remont has become a major part of Tajik economy. Fuelled by remittances and skills of labour migrants, Evroremont goes on and on. When one house is ready, the next one must follow. And when a wedding lies ahead, a new remont is on its way. It seems as if remont has become an integral part of an informally transmitted Tajik identity: "Tajiks all work at Evroremont. It's a job *(professiâ)* which is called evroremont. You can't learn it in school, you just do it" (Interview Khurshed, 2010, pp. 00:12:14-3).

Conclusion

This paper looked at the production of social space through the lens of spatial adaptations. In this field actors engage and compete in the production of space. They are all bound by constraints and guided by wishes. From a Lefebvrian perspective, I understand this as transduction in action. On the household level, families were confronted with housing shortages – both in quantity and quality. Guided by the idea of possible alternatives, they

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known as 'Aluminium composite panel', or 'sandwich panel'. It is a lightweight and resistant cladding material consisting of a polyethylene core sandwiched between two aluminium sheets, which comes in a variety of colours and forms

employed spatial strategies in order to improve living conditions. The inhabitants' involvement and enthusiasm shows the importance of analysing adaptations processes when looking at social space production. Also on the private level individual adaptations of space are not limited to self-assertion. They are deeply embedded in a community context, as shown by the constant importance of *obod*-ness. At the household level, *obod*-ness is achieved, as we have seen, through the practice of remont. Life cycle rituals are a major factor in perpetuating community and are central occasions for adaptations of space. Remont is therefore a recurring phenomenon. In accord with a Soviet anecdote, remont is nothing that can be stopped; it can only pause for lack of available funding (Interview Sergei, 2010).

In this light, *evroremont* appears as a meaningful cultural practice, as a negotiation of identity on the household level. Questions of modernity arise in the same way as was the case with modern wedding dresses – the *evromoda* (Mcbrien, 2006, p. 341). Yet even for traditional, or conservatively Islamic weddings, there is no question of renouncing *evroremont* in the apartment – for the sake of the *obodi* it brings about. Housing adaptation are therefore powerful vehicles for experiencing the "possibility of a difference, without prescribing what this difference should be. It is consumption of space that conveys a hunch of an everyday beyond the society of consumption" (Stanek, 2011, p. 128).

The mechanisms of spatial adaptations described in the paper are, by virtue their embeddedness in local history and local practices, specific to a particular urban setting in Central Asia. Yet Tajikistan, being torn between a Soviet promise of an industrialised modernity and the idealtypic "oriental city" is, in this light, a comparative venture in itself. The negotiations of modernity by means of remont therefore give way to a larger discussion on the global issue of a "do-it-youself-urbanism" which is salient far beyond this particular case.

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Interviews

Akpar

At the Shoemaker's place

Gulanjom

Iroda

Khurshed

Mavluda

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