

---

# Constructing urban cultural landscapes & living in the palimpsests: A case of Moscow city (Russia) distant residential areas

Ivan Mitin\*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>National Research University Higher School of Economics – Russia

## Abstract

A metaphor of place as a palimpsest has become widely used to describe the multivocal cultural landscapes since the 1970s. It has become a model within historical geography in the 1980s, denoting a landscape that consists of various layers of different time of origin. An intervention into semiotics with the focus on semiosis process enables geographers to regard 'place as palimpsest' as a useful model for critical cultural geography emphasizing the endless number of visions & (re)interpretations of one & the same place. Adding the theory of regional geography to the point helps to regard each layer of the palimpsest as a context (not a narrative), centered by dominant representation of a place.

Lived / real-and-imagined places thus may be regarded as palimpsests with endless variety of layers, and living in such a place turns out to be a process of (re)construction of new layers. Combining the 'material' landscape elements with emerging imageries of a place within those layers is helpful to pass forward beyond representations towards unite geographic contexts, that may be both constructed & lived.

Trying to unite those 'constructing' & 'living' perspectives is a challenging task for urban cultural agenda. Urban cultural geography is considered as an effective theoretical framework for place branding, on the one hand, & as a tool to research & reinforce local identities, on the other hand.

The project of free mobile quest games has been implemented by Moscow Agency for Area Development by Means of Culture in Moscow (Russia) in order to decentralize urban cultural agenda, stimulate local urban identities & construct new cultural tourism sights outside Moscow centre, in distant areas of urban apartment blocks. The experience of 20 quest games designed within 2 years is discussed as a case of constructing new geographical contexts (palimpsest' layers) within the realm of cultural tourism. However, deep insights into residential areas' imageries make this experience valuable for the locals, rediscovering their neighborhoods, traditionally regarded as standardized 'non-places', as becoming rich in symbolic capital.

**Keywords:** urban geography, palimpsest, cultural landscape, cultural policy, Russia

---

\*Speaker