Sustainability Transitions in post-soviet Russia: key achievements and pitfalls

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https://russiansustainablecities.wordpress.com/

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Research objective and design

Objective: to provide insights on the post-soviet Russia's socio-environmental transformations in the infrastructural, institutional, political domains and citizens' everyday life.

Methods:

- **Desk research** of the secondhand sources, policy documents, meta-analysis of more than 150 peer-reviewed articles;
- **Semi-structured interviews** with environmental professional groups, environmental NGOs, regional authorities in the cities of Moscow and Kazan (n=100, March-April 2018);
- **Mass media discourse analysis** (10 national and 6 regional Russian online media, 2018)
- **Representative surveys** of the Kazan and Moscow citizens (n=750 in each case, September-December 2018)

Key features of ST in Global South context

- Rigid definitions of mainstream concepts of 'regime', 'landscape', 'niche' (Geels, 2011), etc. often does not work. They need to be conceptualize by the actors themselves (Tyfield, 2014; Campbell and Sallis, 2013). **A greater attention should be paid to the context.**
- **Informal institutions, power relations and agents** play key roles (London and Hart, 2004)
- Under conditions of constant uncertainty and rapid change, sustainability transition is understood not only as replacing old with new but **more importantly as preserving good 'old' practices** (Wieczorek, 2018)
- **High levels of complexity and uncertainty** (Lachman, 2012)
- **Infrastructural and institutional barriers**
- In general **more flexibility and open mind** is needed to understand the transition processes in Global South.

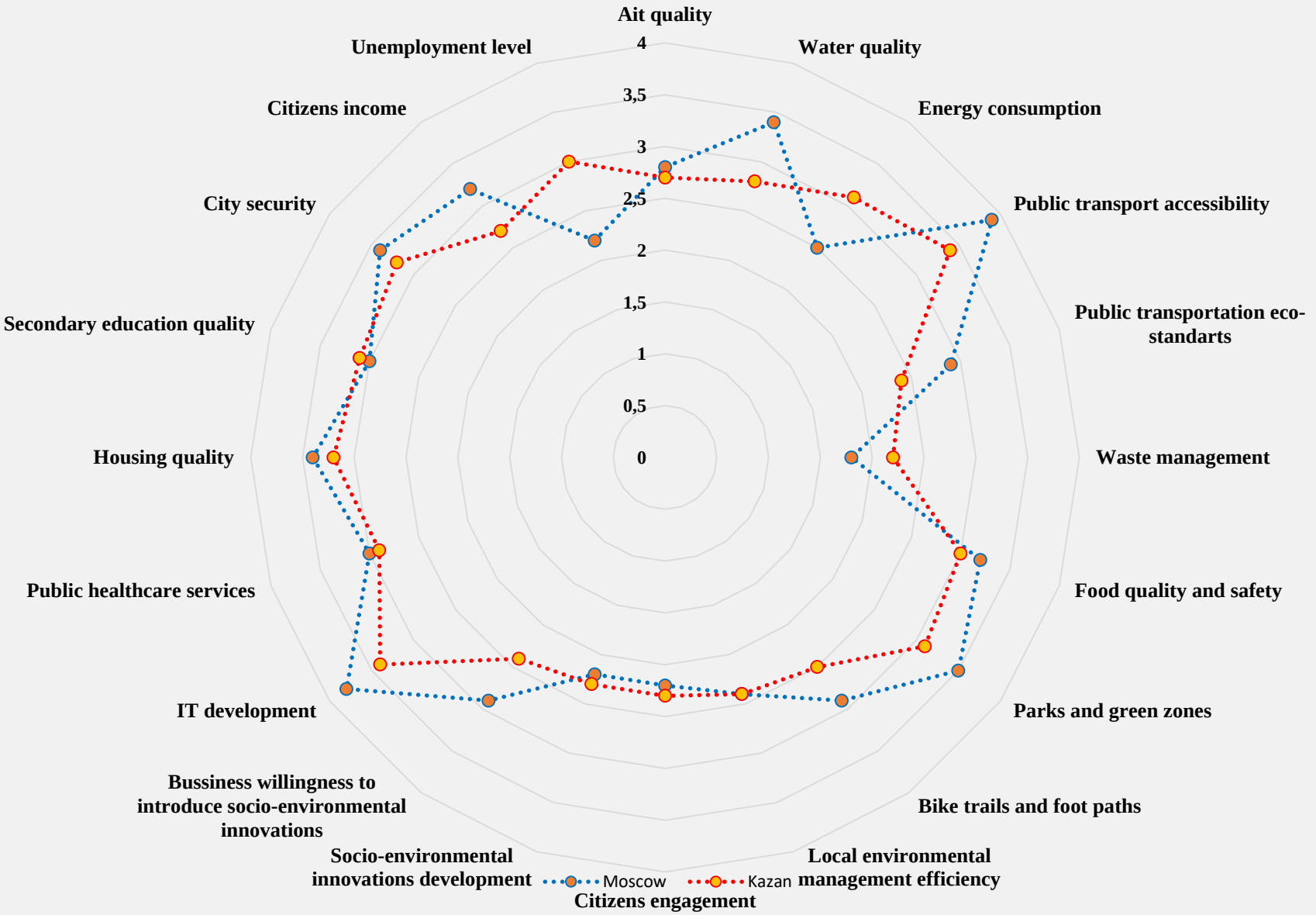
ST in Russia: ‘zooming out’

- For the past 20 years the social landscape of post-soviet Russian cities have been shaping by the changes in geopolitical situation, rapid digitalization, the tightening of legislation regarding public participation, high dependence of the economy on the world oil and gas prices
- **Double transitions** – still has been completing the phase of the Third industrial revolution and simultaneously transiting into the Fourth industrial revolution (Yanitsky, 2018).
- **‘Resource-curse’ paradox:** although the country is interested in modernization and ST, the profitable export of minerals is economically crucial.
- **Slow adaptation** of the socio-environmental innovations and systems ‘lock-in’.
- **Environmental governance** – poor communication and interaction with related departments and ministries, engagement professional ecologists in decision-making, legislation, etc.

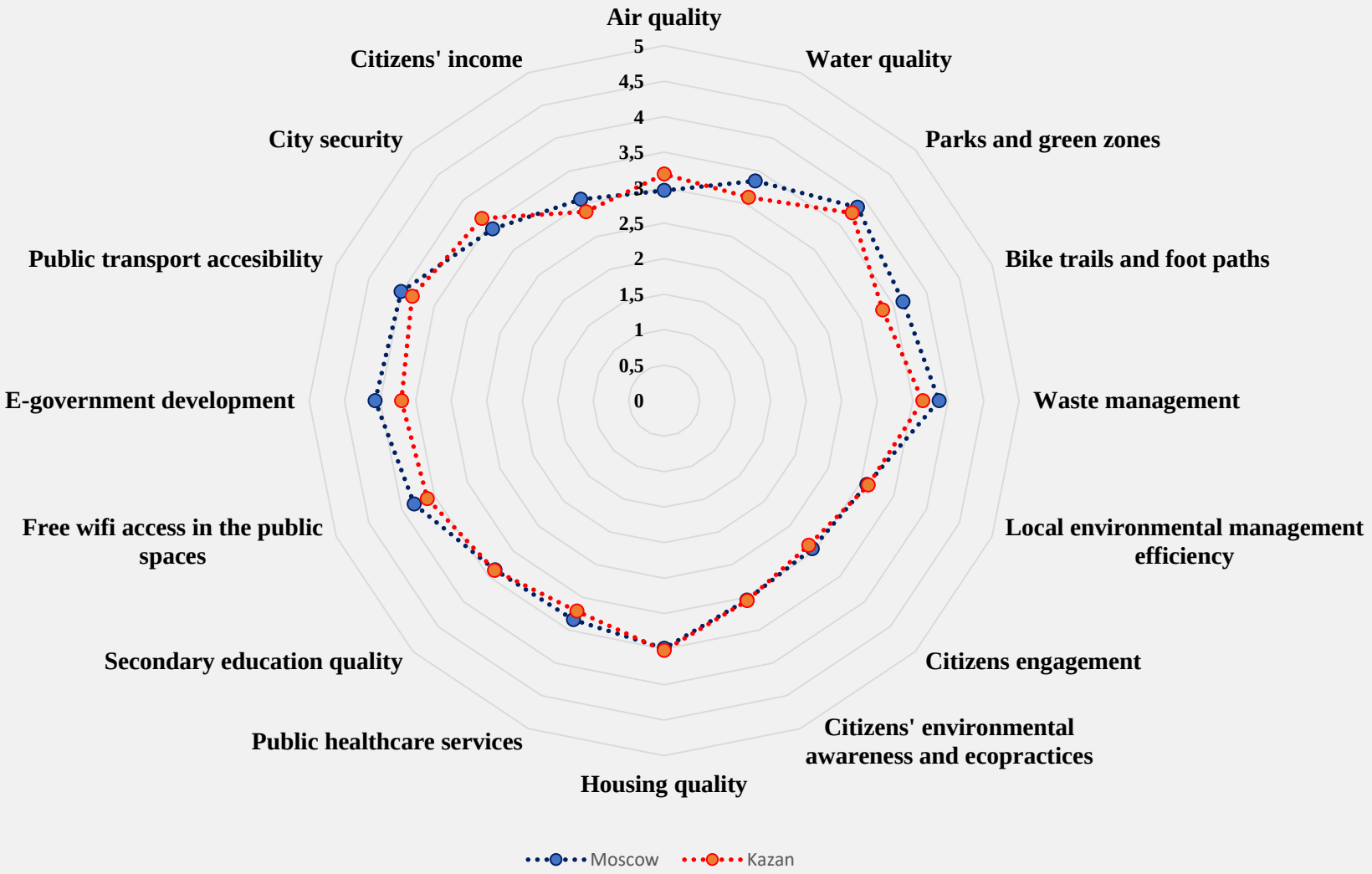
ST in Russia: ‘zooming in’

- **Safety of the environment is among the top five societal problems** (Public opinion fund, 2016, 2018)
- **Increase in environmental consumption practices** (Yao, 2015; Ermolaeva, 2017)
- **Appearing of new and reinforcing the old social and environmental risks:** ‘waste crisis’, air pollution, environmental injustice, low citizens ownership of urban policy, environmental conflicts.
- **Paternalistic values or ’social individualism’ (Crotty, 2012)** switch the responsibility of a healthy environment from themselves to the governmental officials when it comes to real action.

Experts assessment of the various sustainability components of the Russian cities: ‘1’ – critical state, ‘5’ – excellent state (2018)



Citizens’ assessment of the various sustainability components of the Russian cities: ‘1’ – critical state, ‘5’ – excellent state (2018)



ST in Russian: 2013 versus 2018
What have been changed? (experts/laypeople assessments)

Negative trends:

- Waste crisis in big cities (60 mln. tons of waste every year, poor recycling of the population, environmental injustice of the cities and their regions)
- Aggravation of the air/water pollution
- Decreasing of the citizens' income
- Poor citizens engagement in urban planning and environmental decision-making, environmental conflicts

Positive trends:

- Development of public transport infrastructure
- Rapid digitalization and technological advancement in big cities
- Increase in green spaces and parks
- Development of cities green infrastructure (bike trails, e-buses, car-sharing)

Conclusions

- ST in Russia is controversial - although the government is interested in modernization and diversification, it is highly depend on fossil fuels export.
- Resource-based ‘regime’ lead to lock-in the niches.
- The main challenge is in synchronizing the values and practices change of all system’s actors with emerging risks and constant dynamic of the ‘landscape’

Thank you for your attention!

Any questions?