Second homes Russian/Ukrainian style

John Selwood, University of Winnipeg

Abstract: Although much has been written recently about second homes in Europe, North America and the Antipodes, there is a noticeable gap in the literature in that the second homes of Russia and Ukraine have been almost totally overlooked in geographical and closely related academic writing. This paper makes a preliminary effort to address that gap through an examination of the ‘dacha’ – the Russian equivalent of the summer second home. The paper is based on a review of literature and recent field research undertaken around several cities of central Ukraine and Russia. The research reveals that there is a long history of second home usage in these areas and that the dacha has a variety of distinctive styles and functions that can broaden both our understanding of the second home phenomenon and urban food production.

Introduction

The dacha is an interesting phenomenon and it is somewhat surprising that it has been so greatly overlooked in the western geographical literature. Given its long history and that references to dachas are relatively widespread in Russian cultural history and the dramatic literature (e.g., Pushkin, Chekov, Gorki, among others), this oversight is perhaps even more surprising. The dacha in its simplest form may be described as “almost invariably a dwelling that is used intermittently, most often in the summer or on weekends. It stands on its own plot of land, is located out of town, but generally lies within reach of a large urban center (sic)” (Lovell 2003,1). In other words, it is the Russian/Ukrainian equivalent of western culture’s second home. However, as we shall see, the dacha is similar to its counterparts in other parts of the world in having a variety of functions. Its uses are varying and dynamic, generally evolving, with changes in form and function occurring within the wider framework of societal change.
Conceptually then, the dacha phenomenon can be grounded firmly in the now voluminous geographical literature dealing with the rural-urban fringe and placed in the framework of the “city’s countryside” as laid out by Bryant and others (Bryant, Russwurm and McLellan 1982; Bryant and Johnston 1992). This zone of mixed land uses in the outlying areas surrounding cities has been identified by a variety of names including: the peri-urban fringe, the near-urban zone and, most recently, post-suburbia. The latter term, attributed to Kling, Olin and Poster (1991) was originally used to describe the change in physical form of the urban fringe to that of a de-concentrated mixture of urban, recreational and rural land uses, whereas Lucy and Phillips (1997) use the term “post-suburban” to describe the “time period which is succeeding the suburban era and which includes several spatial forms, including a sprawling exurban rural pattern which is of much lower density than most suburbs” (Lucy and Phillips 1997, 260). Space does not permit an exhaustive review of the copious literature relating to this zone of activity and land uses outside the city. Suffice to say that the variety of land uses in the zone include virtually every type of economic and recreational function. Furthermore, they are present in a myriad of physical forms and development densities. The vacation cottage, second home, or dacha can be one of the more peripherally located of these forms, although a great many of them are readily accessible to the city dweller (Muller 2004).

There is now a fairly considerable academic literature on second homes, however, there are very few references to dachas. For example, Coppock’s (1977) classic, but now somewhat obsolete work, makes fleeting reference to the popularity of second homes in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (Coppock 1977, 31), while Wolfe, in Coppock’s book, draws attention to the workers’ summer resorts on the Black Sea (Wolfe, 31). However, neither author uses the word ‘dacha’ in referring to these second homes. Similarly, other more recent, relatively comprehensive works (Gallent and Tewdwr-Jones 2000; Gallent, Mace and Tewdwr-Jones 2005; Hall and Mueller 2005; McIntyre, Williams and McHugh 2006) pay scant attention to the second home phenomenon in countries of the former so-called Eastern Bloc. One notable exception is Lowell’s (2000) recent work, a thorough history of the dacha, but this has received little acknowledgement or recognition in the recreational and geographical literature relating to second homes and exurbia.

Lowell points out that another of the important functions of the dacha has been the production of food and, of course, the agricultural component is another essential element of the rural-urban fringe. Again, there is now an extensive and rapidly growing literature on urban and peri-urban agriculture. Much of this has focused on the importance of small-scale
agricultural production to supplement the food requirements of urban dwellers in near-subsistence economies in developing countries (Losada, Martinez, Vieyra, Pealing, Zavala, and Cortes 1998; Moskow 1999; Drescher, Nugent, and de Zeeuw 2000; Bryld 2003). However, with rising concerns about sustainability, organic foodstuffs and alternative systems of food production and distribution, there is increasing attention being paid to such topics in the more developed economies. The burgeoning literature focusing on such topics as short food supply chains, farmers’ markets and community gardens reflects this (see, for example: Drescher et al. 2000; Morris and Buller 2003; Baker 2004; Watts, Ilbery, and Maye 2005). These activities are concentrated in areas with ready access to cities, just as are dacha communities. The current study has emerged from earlier investigations into second homes and their role in the urban sphere of influence (Selwood and Tonts 2003; 2004).

The principal objective of this paper is to help familiarise geographers with the dacha concept. In doing so, it will provide a brief history of dachas, giving some insight into their evolution, the factors contributing to their widespread distribution and the various forms and functions that they have assumed during their emergence as distinctive components of the urban periphery. The discussion will then turn to a brief description of some preliminary empirical research undertaken during the summer of 2005, the main purpose of which was to gain a first-hand, albeit preliminary, appreciation of the dacha phenomenon and to determine the feasibility of a more substantial investigation. The paper then concludes with a discussion of current trends in dacha use, giving some consideration to their potential impact on future urban development. Some consideration is also given as to whether we can learn anything from the dacha concept that might be applied in a western peri-urban setting.

Origins: The Pre-Soviet Era

The dacha’s origins are essentially generic in that the symbiotic relationship between urban populations and their temporary exodus to the countryside has been going on for millennia – at least as far back as classical Roman times when the more fortunate citizens of Rome took time away from their urban pursuits to enjoy the amenities of country life in their villas, these frequently being located on their latifundi, or agricultural estates. It is also interesting to note that more recent systems of land allocation have taken this relationship between urban and rural property into account in providing larger land parcels, often as reward for services
to the state, to be designated for villas and agricultural activities on the peripheries of cities (Selwood 1981; Keppie 1983; Dyson 1992).

The specific origins of the Russian dacha stem from very similar practices as those carried out in Imperial Rome when its loyal officers were rewarded with gifts of property from the state. In fact, the very word dacha derives from the Russian word “podacha” meaning a gift (Wheeler, Unbegaun, and Falla 1998, 289). Its adaptation into the Russian lexicon to refer to a summer home is widely agreed to have emerged at the time of Peter the Great (Lovell 2003). Indeed, one source has it that Peter himself adopted the word in specific reference to the summer home he had built for himself on the shores of the Gulf of Finland outside St. Petersburg. This small palace, reminiscent of Dutch architectural style, he was said to have called his dacha, or “Little Dutch House” (Guide 2005). The structure still exists (Figure 1), although it is now known as “Monplaisir,” and is now only a small part of the property at Peterhof, where Peter subsequently built his much grander palace after the manner of Versailles, which now dominates the estate.

Regardless as to whether Peter was himself responsible for determining that the word dacha would be used to describe a summer home, he was nevertheless very instrumental in causing the phenomenon to take hold. Not only did he put pressure on his court to develop similar summer estates on the outskirts of St. Petersburg, but the growing middle class of the city began to emulate his actions, albeit at a more modest scale, but in

*Figure 1: Peter the Great’s dacha at Peterhof.*
increasing quantity. During the nineteenth century, large numbers of dachas appeared along the banks of the Neva River and at other locations in the vicinity of the city. Although occurring somewhat later, the dacha concept shortly thereafter spread into the environs of Moscow and eventually into Ukraine as far south as the Crimean Peninsula where the Polish nobility had already established country estates in the eighteenth century. By the late 1800s, dachas had been adopted by a broad spectrum of society, sought after “… by everyone from craftsmen to aristocrats; accordingly, dachas varied enormously in size, level of amenities, and cost.” (Lovell 2003, 61). The swelling summer populations in the areas containing dachas, which had by this time been greatly extended by railway construction, in many instances had changed the character of the rural economy from that of a peasant agrarian society to that of a tourism oriented system catering to a growing number of seasonal dacha dwellers, or ‘dachnicki’(Lovell 2003, 113).

The Soviet Era

The dacha concept not only survived but continued to expand and evolve despite the disruption and turmoil of the Revolution and the Soviet regime. Party bosses, workers and other privileged citizens took over the more comfortable dachas that had been appropriated by the regime and numbers of dacha cooperatives were created in part to overcome the desperate housing shortages that occurred with urbanization. In 1928, a guidebook published for the vicinity of Moscow indicated that there were already around 300 settlements in the area that were second homes to summer vacationing Muscovites (Lovell 2003, 130). Continued expansion during the inter-war period saw the further development of numbers of spacious dacha settlements devoted to various members of the Bolshevik and Soviet elites. For example, Peredelkino, founded in the 1930s and only a half-hour train ride from Moscow, is known for its writers and was once home to such authors as Kornei Chukovsky and Boris Pasternak (Lovell 2003, 154-156). More remotely located, hidden in pine forest on the Moscow River, is Nikalina Gora, originally established as a dacha cooperative of the Workers of the Academy of Sciences and Arts. This settlement was once favoured by such eminent composers as Prokofiev and is still occupied by prominent musicians, although Nikalina Gora, like other more prestigious dacha settlements, has been ‘invaded’ by ‘…a panoply of Russia’s political and business elite’” (Anonymous 2003, 44).

Soviet housing policy, which concentrated on the construction of high density apartments in urban areas, served only to increase the demand
for dachas as people of all but the poorest classes looked for temporary escape from the city. However, at around the same time, the dacha’s function began to broaden from that of a place for the consumption of recreation to that of a place of production as urban workers looked for alternate food supplies to supplement the meagre offerings available in the cities. This situation was of course greatly exacerbated during World War II, when food shortages became even more severe. Factories and other enterprises frequently organized garden cooperatives to enable their workers to produce food for their personal consumption. Not only did food production become a requirement, it became commonplace for owners to construct basic accommodation on their plots. Successive food and accommodation shortages, often of crisis proportions, led to the continued expansion of this new form of dacha through the Brezhnev era, extending into Gorbachev’s period of administration and beyond. Nevertheless, leisure, status and escape from the city persisted as important components of many people’s perceptions of the dacha.

It is evident that the popularity of the contemporary dacha is in line with the more widespread movement towards counter-urbanization, wherein the dacha is but one element in a range of housing forms extending beyond the compact urban centre (Lovell 2003; Zavisca 2003). Recent estimates of dacha ownership indicate that the practice is widespread throughout Russia, especially around the smaller cities. However, a high proportion of the inhabitants of the larger cities have plots of land. Clarke, for example, reports that 21% of Moscow households and 27% of St. Petersburg’s households have plots (Clarke 2002, 3), while Lovell (2003) and Zavisca (2003) estimate that there are well over 1,000,000 dachas in Russia alone. Because of the long period of Soviet domination over Ukraine, it is reasonable to assume that the dacha is similarly popular there, even though Russia and Ukraine are now independent republics.

The Research Methodology

Due to financial and time constraints, the amount of empirical data that could be gathered for this study was necessarily limited, largely based on informal interviews with dacha owners and local officials, anecdotal reports, and relatively few opportunities for on-site examination of dachas. Most of the fieldwork was undertaken in Ukraine within the orbit of Kyiv and supported by direct observation of dacha developments in Russia located along the river and canal system linking Moscow and St. Petersburg. The field component of the research thus followed a roughly north-south transect through western Russia and Ukraine and was pre-
determined by an itinerary put together for other personal reasons. I soon learned that there would be no simple or ready means available for gathering comprehensive statistics on the numbers and distribution of dachas in Ukraine. This was because there were none that were readily available. The country in 2005 was, and still is, in a delicate and relatively unstable political situation. Furthermore, the administration was still very much in the throes of dealing with privatization, not just of real property, but of many other aspects of the economy. Dealing with the dacha situation was not therefore a particularly high priority on the administrative agenda. In addition, it became clear that enquiries from strangers were often regarded by officials with some suspicion. As a result, the research was conducted on an informal basis and relied heavily on local, personal observations. However, this was supplemented by a search of available English language literature, and extensive references to local real estate websites, in both English and in Russian and Ukrainian translations.

**Dacha Settlements in Ukraine**

It quickly became apparent that having access to a dacha was an important part of the Russian/Ukrainian lifestyle. Even before leaving Winnipeg, I was informed by acquaintances having connections with the region that they had friends or relatives there who owned a dacha. During the flight to Kyiv, my seat-mate, now living in the United States, was happy to tell me about his father’s dacha where he would be staying during part of his family visit. The young fellow, aged about thirty, informed me that his father had bought the waterfront dacha property about 15 years previously, on the edge of Kyiv, roughly 40 minutes drive from the city. The father had acquired the land for recreation purposes as an escape from town, although he had grown some vegetables there during the food crisis and collapse of the economy during the early 1990s. Originally there was no building on the property, but on weekends over the years the father had progressively built up a wooden, then stone cottage to which he was still making additions. My informant observed that his siblings were not so keen on the place and did not spend much time there, except to visit with their parents (Seat-mate, 2005). The widespread distribution of dachas was made clear to me even as we drove from Kyiv/Boryspil Airport about 30 kilometres east of the city. Part of the route was a grand, divided highway, flanked by woods, but every so often our driver drew our attention to the presence of numerous dachas, visible through breaks in the trees. The great majority of these were tightly clustered, sitting on
smaller, suburban sized lots, with a wide variety of building forms and styles, some quite rudimentary, but others fairly ornate structures.

Ukrainian regulatory authority pertaining to land operates at three levels, similar to the Canadian system. At the national level the Department of Agriculture establishes broad questions of policy, while the regional and local levels are responsible for urban, rural and communal jurisdictions, along with the administration, interpretation, and application of the national directives. With respect to dachas, these were subject to policies established at the national level, while the regional and local administrations determined allocations, management and local rules. Clearly, there had been little consideration given to planning controls or regulation of the building fabric at the local level. These first impressions became increasingly entrenched with greater exposure to the dacha phenomenon.

Dachas at Hlevakha

Hlevakha, is a small town with a population of around 9000 people located about 30 minutes south of Kyiv and readily accessible to the capital city by train (Figure 2). Associated with the town and adjacent to the railway line is a large dacha settlement consisting of some 2015 dacha plots on 150 hectares of land. ‘Garden Community No 1’, the first of three such communities, was created in 1957 for workers with the Transport Department, the Bank and other ministries and factories. The two other dacha communities, both of about the same size, were created shortly thereafter, all of them administered by the local council of Hlevakha which is subordinate to Vasylkiv regional council.

‘Garden Community No 1’ is subdivided on a basic grid, with each dacha plot being about 5 sotok in area (one sotok is 1/100 of a hectare = 100 square metres). The lots were originally unserviced, but in the late 1990s and later, electricity, gas, and most recently, water lines were installed, providing piped water during the summer months. There is garbage pickup twice a week and liquid sewage is held in containers that are emptied periodically, but sanitary sewage is still reliant on on-site disposal and composting. Furthermore, in the winter water has to be drawn from wells up to 150 metres deep. However, because services are now available and with privatization, people are now permitted to stay on their dachas year round, (Community Garden Manager, 2005). I attempted to obtain a map and copies of the general regulations pertaining to the community and its administration, but was refused, being told that I would have to apply to “Intelligence” for such material. (The manager was an older man of about
Figure 2: Locational map central Ukraine, Kyiv region.
70-75 years of age, and I was informed by my interpreter that his refusal was probably a carryover from the Soviet era). A notice board at the main entrance to the community did, however, carry a variety of regulations, including one that instructed people to maintain safe clearances between tree branches and power lines. There were also helpful hints on the notice board giving advice on planting procedures and general maintenance of the garden plots.

The density of development was quite high, because the lots were quite small, being only about 500-600 square metres each in area. It being July when I did my survey, the properties were covered with lush, verdant vegetation, often making it difficult to pick out the buildings. There were a great many fruit trees, with almost all plots carrying several each. Both vegetables and flowers were present in abundance, although the proportions of each varied between properties. What was very evident, however, was that a great many of the dachas were being used primarily for the consumption of recreation, rather than for food production (Figures 3 and 4).

I interviewed one lady who was in the process of building an additional wing on her already substantial brick dacha. She (Dacha lady (a) 2005) told us that it was to contain a fully equipped bathroom and toilet. This was in addition to a steam bath-house located on the property. Her father, a transport department worker, had acquired the dacha in 1957 when they were first made available. He had obtained it primarily for recreational purposes, although he had also produced some vegetables from the garden. Another profitable pastime at the dacha had been his rabbit farm. Currently, the garden is devoted mostly to flowers of which the lady is justifiably proud, telling us that she was successfully growing roses from cuttings from a bouquet she had recently been given. However, the plot is inter-planted with a variety of vegetables including carrots, onions, cabbages and beets (just for summer consumption). There are also several fruit trees on the property. She told us laughingly that although the dacha was for recreational use, she was a slave to it because of the time it took her to maintain her garden, adding that even when she trotted off to the outside toilet in the morning she could not help but tarry on the way to pull a few weeds from the plot. She now lives with her husband on the property year round, commuting into Kyiv each day to her job in the city. The couple has turned over their city apartment to their sons. She informed us that there had recently been a rapid upsurge in prices for dachas in the community. According to her, they had virtually doubled in value over the past couple of years and were being picked up by buyers as soon as they became available. A run-down, unimproved dacha could still be obtained for about $6,000 US. equivalent, but a fully appointed
Figure 3: Older dacha, Hlevakha.

Figure 4: Newer dacha, Hlevakha.
modernized property would fetch around $100,000 US. Presently, however, there is an embargo on property transfers until government administrators catch up with the situation (Dacha lady (a) 2005).

**Dachas at Monastyryshche**

Part of the fieldwork was undertaken in the westernmost area of the Cherkasy oblast (Figure 2) in the vicinity of Monastyryshche, a small town some 200 kilometres almost directly south of Kyiv and 25 kilometres west of the main autobahn highway between Kyiv and Odessa. This highway now brings the town to within three hour’s travel time of the Ukrainian capital, just close enough to make it accessible for the weekend, but too distant to be attractive to people with no previous ties to the place. Monastyryshche is so named because of its ecclesiastical origins, but its economy more recently has been based on its role as a service center for the surrounding agricultural district and a couple of important factories developed during the Soviet era. One of these, a steam boiler manufacturing plant, was said to have been the second largest of its kind in the Soviet Union, employing several thousand workers. More detailed information on the economic and demographic structure of the town was difficult to obtain. Statistics were hard to come by, partly because none had been compiled, but where there were statistics, the administrators were reluctant to give anything but the most general figures. Overall population figures for the Region have been slowly declining (see Table 1) to a total in 2003 of some 39,000 population, incorporating Monastyryshche, boasting only about 9,300 people (down from its maximum size of around 15,000 when the town’s factories were in full operation); villages 26,000; and Tsybuliv (urban-type community, urban village) 3,800 people. According to the administrative officers, the population decline can be attributed to the loss of factory employment, out-migration and deaths exceeding births in the villages by a ratio of 10:7.

Informal discussions with administrators from the local Cadastral Department (2005) (answerable to the State Land Committee of the Ministry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year ending</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>40,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>39,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>39,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>39,300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of Ecology and Environmental Protection and Architect’s Department) revealed that there are only two areas in the vicinity of Monastyryshche where there are dachas. Both areas contain only a limited number of plots: the exact number of plots in each is unknown because no survey plans exist, but are estimated to be between 100 and 200 in total. In addition, there are three extensive areas where people can obtain ‘field lands’ of about three hectares in area per person. Many of these ‘field lands’ originated when the collective farms were disbanded and the workers were allocated land parcels to allow them to continue working the land. Originally, only the farm workers were deemed eligible, but the privilege was subsequently extended to all the inhabitants of the commune. However, the ‘field lands’ cannot be built on, nor can trees be planted on them. Conversely, town (suburban) plots of up to 10 sotok in area can be purchased, but not for just a garden; construction of a dwelling must be begun within two years of purchase. Currently, land releases and transactions are ‘on hold’ to allow the system to be put into better order, records brought up to date and previous claims and applications to be considered. At this juncture, solely transfers due to inheritance and privatization are being processed, and then only when people are prepared to pay the costs of surveys and documentation. Because of the declining population in the district, there is currently very little demand for land. A field survey and interviews with the local authorities indicated that many land parcels lie vacant inside the town and in the villages, as well as among the garden and dacha plots. Nevertheless, it was very apparent that most of the dacha plots in closer proximity to the town were used primarily for food production, although there was an element of recreation or consumption associated with the activity. Several ‘dachniks’ were observed and interviewed on an informal basis to gain more insight into these activities.

Valya (2005) has two dacha plots located about three kilometers from town. One plot is registered to her and the other to Alyona, her daughter. Valya became eligible for them because her husband worked as an engineer at the local factory while she was a teacher at the factory’s nursery school, and the factory workers were given dachas as part of the wider dacha scheme. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the factory commune in the early 1990s, the dachas are now rented from the local Council. The rent is nominal, only 50 kopeks (about the cost of a half loaf of bread) per sotok, with the larger parcel containing five sotok and the smaller has just four. On these plots Valya has a number of fruit trees, including sweet and sour cherries, apples, pears, apricots, walnuts as well as red and black currents, raspberries and strawberries, gooseberries and grapes. These are eaten fresh, made into jams or compotes, or frozen for consumption.
later in the year. She also grows a wide range of vegetables. Potatoes are a critical staple, with onions, beans, peas, zucchini, squash, carrots, beets and cabbage also being important. Garlic, mint and dill grow seemingly at random throughout the plots (Figure 5). Salad vegetables, such as lettuce and radishes are also regularly harvested. Even without watering, the dacha yields enough to supply most of Valya’s personal needs, as well as those of her daughter and son-in-law. As in many other plots, flowers add another dimension to Valya’s property. In her case, perennials and bulbs, including tulips and narcissi, bring delight and beauty to the garden. They also provide her with cut flowers for her apartment. Given the large numbers of ‘babas’ who hawk their garden produce, including vegetables, fruit, berries and flowers in the local markets and at the entrances to city subway stations, it is very evident that the dacha plot can also provide an income supplement to those who are living at close to a subsistence level. Despite Clarke’s (2002) assertions to the contrary, this suggests that those living at or close to subsistence gain significant, even if minimal, sustenance from their garden production. Tho Seeth, Chachnov, Surinov, and Von Braun (1998) also insist that there will continue to be significant dependence on garden plots for domestic food supplies for the foreseeable future.

Since her forced retirement, Valya now lives in Kyiv where she has found other work. However, she has retained her apartment in Monastyryshche, because she expects to return there eventually, since she feels that it is her permanent home. She spends her weekends and
holidays there so as to be able to escape from the city and to work her dacha. Because of its proximity to town, Valya does not stay at her dacha. There are no dwellings located on her properties, only small sheds which are used for garden tools, storage and the like (Figure 6). However, one has a root cellar, enabling her to stock up with vegetable supplies well into the winter period. This was not the case on a number of the other dachas which boasted dwelling houses.

Down the track a few plots away there are several more very small, but substantial brick-built cottages. One of these was owned by a man from Kyiv who spent his entire summer at the dacha (Figure 7). Another man from Monastyryshche visited his dacha daily, while another lady and her partner spent the entire summer at the dacha and returned there daily during the winter to look after their livestock (Figure 8). This dacha was very intensively developed, containing a variety of fruit trees, a heavily cropped vegetable garden, along with about a dozen chickens, geese, ducks, rabbits and a goat for milking. The five sotok property produces virtually enough for survival, except that the plot is too small to yield sufficient potatoes or grain. Fruit production is surplus to their needs, but there is no local market because most of the locals produce their own. Local prices for cherries are a mere 3 hryvna for 8 kilos, whereas Kyiv prices are 10 hryvna per kilo. Even so, the trip to Kyiv is not worthwhile, because of the small amount of surplus. Instead, their children who come to visit the dacha and lend a hand with the work are able to take home

*Figure 6: Valya’s storage shed and root cellar, Monastyryshche.*
Figure 7: Brick summer dacha, Monastyryshche.

Figure 8: Brick year-round dacha, Monastyryshche.
some produce with them. The parents evidently enjoy their life on the dacha, despite the hard work involved in getting up every morning at 5:30 and ‘toiling’ all day (Dacha lady (b) 2005).

Nevertheless, the parents are looking forward to privatization, when they expect to be given their plot of land. Once the property is transferred into their ownership, they anticipate being able to move there permanently, although sanitation is very basic. Their water comes from a shared well on the neighbour’s property and there is an outhouse at the end of the garden. Sewage disposal consists of composting of the garden and animal waste, while human waste is dealt with by burying it in a low spot on the dacha property as is common practice in the villages. Nevertheless, they are busily fixing up the interior of the home, converting the former single room into two even smaller rooms, one a bedroom and the other a kitchen/living area. There is a root cellar and a tiny attached barn, just large enough to accommodate the goat. However, the small space inside the dacha is partly compensated for by the use of outside spaces as extensions of the living area. For example, the lady who was interviewed was relaxing during the mid-afternoon at a chair and table placed under an arbor of trees - this ‘siesta’ also helping to compensate for the morning’s early start.

Current Developments

Privatization and the greater freedoms associated with perestroyka have brought about greater prosperity to many people of Russia and Ukraine. Consistent with this has been the trend towards more and better housing and more pretentious dachas (Figure 9). Among the most striking impressions one has of the cityscapes of Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kyiv, are the number of building cranes on their skylines and the massive numbers of new apartments under construction (Figure 10). However, for the most part, the new construction is patterned after what is already in place. Therefore, block after block of new high-rise towers, or great slab blocks of multiple stories continue to be the principal forms of residential development available to the city dweller.

Real estate promoters are attempting to cash in on the allure of the dacha. One notable example is the advertisement of a luxury block of condominiums as “Close-By Dachas - Elite Living Quarters” located not far from Poklonna Hill in inner Moscow (Close-By Dachas 2004). Encouraged by the planning authorities, conventional suburban tract developments are also appearing on the outskirts of Ukrainian cities that are catering to the burgeoning demand. According to Kyiv’s deputy head of the office of the city’s chief architect “We now only invite companies to
Figure 9: Newer dachas along the Neva River outside St. Petersburg.

Figure 10: New apartment construction, Kyiv.
bid on integral construction projects...It’s the only way to develop the countryside’” Currently, within a 30 kilometre radius of Kyiv, there are at least eight “cottage villages” in various stages of development (Braychenko, July 2005, 5). In the rather quaint words of the RED Consulting Company’s recent (2005) promotion of its ‘Petrushki’ cottage village, located at Petroshok, some 20 km west, or 40 minutes drive from Kyiv off the Kyiv-Zhitomir highway (Figure 1):

There is a norm for all civilized mankind already - to work in the city and reside outside its limits. The residing at your own house far away from noise, bustle and mad speed of megapolis gives a wholesome effect on your health, pacifies heart and prepossesses for creation.

Private country house is one of major elements of inviolability of your private life being so necessary for rest and soul composure. It is full of greatness and dignity, sacrament and mysteriousness, and saving the things that are the dearest to your heart.

Choosing to leave (sic) outside the city limits, you would get both the relevant level of independence and a possibility to enjoy day-by-day communication with nature, which the normal citizen will lack, and thus will not limit your social activity, for your neighbors are the people of your society.

However, this gated, insulated community designed expressly for consumption of the countryside is well beyond the reach of the average individual. The great majority of the population will continue to be accommodated in the pre-existing apartment block complexes that are now obviously in a sadly deteriorating condition.

Although individual units may be fundamentally sound, quite attractive, and can now be purchased by their occupants, the blocks and their surroundings are currently very inadequately maintained. For example, Valya’s apartment in Monastyryshche is well appointed and roomy. It is 49 square metres in area, with two bedrooms, living room, kitchen, bathroom and toilet. In 1993, with privatization, it cost 8,000 rubles and is now worth about $6,000 US. Despite its being centrally located, because of the town’s compactness, the apartment looks out over a rural landscape across the valley. However, it is not as pleasant an environment as might be expected. Maintenance levels were once at a high standard, but after Russia cut off gas supplies during the 1991 crisis, this spelled the end of hot water services to the apartment. Although gas supplies are again available, in
the meantime, with no water running through the hot water pipes they have deteriorated to the point where they are now useless. There is no money to replace them, so there is no hot water. Furthermore, since privatization, the Housing Authority has also failed to keep up appropriate standards of care regarding building maintenance, grounds keeping, landscaping and garbage collection. Provision of other essential services can also be erratic. Occupants of the housing block are not wealthy enough, nor are they cohesive enough to mount an effective protest. The Housing Authority claims it does not receive sufficient funds from the occupants to deliver on its responsibilities, while the occupants seem unprepared to pay extra for maintenance of the common areas, so little gets done. Occupants spend money on the interior of their units, while putting up with the depressing exterior surroundings of the urban building complexes. However, the latter is a strong motivation for escaping to their more attractive dachas located in a more rustic or ‘suburban’ setting.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated the widespread popularity of the dacha in parts of Russia and Ukraine and, although the data are not comprehensive, they show that the dacha is an integral component of the housing spectrum. The research for the paper was hampered by time and budgetary constraints and not made any easier by the difficulties of communication in a foreign language. However, direct observation brought many of the issues into clearer focus and provided invaluable insights into the diversity in physical characteristics of dachas, the nature of production and consumption on the properties, and the lifestyles of the ‘dachnicki’.

It is clear that there are varied understandings of the dacha concept that incorporate different meanings and priorities for different folks, with different space requirements and different uses associated with the property. It is also clear that the long history of the dacha has contributed to these differences, although the symbiotic relationship between urban and rural life has continued to be a common thread running through the phenomenon. Whereas the earliest dachas were exclusively enjoyed by the nobility for recreational purposes and as sources of revenue, it was not long before they were being enjoyed by a range of middle and even lower class holiday makers as incomes rose and accessibility improved. One can readily draw parallels between events in pre-Soviet Ukraine and Russia and the literature describing peripheral urban expansion and the development of vacation property in Western Europe (Hardy and Ward
During the Soviet era complications arose because of the rapid pace of urbanization, the resultant increased pressure for food supplies and for temporary escape from the stresses of urban living. Again, to a large extent these events paralleled developments in industrializing countries, although the peculiarities of the Communist regime created a variety of schemes designed to manage the system more effectively. War-time emergencies and inefficiencies in food supply and distribution stimulated small-scale agricultural production, giving the dacha another important function and encouraging it to evolve from other forms of rural settlement as well as transforming the purpose-designed vacation properties into places of production. Even here, one can see parallels with the proliferation of allotments and war-time gardens in England and North America during the World Wars (Kains 1942; Buswell 1980; Ward and Crouch 1988). Currently, the development industry in Russia and Ukraine is capitalizing on the growing wealth of the population and the ability of many to acquire a ‘dream home’ or to return to their roots in a quasi-rural setting.

Some of the immediate concerns about property in general lie in questions of security of tenure and the ability of administrations to deal effectively with the transition from tenancy to private ownership within the framework of new national and local regulations. There are also serious planning issues that must be addressed, especially as the trend to year-round occupation of dachas gains momentum. It is quite evident that the dacha settlements developed at higher densities generally suffer from very rudimentary services and facilities, particularly in the area of sanitation. Dachas occupying lot sizes equivalent to the standard Canadian suburban home certainly have to be considered a health hazard as they proliferate and are used for more extended periods of time.

On the other hand, there is clearly a trend towards incumbent upgrading, the improvement of properties when they change hands, or rebuilding programs. It can be expected that privatization will also encourage these trends to gather momentum. Furthermore, it is evident that there is a growing market for conventional suburban property. Private sector developers are responding to this demand and the authorities are, in their turn, demanding more comprehensive plans from the developers. The interpretation of the word dacha is becoming even more blurred by these trends. Nevertheless, there is still a strong feeling among many dachnicki that their property can be more productive, and not merely a place for escape and relaxation in a quasi-rural environment as a great many of them still gain much enjoyment and economic benefit from harvesting the fruits of their gardening labours.

Although there is an extensive literature on the use of ex-urban lands, sustainable agriculture, recreational land uses and cottage development,
this literature is deficient in comparative studies of these phenomena, especially as they relate to the Russian/Ukrainian experience. Given the revival of allotment gardens, the proliferation of community gardens, the rapidly expanding demand for organically produced foods, and calls for sustainable agriculture, the supporters of these movements might learn from the dachniki of the Ukraine and Russia who have demonstrated that considerable rewards can be obtained from putting even minute parcels of land to productive use on the peripheries of cities. Could it be that Western society is too fervently biased against relatively lax treatment of sewage and that regulations pertaining to land development might deter potential enthusiasts from using their suburban and ex-urban holdings in more diverse and productive ways?

There is no question that, as living standards rise in Ukraine and Russia, those who are able to afford to improve their lifestyle will aspire to obtain property that is more spacious and with higher amenity than the cramped units in the high density apartment complexes reminiscent of Le Corbusier’s ‘Radiant City’ (Behrens 2005) that now dominate the cities of those countries. It is also very likely that elements of the dacha concept will continue to be deeply embedded in the Russian/Ukrainian psyche, or at least to be incorporated into notions of settlement in an essentially urbanized society that, like Canada, can enjoy the privilege (or illusion) of having extensive amounts of land into which to spread. Perhaps the emerging trends towards ‘alternative’ food systems, the growing interest in community gardens and organic food production, and similar labour intensive aspects of agricultural production, will more effectively blend with recreational activities normally associated with cottage developments on the peripheries so that there can be a better balance between the consumption function and the realisation of the potential for the production of food. A more in-depth examination of the role and functions of the dacha and its incorporation into western geographical literature is needed for there is potentially much we might learn of advantage from the dacha phenomenon. At the very least, the dacha should receive greater recognition in the literature pertaining to exurban land uses, second homes and to peri-urban agriculture.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the most helpful translation service and advice provided by Alyona Avdyeyeva of Kyiv, without whose assistance the research would have been impossible. Thanks are also due to the comments of two anonymous reviewers.
Notes

* The web pages of the RED Consulting Company <http://www.red.Kyiv.ua> provide a comprehensive listing of accommodations of various kinds in a large number of districts both inside and outside of Ukraine. For additional listings see: Delta Realty <http://www.deltarealty.ru/en/country>. Prices listed are not cheap, often quoted in the millions of US dollars!

References

ANONYMOUS 2003 ‘Field guide to dachas of the Moscow Region’ Russian Life Jul/Aug; 46(4) 42-44
BAKER, L. 2004 ‘Tending cultural landscapes and food citizenship in Toronto’s community gardens’ Geographical Review 94(3) 305-325
BRAYCHENKO, V. 2005 ‘Life in Kyiv’s suburbs: more amenities, please’ Kyiv Post 28, July 12(30) 5 and 14
BRYLD, E. 2003 ‘Potentials, problems, and policy implications for urban agriculture in developing countries’ Agriculture and Human Values 20(1) 79-86
CADASTRAL DEPARTMENT, 2005 Personal communication 15 July
CLOSE-BY DACHAS 2004 <http://www.bdacha.ru>
COMMUNITY GARDEN MANAGER, Hlevakha 2005 Personal communication 16 July
DACHA LADY (a), Hlevakha 2005 Personal communication 16 July
DACHA LADY (b), Monasteryshche 2005 Personal communication 14 July
DYSON, S.L. 1992 Community and Society in Roman Italy Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press
GALLENT, N. and TEWDWR-JONES, M. 2000 *Rural Second Homes in Europe: Examining Housing Supply and Housing Control* Aldershot: Ashgate


GUIDE, 2005 Personal communication 18 August

HALL, C.M. and MULLER, D.K. eds. 2004 *Tourism, Mobility and Second Homes: Between Elite Landscape and Common Ground* Cleveden: Channelview Publications

HARDY, D. and WARD, C. 1984 *Arcadia for All The Legacy of a Makeshift Landscape* London: Mansell

KAINS, M.G. 1942 *Food Gardens for Defense* New York: Stein and Day


LOSADA, H., MARTINEZ, H., VIEYRA, J., PEALING, R., ZAVALA, R. and CORTES, J. 1998 ‘Urban agriculture in the metropolitan zone of Mexico City: changes over time in urban, suburban and peri-urban areas’ *Environment and Urbanization* 10(2) 37-54


McINTYRE, N., WILLIAMS, D. and McHUGH, K. eds. 2006 *Multiple Dwelling and Tourism: Negotiating Place, Home and Identity* Wallingford: CABI Publishing


MOSKOW, A. 1999 ‘Havana’s self-provision gardens’ *Environment and Urbanization* 11(2) 127-134


SEAT-MATE 2005 Personal communication 11 July


SELWOOD, J. and TONTS, M. 2004 ‘Recreational second homes in the southwest of Western Australia’ in Hall, C.M. and Muller, D.K. eds. Tourism, Mobility and Second Homes: Between Elite Landscape and Common Ground (Clevedon: Channelview Publications) 149-161


VALYA, 2005 Personal Communication 14 July


ZAVISCA, J. 2003 ‘Contesting capitalism at the Post-Soviet dacha: The meaning of food cultivation for urban Russians’ Slavic Review 62 (4) 786-810