

The building projects near Pulkovskaya Observatory – the next stage of urbanization  
of the St. Petersburg World Heritage Site

Recognition of the universal value of the St. Petersburg agglomeration included in the World Heritage List has long required a radical revision of the town-planning policy of St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region. However, this does not happen. Like Saturn devouring its children, the authorities support the invasion by new residential and office buildings in surroundings of the city, devoid of buffer zones, protected only by local protection zones liberal to investors.

A current example of such a situation is the projects for building in the open landscapes areas between the Pulkovo Observatory and the ensemble of Tsarskoe Selo. Location of new quarters was chosen on agricultural lands of former Palace villages destroyed during the WWII. They are adjoined or intersected by a number of linear elements of the World Heritage site. The typology of these elements is different, but together they constitute the composition framework of the territory, determine its visual characteristics and the historical memory inherent in it, are the embodiment of the "spirit of place". With the exception of the observatory, none of these elements are included in the National Heritage lists.

Projects designed without assessing their impact on the heritage threaten to radically change the nature of the terrain. They "sit down" directly on the line of defense (element 540-036a "Blockade Ring"), violate the visual characteristics of the open landscape when perceived from the roads (elements 540-034a, -034b, -034e), turning them into city avenues, changing the image of the landscape on the geological plateau above the Izhorsky Bench (540-030) in perception from long distances. Especially clearly, the process of urbanization will be perceived from the windows of aircraft passing over them at low altitude during takeoff and landing at the nearby airport Pulkovo.

The Public Movement "Let's Save the Pulkovo Observatory" commissioned us to assess the impact of development projects on the outstanding universal value of a World Heritage site on the basis of the ICOMOS Guidance. The consequences of erecting the residential complexes are defined as NEGATIVE. Agreeing with the possibility of limited construction in the surveyed territories, alternative proposals were formulated, based on maintaining the dominant role of the landscape.

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