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Investigating Modernity through the Lens of a Recreation Venue: Pleasure Gardens in Late Imperial St. Petersburg and Moscow

This article investigates aspects of modernity through a study of pleasure gardens in St. Petersburg and Moscow in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Russian pleasure gardens, being mere imitations of the English venues, reflect how western ideas connected to entertainment were modified, enriched with local features and used for wider purposes. This study argues that pleasure gardens were translators of a developing mass culture, providing facilities for testing new technology and leisure practices, and were also indicators of cultural changes which were experienced by an urban population in the late-Imperial Russia. Svetlana Ryabova holds a Ph. D. from Moscow State University and is a Senior Lecturer in the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. She has a particular interest in social and cultural history.

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Svidrigailov treated Katia and the organ-grinder and some singers and the waiters and two little clerks. ... They took him finally to a pleasure garden, where he paid for their entrance. There was one lanky three-year-old pine tree and three bushes in the garden, besides a “Vauxhall,” which was in reality a drinking-bar where tea too was served, and there were a few green tables and chairs standing round it. A chorus of wretched singers and a drunken, but exceedingly depressed German clown from Munich with a red nose entertained the public. The clerks quarreled with some other clerks and a fight seemed imminent.¹

The passage originates from Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. It promotes a stereotypical image of pleasure gardens with scanty vegetation, fights, alcohol-consumption, and low-quality entertainment, which were popular in St. Petersburg and Moscow in the 1860–1880s. However, in the late nineteenth century not all pleasure gardens of Russian capitals² fitted this description: they changed in parallel with changes in the socio-cultural environment. The purpose of this article is to investigate pleasure gardens in St. Petersburg and Moscow in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the way in which they reflected modernity and were influenced by it.

The term 'pleasure garden' is used to designate a summer recreation ground with a theatre, a restaurant, a garden, and other leisure facilities entrance to which was subject to an admission charge. Thomas Garrett's definition of a pleasure garden as "enclosed ornamental grounds, open to the public as a resort or an amusement area, and operated as a business" is also applicable.³ It is essential, however, to distinguish pleasure gardens from amusement parks. At the end of nineteenth century, the former did not necessarily have a large green space, and everything circulated primarily around a restaurant (or a cafe) and a theatre, and also around open stages, dancing bandstands, and some attractions like billiards, shooting galleries, bowling, carousels, swings and hot-air balloon ascensions. The amusement parks, which have become ubiquitous since the 1900s, were resorts with a vast space and attractions: roller-coasters, mechanical rides, merry-go-rounds, fairground booths and refreshments with some cafes or small restaurants. An open-stage, cinema, dancing venues may also have been in evidence, but the emphasis was on the mechanized amusements, not on the theatre.

This article focuses on a period from 1882 and 1917, which can be identified as a period which engaged with the developments in modernity. The notion 'modernity' embraces not only a temporal definition, but also a qualitative one with certain features such as the transition from a traditional society to a modern industrial capitalistic one due to the developments in science, urbanization, bureaucratization, the emergence of the mass culture and indeed a consequent global social transformation.⁴

Few studies focus on Russian pleasure gardens and their place in the urban culture,⁵ as well as discussing the ways in which these recreational venues changed in the period of modernity and were influenced by technological advances.⁶ Only one piece of research on St. Petersburg pleasure gardens by Al'bin Konechnyi is published in English and is available for international scholars.⁷ Eugene Swift in his study on popular theatre in late Imperial Russia and Louise McReynolds in her book on leisure in Russia of the same time also pay attention to some St. Petersburg and Moscow pleasure gardens.⁸ A collection of essays *Pleasure Gardens, from Vauxhall to Coney Island* was the first attempt to explore pleasure gardens as an international phenomenon, using various interdisciplinary approaches, yet no essay on Russian resorts was included in the collection.⁹

This article is intended to begin the process of filling such a lacuna. It suggests that pleasure gardens in late Imperial Russia were translators of a

developing mass culture as well as indicators of cultural changes which were experienced by urban dwellers, and were additionally used as facilities for the display of technological advances and the introduction of new leisure practices. The research which underpins this discussion is based on the examination of various primary sources: regulatory acts from the imperial central government and local administration records have been used to discover how the government responded to the socio-cultural changes of the time, and how it interacted with society. Local documentation and records from differing Temperance and theatrical societies help to illustrate the formation of civil society, and the strategies which the local community used to address challenges such as the provision of summer leisure for the working class. Official statistics and self-generated databases allow us to compare how summer entrepreneurship developed in both St. Petersburg and Moscow and to compare and contrast pleasure gardens with other leisure institutions. The imperial press (mostly artistic magazines and daily broadsheets), personal accounts and fiction help to articulate the qualitative features of the pleasure gardens.

Emergence of pleasure gardens and their transformation

The history of the pleasure gardens begins in London in 1661, when the Vauxhall Gardens appeared on the south bank of the Thames.¹⁰ They had attractive walks, organized entertainment, served food and drink, and charged an entrance admission fee. Sometime later, pleasure gardens gained widespread popularity throughout Europe, the United States, and also were opened in Russia, first in St. Petersburg and Moscow, and from 1810–1840s in other Russian cities.

Several terms were used as synonyms for pleasure gardens. In the British nineteenth century periodical press and in some historical works, pleasure gardens were also called “pleasure” or “recreation grounds”, or “recreation haunts”. The notion of pleasure gardens is an adaptation of the French term “jardin de plaisir” used in eighteenth century books on landscape architecture.¹¹ In Russia, the notion of the “pleasure garden” (*uveselitel'nyi sad*) was used for the first time in 1794, in a guidebook of St. Petersburg, akin to the London Baedeker.¹² However, Russian newspapers and magazines, personal accounts and guidebooks also used such words as a “garden-theatre”, an “amusement garden”, “vauxhall” (that was transformed in Russian into “voksal”) and a “summer garden for amusement and promenades.”

Conlin states that there are three main periods in history of British pleasure gardens: 1660–1730s, 1730s–1820s, and from 1820 till the early twentieth century.¹³ During each period, the design of pleasure gardens, their audience and entertainment differed. Throughout the first phase, pleasure gardens were mostly privately owned aristocratic retreats, open not necessarily on a daily basis. Their layout consisted of a huge private garden with fruit trees, flowerbeds, shrubberies, and grass or sand paths. The public promenaded, ate fruit, and breathed the fresh air, whilst almost no musical or theatrical presentations were offered. On special occasions, for example, during fairs, pleasure gardens were sometimes made available to a wider audience. In the

second period, fruit trees were replaced with lime or elm trees; paths were changed to main alleys—wide gravelled routes— and subsidiary walks. Different garden constructions such as pergolas, summerhouses, grottos, statues and other elements of garden architecture were established, and also theatrical and musical venues as well as cafes were opened. During the final stage, pleasure gardens were mostly attended for passive recreation such as eating, drinking and watching performances and became generally available to the public. During this period, the green space was reduced significantly; some pleasure gardens did not even contain a garden which was replaced with exotic plants in pots, a few flowerbeds and shrubs. Russian pleasure gardens faced almost the same processes, although the final phase of the development started much later in the period from 1880s.

The precursors of pleasure gardens emerged in Russia in the late 17th century, in the time of Peter the Great's father, Aleksey Mikhailovich. They were royal gardens in Moscow's north-eastern suburbs Izmailovo, Preobrazhenskoe, used for growing exotic fruit, vegetables and medicinal herbs for the tsar's use, which contained some features of a recreation venue, for example, decorated gazebos and galleries.¹⁴ From 1750–1760s, certain landowners started to open their hall gardens (*usad'ba* gardens) for the public on some holidays.¹⁵

The first public pleasure gardens with an entrance admission fee, which were open several days during the week, appeared in Russia in 1760s, and most of their owners were non-Russian entrepreneurs.¹⁶ For example, Michael Maddox (1747–1822) was an Englishman who ran several pleasure gardens in Moscow. Another famous entrepreneur was a Czech composer Ernst von Wanczura who owned a pleasure garden, *Voksal v Naryshkinskom sady* (opened in 1793) in St. Petersburg. Wanczura's pleasure garden was located in the city suburbs, in Ofiterskaya street (modern Dekabristov street) and attracted a wide audience. Every Wednesday, Sunday and on holidays the garden was available for those able to paid the reasonably high admission fee of 1–2 rubles. Performances, concerts and masquerades were held there from 8 p.m., food and beverage were served, while bowling and carousels also were provided. This pleasure garden had a short timespan despite its popularity, and closed due to financial difficulties.¹⁷ Russian pleasure gardens from the late eighteenth century till the 1880s were mostly situated in suburban parks, and had the same features as British pleasure gardens of 1730s–1820s. Promenades in the park formed a typical pastime, which also might include listening to the music, watching a theatre performance, playing bowls and drinking.

The great reforms of 1860–1870s, especially the emancipation reform of 1861 and urban reform of 1870, led to significant changes, such as the growth of cities, the formation of a civil society, and industrialization, which all affected urban leisure. An urban space, in contrast to rural areas, provided for different occupational patterns, which led to a certain distinction between work periods and leisure time. Free time started to be considered as valuable and meaningful. The growing leisure class, along with an increasing number of industrial workers both demanded more urban recreational facilities. Workers had about 80 days free during the year—Sundays and holidays (27.68% did not work at all, 72.3% worked one or 2 hours during these days¹⁸). In 1913, for example, the number of

free days had increased to 86. What is more, a working day became 2 hours shorter after the revolution of 1905, lasting 10 hours in all, so that in the evenings, some male workers, especially those who were single, looked for some leisure activities to occupy their free time.¹⁹

The demand for urban recreation was especially high in summer when most theatres were closed. This demand could never have been satisfied had the monopoly of Imperial theatres not been removed in 1882.²⁰ The Imperial theatres monopoly had been introduced in 1854 and forbade imperial actors from participating in private enterprises, as well as restricting the possible performance in private enterprises to variety shows with foreign actors and circus.²¹ Although there were very few exceptions, some entrepreneurs did manage to receive special permission to open private theatres: for example, Mikhail Lentovskyi, the owner of a famous Moscow pleasure garden *Hermitage* which operated from 1878 to 1892. The removal of the monopoly triggered the development of private initiative in the field of leisure with the result that increasing numbers of entrepreneurs became able to open theatres and pleasure gardens as well.²²

Although initially pleasure gardens were luxurious institutions open explicitly for the nobility, the nature of their patrons gradually started to change. From the 1860s, merchants formed the majority of the public and, then, close to the beginning of the twentieth century, pleasure gardens became resorts also available for people from lower social backgrounds. Recreation amenities and an entertainment programme provided in pleasure gardens were supposed to attract a wide audience, regardless of their social background. Both the entrance fee and entertainment in pleasure gardens gradually became relatively accessible to different social ranks in terms of cost, varieties of taste, and understanding. For example, in 1913, the monthly salary of workers varied from 20 to 40 rubles, which depended on their qualification and occupation: a highly-skilled machinist, for example, could earn 35–50 rubles a month. Women and non-factory workers received lower wages.²³ As for workers' living expenses, in 1908–1911 single male workers in St. Petersburg spent 54% of their income on the expenses of food, tobacco and alcohol, 15–21% was spent on accommodation, 15–17 % on clothes, 5% on religious needs, while 11% was sent to relatives living at home in villages, and about 5% was spent on cultural and educational needs (including entertainment expenses).²⁴ It was expensive to attend most of theatres which sold very few tickets at a low price: for example, the cheapest tickets at the Bolshoi theatre cost 60 kopecks, and 37 kopecks at the Malyi theatre.²⁵ A cinema ticket cost from 5 to 40 kopecks, an entrance admission to pleasure gardens varied from 10 to 50 kopecks. Such entrance admission fees can be compared to the prices of food: in 1913, a loaf of bread cost 4–5 kopecks, a pound of sugar 12 kopecks, and a bottle of milk (615 ml) 8 kopecks. Thus, workers could afford to patronize even fashionable pleasure gardens although not on a regular basis.

Guards were able to prohibit the entrance to a pleasure garden of very intoxicated people in untidy clothes, but this action was not connected to their social status.²⁶ However, inside a pleasure garden, customers could choose how to entertain themselves, and where to go, based on their ability to pay. They could

watch a performance in a theatre for an extra admission price (from 30 kopecks and higher, depending on the pleasure garden), eat in a restaurant, or just enjoy a cheap beverage and a free open-stage variety programme. Thus, pleasure gardens available for a wide audience for a price of a ticket, on the one hand, encouraged social interaction among various status groups, on the other, some features of class separation remained based largely on economic factors.

The topography and the types of St. Petersburg and Moscow pleasure gardens

From 1882 to 1917, there were about 70 pleasure gardens in St. Petersburg and around 50 pleasure gardens in Moscow, without taking into account tiny pleasure gardens which had opened in front of some restaurants, taverns, or hotels. However, these 70 and 50 pleasure gardens did not function at the same time: some of them had a lifespan of even less than a month. For instance, in Moscow, the suburban pleasure gardens *Olympia* in Sokolniki Park and *Folies-bergere* in Petrovsky park, in St. Petersburg, the suburban *Hermitage* near a beer factory, the *New Bavaria*, had been entertaining their patrons, which mostly consisted of workers, for less than a month.²⁷ Their entrepreneurs were suspect dealers or commercially unsuccessful actors. On the other hand, a sufficient number of pleasure gardens in both capitals were operated by stable entrepreneurs, being run for more than 15 years. Some of them were fashionable venues for the rich, while some were their cheap imitations aimed mostly at factory workers and servants. For example, in Moscow, they were the fashionable *Hermitage* garden in Karetnyi riad, in the city centre (1895–1918), the *Renaissance* garden in Schipok, in the working suburbs (1900–1917); in St. Petersburg, there were, for instance, the luxurious *Aquarium* (1886–1918) and *Buff* pleasure gardens (1901–1918).

In 1897, the population of St. Petersburg numbered 1,264,920 people, the population of Moscow 1,038,591. These two cities had 17 and 6 pleasure gardens respectively, so proportionally St. Petersburg had 79,057 people for each pleasure garden, while Moscow's proportion was 173,098. In 1910, there were 1,556,000 people in St. Petersburg and 18 gardens (97,250 people per garden); while Moscow had a population of 1,481,240 people with 13 gardens (113,941 people per garden). Thus, the population of St. Petersburg had increased by 23%, the population of Moscow by 43%, whereas the numbers of pleasure gardens in Moscow had doubled while in St. Petersburg, the numbers remained constant. Although St. Petersburg as the first capital was a trendsetter and encountered novelties earlier, probably the progress of urbanization in Moscow was faster as was its need for entertainment. Obviously, the potential audience of the pleasure gardens should not be confused with the total population of Moscow and St. Petersburg, but these figures allow us to correlate, at least very approximately, the speed of population growth with the consequent increase in the number of pleasure gardens in both capitals. The number of pleasure gardens in both capitals almost matched the number of theatres but were considerably fewer than the numbers of cinemas: in 1910, there were 22 theatres, 18 pleasure gardens and 134 cinemas in St. Petersburg, while in Moscow there were 13 pleasure gardens, 15 theatres and 107 cinemas.²⁸

Most pleasure gardens were set up in places that had formerly been recreation grounds. Initially, in both capitals, pleasure gardens used to be located in suburban parks, in grounds used for fairs, abandoned dachas, and on the land of the impoverished nobility. For instance, in St. Petersburg, the pleasure gardens *Livadiya* and *Arcadia* in the old Count Stroganoff Park were opened in what had been the former noble's property. In 1889, in the northern suburbs of Moscow, in the abandoned *Saks garden* in Petrovskiy Park, its purchaser, an actor Vladimir Vmetnev founded a pleasure garden *Fantasia* that was to flourish for 10 years, and was popular among merchants and clerks.

The process of urbanization resulted in the extensive growth of suburbs. The demand for recreation in these new urban districts inhabited in particular by workers increased rapidly, so that recreational facilities, including pleasure gardens, appeared there. Moreover, many pleasure gardens opened near suburban dachas, rented or private summer houses where a great number of citizens moved in the summertime to live in a natural environment, breathe the fresh air while some moved there to avoid the expensive rental accommodation which they had to pay in the cities.²⁹

At the turn of the twentieth century, the owners of pleasure gardens preferred to lease smaller areas in the city centre near other cultural spots such as theatres, cinemas, and museums. Gardens in the city centre sometimes lacked any green space whatsoever: in the press, they were sometimes sarcastically referred to as strange gardens with no trees. For example, a columnist of the theatrical magazine *Studia* spend a day visiting almost all the pleasure gardens of Moscow and trying to locate there at least some trees and flowers; eventually he was confused about why these gardens were called 'gardens' at all, as there were very few flowerbeds, let alone trees.³⁰ Another journalist exclaimed: "It would be abnormal to find a pleasure garden with trees, flowers and some shade in the whole of St. Petersburg".³¹ Most of accounts tended to assume that this lack of green space was a distinct feature of pleasure gardens: it was so, but tended to be present in the city centre or in working class outskirts, where no park had existed before. In the early twentieth century, in St. Petersburg, half the gardens were situated in the working outskirts, whereas in Moscow only a third of gardens were similarly situated, with the other two-thirds within the Sadovoe ring (the centre of the city). Probably, in St. Petersburg, entrepreneurs responded more quickly to the demand of workers for recreation facilities, thereby causing an increase in pleasure gardens in the industrial working suburbs.

All the pleasure gardens in Russian capitals can be divided into two large groups: *commercial* pleasure gardens run by entrepreneurs, and *non-commercial* ones created by philanthropic societies, factory-owners, or local authorities with temperance and educational aims. Commercial or non-commercial activity of the garden defined its general image. Among commercial pleasure gardens, there were expensive ones for mostly an upper-class audience, gardens with modest admission and cheap pleasure gardens for workers. Although luxurious gardens were available for everyone who paid an entrance fee, about half a ruble, which even industrial workers could afford, inside the gardens, if their patrons wanted more than just promenading, listening to the garden orchestra and watching the

open-stage performance, they had to be prepared to pay considerably more. For example, in Moscow's *Hermitage*, in 1910, the cheapest dinner in a restaurant cost from 1.5 rubles. In Moscow, gardens of this type have been already mentioned like the *Hermitage* and *Aquarium* in the city centre inside the Sadovoe ring. The *Hermitage* was opened in 1894 by a former peasant Yakov Schukin, who by that time had acquired considerable experience in gardening and operated restaurants and bars in several pleasure gardens. Schukin ran this garden successfully till 1916. The *Aquarium*, opened by Mikhail Lentovsky in 1893 located at the former site of the International Electrical Exhibition, had changed owners many times. The most remarkable were two foreigners, French entrepreneur Charles Amount and Black American Frederick Thomas. While the *Hermitage* was more elite in terms of the performances held there (for example, Stanislavsky with the Moscow Art Theatre rented a theatre in this garden from 1898 for a few seasons)³², *Aquarium* was more well-known for its *café-chantant* performances and restaurant scandals, especially during Aumont's tenure. Sometimes, however, there was stiff competition between these two pleasure gardens for both audiences and starring performers, the singer Fyodor Chaliapin as a case in point.³³ In St. Petersburg, among the fashionable gardens were, for example, the *Aquarium* and *Buff* not far from the city centre and the *Arkadiya* and *Livadiya* in the luxurious suburban areas. Gardens with modest admission prices charged 25–40 kopecks as an entrance fee. In Moscow, there were pleasure gardens in Sokolniki and Petrovskiy suburban parks, and a pleasure garden in the Zoological garden (Figure. 1), while the *Pompey*, *Bavaria*, *Olympia* gardens were located in St. Petersburg. An entrance fee to the cheaper pleasure gardens situated in the working suburbs varied between 10 and 25 kopecks.

There were large pleasure gardens for 7,000–15,000 people, medium size ones that might include 2,000–7,000 people, and small ones that could accommodate a maximum of 2,000 visitors. Based on the entertainment programme offerings, *café-chantant* gardens (mostly, for single men) and family gardens can also be distinguished. Moreover, pleasure gardens were also differentiated by the availability of alcohol. There were gardens that regularly invited world-famous performers, actors, musicians, prestidigitators (for example, Sarah Bernhardt, Lina Cavalieri, Tomazo Salvini, Fyodor Chaliapin, Harry Houdini), gardens with professional actors and musicians, gardens that invited spurious 'stars' to attract the audience, and gardens with amateur performers. For example, when Harry Houdini was performing at the Moscow *Hermitage*, the *Aquarium* advertised the performance of a totally unknown lady "Houdini", whose surname on posters was intended to attract audiences.³⁴ As well, the nature of many pleasure gardens changed depending on the time of day. For example, in the mornings, zoological gardens in both capitals, a section of which was a zoo and another which had recreation facilities such as a summer theatre and a restaurant, were mostly visited by families, but at night they were transformed into *cafés-chantant* for intoxicated patrons along with numbers of prostitutes.³⁵



Figure 1. Photograph of St. Petersburg Zoological garden. c. 1910. Courtesy of the Central State Archive of Documentary Films and Photographs, St. Petersburg.

Non-commercial pleasure gardens were a particularly Russian phenomenon. Their emergence is partly connected to the introduction of the liquor monopoly in 1894 by Finance Minister Sergei Witte and a popular theatre movement.³⁶ The liquor monopoly was intended “to limit where and when alcoholic beverages could be sold”, ensuring the government an enormous source of new indirect tax but it went hand in hand with a temperance campaign, “encouraging more modest drinking habits among the population”.³⁷ This led to the involvement of local authorities, factory owners, and the intelligentsia in the development of low-priced ‘rational recreations’, whose aim was to distract working people from drinking alcohol. For this purpose, the Guardianship of Popular Temperance was established throughout the whole Russian empire. Pleasure gardens, people’s houses³⁸ (leisure centres with a theatre, canteen, evening classes, anti-alcohol museums managed by the Guardianship), cheap theatres, tearooms, and libraries were used as platforms for popularizing the ‘rational recreations’. The term ‘rational recreation’ and a claim for it appeared in British society in 1820–1830s. This term was connected with “re-creation and refreshment of the mind and spirit, necessary for right development of our being”.³⁹ The programme of ‘rational recreation’ in London, as in Moscow, was aimed at reducing alcohol consumption, increasing moral awareness, and teaching people to use their free time in educative ways.

In Britain, the implementation of the ‘rational recreations’ programme was connected to the pursuit of natural activities and sports, while, in Russia, the theatre was believed to be the driver of this initiative. British lobbyists of this programme believed that in combination with rational amusements, nature, like art, would have a morally beneficial influence. In Britain, pleasure gardens were replaced by parks that differed according to their size and the numbers of facilities provided, mostly to encourage sporting games and competitions, while admissions were free. Unlike the pleasure gardens, there were no restaurants or theatres. Eventually, pleasure gardens almost disappeared in Britain and by the 1900s, had been replaced by public amusement parks.⁴⁰ However, in Russia,

programmes of 'rational recreation' were implemented in pleasure gardens, some theatres and in people's private houses.

Among non-commercial pleasure gardens there were public pleasure gardens run by local authorities, some that were part of people's houses, and others organized by philanthropic societies (the Popular Entertainment Society, for instance) and factory owners. For example, in St. Petersburg, the Neva Popular Entertainment Society was founded in 1891 by several factory owners and members of the intelligentsia who organized several low-prices popular theatres and pleasure gardens.⁴¹ The most prosperous among non-commercial pleasure gardens were ones run by the Guardianship of Popular Temperance, as it had a financially strong base with the support of the Finance ministry.⁴² For instance, there were pleasure gardens at the people's houses, also managed by Guardianships of Popular Temperance, among them the pleasure gardens at Tsar Nicolas II People's house in St. Petersburg, the Gruzinskyi, Alekseevskyi, and Sergievskyi people's houses in Moscow. At a low admission price (5-10 kopecks), concerts of classical music by composers such as Beethoven, Mozart, and Tchaikovsky were organized. Although they were aimed at people from a financially disadvantaged social background, the audience at these concerts was mostly members of the intelligentsia.⁴³ Sometimes, during holidays and weekends, authorities in St. Petersburg and Moscow enclosed parts of municipal parks and gardens, organized theatrical and concert programmes and provided alcohol-free beverages and food there, charging an entrance fee.⁴⁴ Moscow authorities sponsored the regular concerts of symphonic music in Sokolniki, where such famous conductors as Serge Koussevitzky and Constantine Saradzhev performed, and Sergei Prokofiev played his first piano concert there in 1912. The situation was the same with classical music concerts in people's houses: mostly consisting of the intelligentsia rather than workers who went to listen to them at the low admission price.

Non-commercial pleasure gardens were imitations of commercial exemplars, copying their design, although the purposes were different and an entrance admission was significantly lower. Initially, some non-commercial pleasure gardens and people's houses even allowed the consumption of light alcohol, such as cider and ale. The issue of permitting alcohol in non-commercial public venues, however, was heatedly debated, resulting in the total exclusion of alcohol.⁴⁵ Before the introduction of the wine monopoly in 1894, when the Guardianship of Popular Temperance was organized, there were open-air popular festivals (*narodnie guliania*) held in holiday days-offs and Sunday week-ends. In comparison to the festivals, pleasure gardens were open every day during the whole summer season from May to September. The Guardianship of Popular Temperance started to control festivals, which, eventually, were replaced by the people's houses and non-commercial pleasure gardens. The Guardianship of Popular Temperance had finally accumulated everything connected to the popular recreation in its hands, but with the removal of competition, the quality of these resorts declined.⁴⁶

The layout, entertainments and technological advances

All pleasure gardens had certain elements that were integral parts of their layout on the evidence of their plans. Usually, they contained a winter theatre (in a building with heating), an open-stage (a 'summer theatre'), a stage located in the restaurant, orchestra bandstands, a cinema, bowling alleys, archery, gazebos, fountains, and pergolas. All stages often featured a different repertoire: opera, operetta, farce, drama, and ballet were held in the winter theatres; an open-stage theatre had different 'divertissement' numbers: short comic plays, circus performances, puppet-shows, singers, dancers, variety shows, and 'speaking' numbers. Restaurants usually featured variety (vaudeville) performances that included both singing and dancing.

Entertainment programmes in the pleasure gardens had an almost identical organization. They typically began with a 'gulianie' (an outside promenade) at 6 p.m. during working days, and at 12–3 p.m. on Sundays and holidays. In both capitals, a theatre performance started at 8–8.30 p.m., with divertissements as interludes. There was also a performance on an open stage consisting of 20–30 variety numbers. A programme on a restaurant's bandstand started about midnight. On weekends and during the holidays, orchestras played music, sometimes numbering two or three orchestras playing at the same time in different parts of a pleasure garden. Winter theatres had less than adequate soundproofing, and audiences suffered from the cacophony of sounds emanating from music outside or the open-stage programme.⁴⁷ Most pleasure gardens were opened until 4–5 a.m. but with the beginning of the World War 1 and the establishment of the state alcohol monopoly in 1914, pleasure gardens were obliged to close at 1 or 2 a.m.

Winter theatres either specialized in a particular genre or housed everything from opera to farce. Russian garden operetta was similar to a light comedy sprinkled with topical jokes. As a rule, operettas were of German, Austrian, or French origin, translated into Russian. It was not an exact translation, but a reconfiguration with Russian jokes, Russian names, and occasionally the location of the performance would be given a Russian context.

A restaurant bandstand was dominated by song and dance items including Russian and Gypsy romances, pieces derived from operas and operettas, and popular songs. A performance there started late in the evening, around 11 p.m. and continued till 2–3 a.m. Customers could reserve separate booths and invite performers there. In some advertising posters, entrepreneurs promised 'bunches of fresh étoiles' every evening. They were called foreign stars or étoiles in order to advertise the performance and attract a mostly male audience. Besides Russian étoiles, there were women who came from abroad, usually from France, Germany or Italy. Some of them were actresses who used to dance or sing in French cabarets or *cafés-chantant* before coming to Russia, or were plainly just courtesans. Their main value was youth, beauty, and pretty dresses adorned with jewellery, and a talent for encouraging the customers to order more alcohol, fruit, or expensive desserts. Having performed their numbers, étoiles often went to separate booths to sit at the tables with their admirers. Sometimes, 6 out of 16 chorus girls would

sing and dance on the stage while another 10 were ‘working’ the tables.⁴⁸ A bandstand (an open stage) *divertissement* comprised circus acts, puppet shows, tableaux vivants, ballet, and variety, connected by the jokes and announcements of the master of ceremonies. In addition to performances and a *divertissement*, pleasure gardens had a number of other entertainments: boating, horse/pony riding, cinema, dancing classes (sometimes with a dancing teacher), roller-skating (with a trainer), French wrestling, billiard playing, and the holding of a prize lottery. During the weekends and holidays, fireworks were organized. In some pleasure gardens, there were programmes intended to entertain children, such as parties with free desserts, sweets, and small gifts, little competitions, dance classes, fashion parades, carnivals, sport competitions, pony-riding, and free excursions for children of different ages in the Zoological garden.

In both capitals, audiences demonstrated an ongoing demand for dangerous tricks, which were frequently demonstrated. For instance, in Moscow’s *Renaissance* garden, there was a circus number featured in which an American named Habretz had to climb a 30-metre pole and jump from its top into a deep hole filled with water. This ‘mortal number’ clearly justified its name and finished with the death of Habretz in front of an astonished public.⁴⁹ Ballooning was another dangerous amusement popular in both capitals: initially, it was performed by professionals for the spectators’ pleasure, then it became an expensive and risky attraction for audience members themselves who were encouraged to take a balloon trip with an instructor.

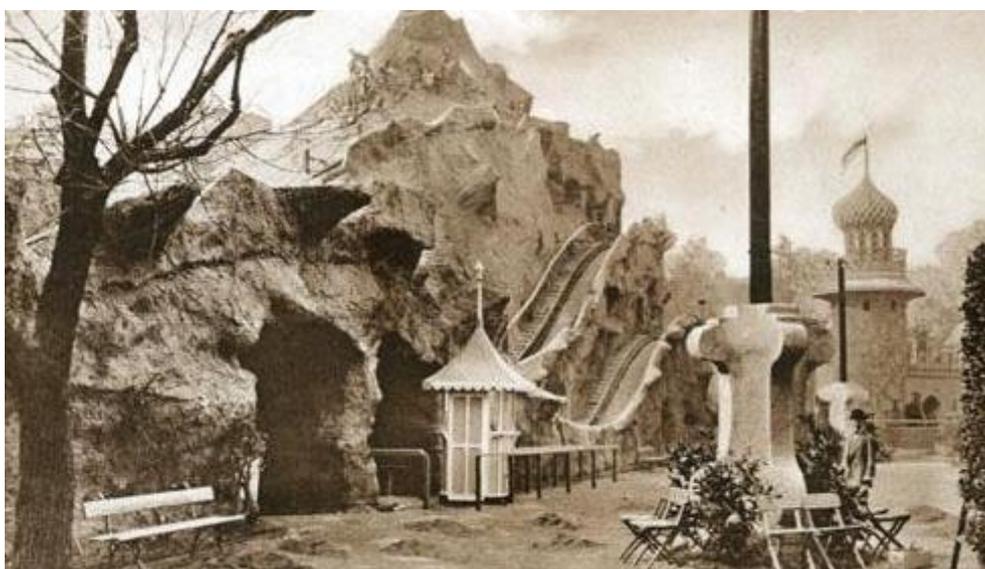


Figure 2. Photograph of St. Petersburg Luna-park. 1913. From the author’s collection

Although the performances in some pleasure gardens were quite traditional, and the atmosphere in the garden did not differ much from the description given in Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* quoted at the beginning of this article, some pleasure gardens changed considerably. They gained access to electricity, a water supply, drainage, city transport (trams), and their green space was replaced with yet more entertainment facilities. Russian garden entrepreneurs regularly travelled abroad to invite western ‘stars’ to perform in Russia and to look for novelties in the amusement industry, such as new

attractions and devices that, for example, produced electricity, allowing these entrepreneurs to proclaim that their achievements were close to those of Europe. Audiences sometimes attended pleasure gardens to learn about technical inventions. At the Moscow *Hermitage* (Figure. 3), for example, its owner Yakov Schukin, a former peasant who became a merchant, did his best to make his garden a modern and lucrative resort. He travelled to Europe at least twice and attended the top theatres, pleasure gardens and amusement parks in Berlin, Vienna, Budapest, Paris and London to learn about their programmes, novelties and technological advances. He signed a contract for an autonomous diesel electric station for his garden, one of the first diesels in Moscow, which was used to generate enough electricity to illuminate his garden perfectly and the included the construction of a heating system there. In addition, Schukin purchased a special mechanism that would allow him to water all the plants in his garden simultaneously.⁵⁰ Of course, signing contracts with foreign stars like Harry Houdini and Sarah Bernhardt were just as important to him.⁵¹



Figure 3. Photograph of the entrance to the Moscow Hermitage pleasure garden. c.1910. From the author's collection

New technical inventions were demonstrated in pleasure gardens. For example, on June 14th (26th), 1896, the first cinema show took place where the projected motion pictures by the Lumière Brothers were demonstrated in the Moscow *Hermitage*, and a week earlier in the St. Petersburg *Aquarium*. As well, the first automobile racing and ballooning took place in Moscow's *Aquarium*. New technically advanced attractions appeared in pleasure gardens at the beginning of the twentieth century and consequently some of the gardens were transformed into amusement parks. For example, this happened to the St. Petersburg's *Buff* garden in 1912 (Figure. 2) and the Moscow Zoo in 1917. Special equipment typical of Luna parks was purchased in Great Britain for both gardens, but apart from these attractions, they both had a theatre as a crucial constituent element as well.⁵² Russian poet Alexander Blok wrote in his diary how thrilled and excited he was by the St. Petersburg Luna park. Like an addicted person, he attended it every day, took his friends there and relatives, and travelled on the roller-coaster more than 10 times a day till 1 a.m.⁵³

Conclusion

Pleasure gardens emerged as aristocratic venues in 17th century London, spread throughout Europe and then Russia, and ended up as places for popular recreation. Pleasure gardens were indicators of the changes that Russian cities and their culture were facing at the *fin-de-siècle*. Pleasure gardens transmitted a mass commercial entertainment culture which was consumed by people of all classes. On the other hand, the form of pleasure gardens was used by temperance societies and those concerned with social enlightenment to distract workers from alcohol consumption and to organize their leisure. Entertainment of the pleasure gardens synthesized forms of high and low cultures, taking their inspiration from the Imperial theatres, European cabaret, fetes, and fairs, and facilitating the process of cultural cross-fertilization among these venues.

In terms of the number of available pleasure gardens, St. Petersburg as a trendsetter was ahead of Moscow, although the latter also developed very quickly. In both capitals, many pleasure gardens were opened in the recent proliferation of working suburbs, which also became possible because of improvements in transportation that enabled people to commute by trams, as an example.

Pleasure gardens kept pace with technological progress: electricity, water supply, drainage, new technically advanced attractions, photography, cinema, became features there. The reverse side of this progress was demonstrated in the diminishing of the 'green' park zone of the pleasure gardens. Thus, in some resorts, only a vestige of the garden's origins remained including such elements of garden architecture as flowerbeds, pergolas, sculptures, fountains and benches. Thus, pleasure gardens increasingly became metaphors of nature, where people who had to spend their summer in the city, could stay outdoors, surrounded by an artificially constructed natural environment.

¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (Clayton: Prestwick House Inc., 2005), 425.

² Russia was a bi-capital country as, for example, were the USA and the Netherlands. Moscow was an old, historical capital of Russia, St. Petersburg became a formal capital in 1712 and was the main city till 1918. There is no official act that confirms the transfer of the capitals, so Moscow had a status of the second capital.

³ Thomas Myers Garrett, "A History of Pleasure Gardens in New York City, 1700–1865" (PhD diss., University Microfilms, 1978), 4.

⁴ See, for example, Daniel R. Brower, *The Russian City between Tradition and Modernity, 1850–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680–1780* (New York/London: Guilford Press, 1998).

⁵ See, for example, Yuri Alyanskiy, *Uveselitelnie Zavedenia Starogo Peterburga* (St. Petersburg: Avropa, Stroiizdat, 2003); Elena Sariieva, *Razvlechenia v Staroi Moskve: Ocherki Istorii (60–80 godi XIX veka)* (Moscow: State Institute of Art Studies, 2013); E.V. Savina, "Rol' voksalov v Formirovanii Razvlekatelnoi kulturi Dvorianskogo Russkogo Obschestva 18 Veka" in *37 Ogaryovskie Tchteniya* (Saransk, 2009), 82–90; Elizaveta Uvarova, *Kak Razvlekalis' v Rossiiskih Stolitsah* (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2004).

⁶ See, for example, Al'bin Konechnyi, "Shows for the People: Public Amusement Parks in Nineteenth Century St. Petersburg" in *Cultures in Flux: Lower-Class Values, Practices, and Resistance in Late Imperial Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 121–130; Irina Steklova, "Fenomen Uveselitelnyh Sadov v Formirovanii Kulturnoi Sredy Peterburga" (PhD diss., Leningrad, 1991); Elena Vyshelenkova, Svetlana Malysheva, *Kultura Povsednevnosti Provintsialnogo Goroda: Kazan i Kazantsi v XIX–XX Veke* (Kazan: Kazan State University, 2008).

⁷ Konechnyi, 121–130. In fact, this article has an inaccuracy in the translation: the term "an amusement park" was used instead of "pleasure garden", where the author definitely discusses the latter.

⁸ Eugene Anthony Swift, *Popular Theater and Society in Tsarist Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 30–38, 136, 145, 170; Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play: Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 210–223.

⁹ Jonathan Conlin, ed., *The Pleasure Garden, from Vauxhall to Coney Island* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

¹⁰ Warwick Wroth, *The London Pleasure Gardens of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1896), 76.

¹¹ Conlin, 20.

¹² I.G. Georgi, *Opisanie Rossiisko-Imperatorskogo Stolichnogo Goroda Sankt-Peterburga [The Description of the Russian Imperial Capital City of St. Petersburg and the Sites Nearby]* (St. Petersburg: Pri Imperatorskom Shliakhetnom sukhoputnom kadetskom korpuse, 1794; reprint, St. Petersburg: Liga, 1996), 455.

¹³ Conlin, 18–22.

¹⁴ Ivan Zabelin, *Moskovskie Sady v XVII Stoletii* (Moscow: Tipografiya V. Gotie, 1856), 7.

¹⁵ Mikhail Pyliaev, *Staroe Zhitie: Ocherki i Rasskazy* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya A.S. Suvorina, 1892), 134.

¹⁶ Murray Frame, "'Freedom of the theatres': The abolition of the Russian Imperial Theatre monopoly" in *Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 83, no. 2 (April 2005): 259.

¹⁷ Georgi, 458; Uvarova, 39.

¹⁸ Victoria E. Bonnell, ed., *The Russian worker: life and labor under the tsarist regime* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 200.

¹⁹ V.D. Patrushev, *Trud i Dosug Rabotchikh (Budget Vremeni, Tsennosti i Motivi) [Labor and leisure of workers (Time Budget, Values and Motives)]* (Moscow: The Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Science, 2006), 9; Victoria E. Bonnell, 72.

²⁰ See *The Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire* (St. Peterburg, 1882), collection 3, vol. 2, no. 760.

²¹ Swift, *Popular Theater and Society in Tsarist Russia*, 47.

²² Frame, "'Freedom of the theatres': the abolition of the Russian Imperial Theatre monopoly", 256, 285.

²³ Bonnell, *Roots of rebellion: workers' politics and organizations in St. Petersburg and Moscow, 1900-1914*, 215; Bonnell, ed., 201–201.

²⁴ S.N. Prokopovich, *Biudzhety Peteburgskikh Rabotchikh* (St. Petersburg, 1909), 9–17.

²⁵ Swift, 136.

²⁶ See, for example, the description of how people who were not neatly dressed were forbidden to enter the pleasure garden in M. Grigoriev, *Petersburg 1910-h Godov. Progulki v Proshloe* (St. Petersburg: Rossiiskiy Institut Istorii Iskusstv, 2005), 23.

²⁷ *Rampa*, 17 (1910): 4; *Ibid*, 21 (2010): 5; *Moskovskii Listok*, 152 (1910), 1; *Ibid*, 99 (1909), 1; *Peterburgskiy Listok*, 136 (1893), 3; *Ibid*, 178 (1893), 3.

²⁸ *Goroda Rossii v 1910 Godu* (St. Peterburg, 1914), 39, 134–135, 286–287, 286–28.

²⁹ See, for example, Stephen Lovell, *Summerfolk: A history of the dacha, 1710–2000* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003).

³⁰ *Studia*, 30–31 (1912): 15.

³¹ *Peterburgskiy Dnevnik Teatrala*, 21 (1904): 2.

³² The Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum. Fund 543, no. 1, p. 12–20.

³³ V.A. Telyakovskiy, *Dnevnik Direktora mperatorskikh Teatrov. 1898–1901* (Moscow: Artist, Rezhisser, 1998), 539.

³⁴ *Moskovskiy Listok*, 29 July (1903), 3.

³⁵ State Central Historical Archive of St. Petersburg. Fund 513, file 49, no. 136, p. 161.

³⁶ See more in Swift, 39, 131.

³⁷ *Ibid*.

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- ³⁸ People's house is a translation of the Russian 'narodnyi dom'. They were leisure and educational establishments, organized by Temperance Guardianship to distract workers from the consumption of alcohol. There were 8 in Moscow, 5 in St. Petersburg.
- ³⁹ Hazel Conway, *People's Parks: the Design and Development of Victorian Parks in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 29.
- ⁴⁰ See, for example, Judith A. Adams, *The American Amusement Park Industry: A History of Technology and Thrills* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991).
- ⁴¹ I.F. Petrovskaya, V.V. Somina, *Teatral'nyi Peterburg: Nachalo XVIII veka—oktyabr'1917 goda* (St. Petersburg: Rossiiskii Institut Istorii Iskusstv, 1994), 252
- ⁴² Swift, 134.
- ⁴³ *Teatr i Iskusstvo*, 24 (1903): 461.
- ⁴⁴ State Central Historical Archive of St. Petersburg. Fund 792, file 1, no. 3420; *Peterburgskiy Listok*, 118 (1885), 2.
- ⁴⁵ *Teatr i Iskusstvo*, 20 (1898): 373; *Ibid*, 33 (1901): 593–594.
- ⁴⁶ Konechnyi, "Peterbourgskie Narodnie Guliania na Maslianoi i Paskhalnoi Nedeliakh" in *Peterburg i Gubernia: Istoriko-Etnograficheskoe Issledovanie* (Leningrad, 1989), 21–52; State Central Historical Archive of St. Petersburg. Fund 792, file 1, no. 7557, p. 1.
- ⁴⁷ *Teatr i Iskusstvo*, 28 (1899): 493; *Ibid*, 24 (1900): 445.
- ⁴⁸ *Moskovskiy Listok*, 168 (1910), 3.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 171 (1911), 3.
- ⁵⁰ The Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum. Fund 543, no. 3, p. 12.
- ⁵¹ *Moskovskiy Listok*, 29 July (1903), 3.
- ⁵² State Central Historical Archive of St. Petersburg. Fund 1506, file 1, no. 1, pp. 1–5.
- ⁵³ Alexander Blok, *Notes, 1901–1920*, vol. 7 (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1965), 132.