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The Symbolic Significance of Architecture

Inna A. VERSHININA[1]*, Artemiy R. KURBANOV[1]

Abstract

The article deals with the process of cities' changes considered in the context of the formation and transformation of historical and cultural memory. Every moment of a city's existence is a combination of "places of memory". Each of them plays its role in the general symbolic ensemble. Urban development is connecting with transformation of social and political systems. Any social and political change is expressed by creation of new and destruction of old "places of memory" in the urban space. This connection becomes even more evident if we study the history and contemporary state of the capital cities. Traditionally, capitals bear a maximum symbolic load. The development of Moscow during the Soviet period shows how architectural solutions and urban space in general express the new socialist ideology. Soviet authorities strove to affirm their values and priorities with all the means they had, including the new image of communist Moscow. The collapse of Soviet regime became a new stage of development of the urban space. For certain architectural facilities, a fragile border between oblivion and destruction and preservation of an architectural monument with its official acknowledgment depends on multiple circumstances. These include purely pragmatic aspects related to the cost of preservation and reconstruction of the facility, ideological aspects as far as many facilities are a live reminder of the past that is sometimes rather embarrassing. The destiny of "houses-communes" in post-Soviet Moscow and Casa Parlamentului in Bucharest can serve as examples. The article concludes that the process of accelerated modernization changed the face of metropolitan cities in Eastern Europe.

Keywords: urban studies, space, "places of memory", symbolic legacy of cities, capitals, Moscow, Bucharest, metropolitan cities, Eastern Europe.

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1. Introduction

Material objects have been surrounding people since ancient times. These objects were created or adapted by people for their needs and became a significant part of the social community. The list of these objects includes common and habitual homeware, such as beds, chairs, utensils used for eating and washing, clothes, tools, as well as houses, villages and cities, streets, vehicles, ships. A man includes his concepts of practicability, convenience and beauty in every object, which means that, in a sense, a man shares a part of himself. That is why objects show people's own reflections, they remind about them, their past, their ancestors, etc. People live in the world of objects, which has an indicator of time connecting them to the present and to various periods of the past as well [5].

Historical events are refracted in the public mind and develop images of ideas about figures, actions, dates meaningful for this social community. To a large extent such images define patterns of perception of the relevant information context. The concept of historical memory can describe the collective ideas of a society regarding its past. Historical memory manifests itself in the basic world outlook paradigms and can be expressed in certain social actions. Halbwachs was one of the first scientists to address the issue of historical memory. He suggested considering collective reminiscences ("collective memory") as one of the key factors of preservation and reproduction of social identity: "It provides the group a self-portrait that unfolds through time, since it is an image of the past, and allows the group to recognize itself throughout the total succession of images" [10]. Manifestation of historical memory becomes more expressing in certain situations, whose perception resonates with their key elements in the public mind. "Recognition" of familiar images in the event context makes respective patterns actual in individual and collective behavior.

Assman argues that a house means for a family the same as a village and a valley mean for the community of peasants, or a city means for its dwellers, or a country means for its citizens: these are the frames of memory which it keeps as "motherland" even in absentia, actually, especially *in absentia* [5]. Study of the cities is important to understand history of civilization and to forecast its future. City is a point of maximum concentration of power and culture of the community where all the problems of civilization, the form and symbol of integrated social relations become actual and may be solved as far as this is where social self-consciousness is developed. Cultural memory is kept alive also by architectural styles, traditions of images, and continuously and periodically repeated rites and practices [3]. Cities are the custodians of history and

culture, because each building reflects ideas of its time. Time becomes visible in the cities [18]; according to Mumford, cities are a perfect presentation to study the history of culture. Mumford calls cities museums and says that they are a manifestation of memory about history of civilization development that helps to understand relevant problems of the present. Like many other scientists, Mumford shared the idea that people systematically try to reconstruct the present out of the past and view the present itself as history.

Transformations of the urban space become the inevitable consequence of social and political changes, especially, the revolutionary ones. On the one hand, a new lifestyle leads to the modification of certain social practices, but, on the other hand, it leads to changing the symbolic context of their existence. A desire to break with the past and to fix such a break, to counterpoint it with all means becomes the common denominator of these factors. Such means also include new architectural forms and space solutions. Any regime needs its "places of memory" [20], which leads to the creation of new architectural structures. Things do not "have" a memory of their own, but they may remind us, may trigger our memory, because they carry memories which we have invested into them, things such as dishes, feasts, rites, images, stories and other texts, landscapes, and other "lieux de mémoire" [4]. The creation of new "places of memory" often accompanies by the deconstruction or loss of the previous ones. It is never the past itself that acts upon a present society, but representations of past events that are created, circulated and received within a specific cultural frame and political constellation [2].

The purpose of this article is to analyze the interrelation of social and political changes and transformation of the urban space.

The main tasks of this paper are to:

- consider representation of a city as a "place of memory" in social theory;
- analyze peculiarities of symbolic functions of the capitals;
- analyze constructional features of the "places of memory" in the urban space in the course of establishment of new political regimes (by the example of Soviet Moscow);
- analyze the transformation of the "places of memory" in the urban space within the context of social and political transition (by the example of post-socialist cities).

2. Theoretical Background

In the last third of the 20th century, we witnessed the beginning of active research of collective and cultural memory, and its various demonstrations [5, 7, 10, 15, 19]. Usually Halbwachs's works are the theoretical basis [10]. There are different modes of remembering in culture. Scientists study representations of memory in literature, language, mass media, etc. [3, 4, 9]. One of the research fields studies preservation and change of memory with architectural structures [2, 4, 5, 19, 20, 22]. Architecture is the material dimension of cultural memory. The space is viewed as a result of social activity and reflection of ideologies. That is why political transformations are often accompanied by the reconstruction of cities and creation of new ones.

The increased interest in the studies at the end of the 1980s was connected with the political changes in Eastern Europe, which entailed a revision of the past, a revision of memory, the elimination of the old places of memory and creation of new ones. Social memory may well be a result of intentional memory politics: architects and city planners not infrequently set out to accentuate a particular construction of a city's history, by emphasizing certain historical elements and destroying others [29]. Changes in the urban space, especially the capitals, allows tracing ideas and revising values [6, 12, 13, 16, 21, 23, 25, 27].

In this study, we research the problem of the symbolic legacies of cities. The methodological basis of the research is formed by the theory and applied analysis of cultural memory and architecture as its material dimension, as represented in the works of Simmel [24], Lefebvre [14, 15], Mumford [18], Nora [20], Confino [7], Therborn [25, 26], Assman [4, 5], and Assman [2, 3].

3. Argument of the paper

Welzer argues that spaces are a part of social memory; urban planning and architecture are ensembles in which historical eras are superimposed over one another in stone, concrete, and asphalt [29]. Memory refers to everything, which transports and communicates the past and interpretations of the past in a non-intentional manner: architecture, landscape, etc. Cities can tell their history because many buildings reflect the spirit of their time. Hence, space serves to symbolically mediate past events, underlining the constant, physical presence of the multilayered cultural past, which is even inscribed in the landscape and in the architecture [19].

The symbols of the cities in the 13th century were cathedrals, in the 16th century they were replaced by palaces and at the end of the 19th century; skyscrapers became the symbols of engineering thought triumph. According to Assmann cultural memory is a kind of institution; it is exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sounds of words or the sight of gestures, are stable and situation-transcendent [4]. The change of historical periods presupposes the reconstruction of the urban space; the symbols of a new era are created. Political changes inevitably lead to the transformation of urban space. The new government creates its own "places of memory". Monuments are the most important places of memory. They tell their stories from stone and metal. Assmann and Shortt argue that memory is not only susceptible to changes, it is itself a powerful agent of change; accredited with the power of transforming our relationship to the past and the ability to revise former values and attitudes, memory can create new frames of action [2].

Transition of the society from one type to another represents a difficult period, whose characteristics are not easy to record as the dynamics and transformation are the essence of the period. At the same time, architecture is able to materialize such dynamics and, like a frame by frame filming, records every stage of the change. At this, many phenomena of the transit period change significantly during their development. Moreover, during the transit period traditions give way to fashion. As soon as the ideology giving rise to this or that architecture changes, the architecture immediately loses any value in the public eye.

Cities are the keepers of history and culture, and even the buildings reflect the spirit of their time. The buildings of capital cities are the most important. Some political leaders begin to create a history from the foundation of the capital city. Washington, Brasilia, Canberra, Ottawa, New Delhi and so on are examples of new capitals. There are many "places of memory" in these cities. The National Mall in Washington, D.C. is the symbolic space for example. Designed in its basic outline by Washington architect Pierre L'Enfant in the 1790s, the National Mall today serves as the prime destination for national(ist) pilgrimages of U.S.-American citizens and as a tourist attraction for both American and international visitors. The Mall connects the major buildings of the three branches of government, the White House, the Capitol, and the Supreme Court in a larger topographical and symbolic context [11].

Foundation or transformation of the capital is common practice for a new government or a new political leader. Many try to leave a memory of themselves for a long time to come, creating monumental architectural structures. Therborn argues that capital cities are special cities, as centers and

as representations of nations they are sites of national power, and focal points of national identity as well as a human habitat, each with their specific ecology, more or less planned infrastructure, their economic metabolism, and everyday forms of urban life. To them, as nodes of national politics, culture, and economics, global or inter-national constraints and opportunities are particularly sensitive and important pertaining to the, always changing, place of the nation in the world [25.] Capital, the center of the state power, rests upon a whole bunch of traditions and symbols and embodies might of the state both within the country and abroad. A capital city is by definition a manifestation of the nation, but it is also the locale, the home of its residents, and a crucial node of inter-national relations and influences.

The most significant message is borne by architectural structures of the capital cities where the regime tries to leave a long memory about itself in the political and cultural space. Literature testifies that nobody ever loved Russian capitals, whatever the city it was. This is a widespread situation where the capital symbolizing the power and state causes conflicting emotions. London was also never specially loved by the Englishmen [24], as the citizens of Russia never loved Russian capitals. However, these are the capital cities, which more often become the ground for testing architectural innovations.

Saint Petersburg was a new capital of the Russian Empire. The city was initially built by the First Russian Emperor Peter I (known as "the Great") as a capital, its plan was accurately considered. The city constructed by Peter I was the capital from the beginning of the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century. For these two centuries, Moscow was left to itself and, on the contrary, developed rather chaotically. After Peter I transferred the seat of government to St Petersburg in 1703, Moscow languished, for some 200 years largely deserted by the ruling classes. From a traditional seat of the Russian nobility, it was transformed to a center of trade and industry, where the merchant elite became more influential than the gentry. According to Behrends the city melted into the Russian countryside, and there was a large zone of transition between the urban areas and the rural surroundings [6]. The reversion of the capital to Moscow in 1918 required modernization of the city, recovery of its political and symbolic functions. [28] The reconstruction of Moscow at the beginning of the 20th century was one of the largest projects of reconstruction of the urban space in Russia.

In the 20th century, the functional dominance of Moscow within the Russian urban system became very apparent. Moscow was not only the place where political, administrative and economic power was located; it was also a

model of civilization for the whole country. [23] During the 20th century, Moscow changed from being a one million-person city in Russia to the largest European urban agglomeration. The growth and urbanization processes were particularly strong during the Soviet period.

4. Arguments to support the thesis

Behrends argues that the Soviet power transferred the capital back to Moscow, which was seriously reconstructed. To Stalin, modernization at breakneck speed was a precondition for the survival of the Soviet state in a world he perceived as hostile; in the course of the second five-year plan, beginning in 1932, Moscow became one of the showcases of Soviet modernity. [6] Stalin and his entourage launched a campaign to "reconstruct" the Russian metropolis. It was imperative that Moscow should be the world's prime example of a socialist city. The urban space of the state capital where proletariat won should have inevitably had a gigantic symbolic load: "Moscow ... had to become a place for demonstration of achievements of the new regime, a city whose inhabitants would be able to feel the promising communist future in their everyday life. The city was to become a communist Mecca for foreign pilgrims as well". [6] Moscow became the center of the proletariat's revolution, which workers of other countries could use as an example. The capital always bears an ideological function, but it was even hypertrophied in the USSR. Behrends argues that when transforming Moscow, the Bolsheviks constructed a new face of their regime representing them as incontestable leaders of the country. Their task included both the construction of a new soviet capital and the creation of a city to become the symbol of the whole Bolshevists mission and simultaneously the future global capital. [6] The memory of the past is still alive in the city environment but its historic significance is still disputed.

The 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s was the time of city construction debates and trailblazing experiments. Soviet power did not intend to keep any cultural heritage. Moreover, it was ruthlessly destroyed. Arguing with Le Corbusier, Ginzburg wrote: "You are the splendiferous surgeon of a modern city... You create wonderful gardens on the roofs of multistory houses striving to grant people an extra bit of green, you create charming mansions with ideal commodities, peace and comfort for their inhabitants. However, you do all this because you want to heal the city, try to essentially preserve it in the form created by capitalism. Here, in the USSR, we find ourselves in conditions that are more favorable: we are not connected to the past... We make the diagnosis for a modern city. We say:

yes, it is ill, terminally ill. However, we do not want to heal it. We prefer destroying it and start creating a new type of human settlement deprived of internal contradictions". [27]

The symbols of the last era were to should have given place to the new ones. The construction of a palace in the place of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was of particular significance: the destruction of the main Moscow church (a symbol of victory of the Russian Empire over Napoleon) was one of the steps aimed at the elimination of symbols of the past from the public space. The most ambitious project of the Soviet power was the Palace of the Soviets. The Palace of the Soviets was never constructed but many other architectural structures were built. However, we can see another skyscraper in the same style. The Seven Sisters are a group of seven skyscrapers in Moscow. The first realization of monumental cityscape was the luxurious Moscow underground opened in 1935.

Street and place names have also been changed en masse. As the road from the center of Moscow to Leningrad (St. Petersburg) Gorki Street (now reverted to its former name of Tverskaya Street) was the main street in the city. In those times, it became wide and straight. The radial leading on to the highway to Leningrad, Gorki Street was rebuilt to no less than 100 m between building frontages, and incidentally accommodating no less than three lanes of traffic in either direction. [1] Street and place names have also been changed. In planning terms, this meant the rebuilding of the city according to a grandiose ring and radial patterns, with wide boulevards on the grand model of Haussman's Paris, only grander.

For socialist regimes, the shaping of urban space was an important element of political projects aimed at creating new forms of society. [16] Houses-communes became a complete incarnation of the idea of "household communalization" and were widely spread in the prewar soviet cities. They are the heritage of the prewar epoch and evidence of social and architectural experiments of the 1920-1930s reminding us about the time of Constructionism and its ideas. A "house-commune" was an architectural and social movement in the early Soviet Union. The purpose of the "house-communes" was to "live together" with communal education of children, food preparation, household chores and recreation.

"Houses-communes" occupy an intermediate position in the urban space. On the one hand, buildings preserved until present usually have the status of architectural monuments, like the widely known Narkomfin Building at Novinsky Boulevard in Moscow. On the other hand, their state is usually so poor that preservation of a viable state of such facilities becomes as problematic for the city authorities as overhaul repairs of the "khrushchyovkas". Exceptions from the rule are infrequent. One of the

exceptions is the destiny of a "house-commune" at Ordzhonikidze Street ("house-commune" of the Textile Institute) a nine-year-long reconstruction of which finished in 2016. Mixed feelings towards that historic period symbolized by the "houses-communes" deepens the duality of their status: they are witnesses and monuments of the past, too embarrassing for many people, and this circumstance puts their existence at threat.

However, standards of the house construction were cardinally revised after a new political leader, Khrushchyov, rose to power. He offered a new idea of an individual apartment for every family instead of the communal household. Rapid construction of new quarters started. The construction of twin houses was rather cheap and made it possible to provide small but separate apartments to many families within a short period. A new city culture was developed based on the "minimum of life", primarily, on the space minimum principle. [18] They are not perceived as the historical city environment but rather as a problem inherited by the current generation. In their turn, "houses-communes" are considered as examples of the most trailblazing experiments.

There are many objects to dispute as far as there are no distinct criteria of their historical significance. Discussions of the "Soviet" (past, heritage, experience) continue. Kazakevich argues that the phenomenon of the "Soviet", formerly clearly defined and fully clear at various levels of public communication "becomes more and more vague, inexplicable, empty and problematic" after several decades of non-Soviet/post-Soviet existence. [12] Sometimes the private initiatives look like efforts to eliminate memories about the soviet period in the history of the country. One of the examples of desovietization is disputed around the transport interchange hub based on Voykovskaya subway station, which is urged to be renamed. Pyotr Voykov is considered one of the persons guilty in the murder of the last Russian Emperor Nikolas II and members of his family. In the Soviet Union Voykov was a hero; streets, factories and other facilities were named after him. After the canonization of the royal family in 2007, the Russian Orthodox Church urged the authorities to erase the name of the "regicide and infanticide" from public objects. Renaming the city facilities is an effort to change historical memory, which is anyway elective and discrete.

At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, reference of the "Soviet" to a place (its localization) was an important element of political and cultural struggle. However, for the last 10-15 years we might see how this trend to localization has been gradually losing its significance, its social and political importance. It is replaced by more universal categories. It is getting more and more difficult to give a conventional and steady definition

of the "Soviet". Hence, the Soviet era becomes history losing its negative and positive significance and integrity in the majority of the cities.

In Postsoviet Russia Moscow lost its symbolic meaning and became an economic center, in the first place. One of the key ideas of Yuri Luzhkov, the former mayor of Moscow, was to convert the city into a financial center. To meet such a status for Moscow, reconstruction of the urban space started again. Many business and trade centers appeared in the Russian capital; the construction of skyscrapers - Moscow International Business Center "Moscow City", started in 1992 and is still ongoing, was one of the most large-scale project.

Economic transformations lead to the growth of inequality, social stratification and a cardinal change of the image of multiple districts. During the USSR period, Moscow was not acquainted with such a phenomenon as ethnic settlement of districts and a significant difference between revenues of social groups. Moscow saw segregation, but it was merely politically based segregation. Differentiation of various city districts and their division into prestigious and non-prestigious ones became the consequence of the settlement of houses or districts by representatives of certain professions of various enterprises.

From the beginning of the 1990s, the Russian capital entered a new stage of development, and the image of the city changed dramatically. Post-Soviet development of Moscow tends to the infill construction, so, the development of elite quarters is hindered. Even in the neighborhood of Ostozhenka with the highest prices of apartments due to the proximity of the Kremlin and Cathedral of Christ the Saviour there are apartments inhabited by people who received the apartments from the USSR government. They do not want to move to other districts as far as the largest part of their lives is connected with the center of Moscow but still, those people are sometimes not that rich. That is why there are newly constructed elite houses in the center of Moscow, but the population of the central district of the capital is represented by the whole variety of the social strata.

One cannot call the quarters consisting exceptionally of new post-soviet buildings clearly elite, although the inhabitants at their own expense bought all the apartments in them, because they are located far from the center of the city. This, due to the high traffic of the transport arteries, causes lots of difficulties to their owners when moving around the city.

One can hardly find streets of modern Moscow with consistent architectural style. Eclecticism has become the main characteristics of the city. Hi-tech office buildings neighbor with mansions of tsar times. Multiple service business buildings actively struggle to win their customers under high competition. They use all the possible means to attract customers' attention.

The city space of Moscow is transformed to receive profit, in the first place. According to Light and Young, the removal of elements of the built environment and accompanying symbolic forms has been taken to be emblematic of the change of political and social system from state socialism to various forms of emerging capitalism. [16] Moscow is at a critical turning point, moving from being a socialist to a capitalist city. However, such situation is characteristic not only of Moscow but of many capitals of Eastern Europe. [25]

5. Arguments to argue the thesis

The capital of Romania as well as the capitals of other countries can tell us a lot about its history through its buildings from different historical periods. One of their sisters was built in Bucharest (Casa Presei Libere, 1952–1956).

Reconstruction of Bucharest by socialist leader Nicolae Ceauşescu is an example of large-scale transformation. Ceausescu wanted to create a new story, and indeed, Bucharest keeps a memory of it. During the 1980s, Nicolae Ceauşescu undertook a large-scale physical and symbolic remodelling of centre of the capital city, Bucharest, in order to reflect his particular blend of the ideals of Communism, his cult of personality, and his version of Romanian nationalism. [16] However, the 1989 Revolution brought an immediate halt to construction work and Ceaușescu's vision for remaking Bucharest was widely denounced.

The value of many architectural structures is controversial. The Parliament Palace (Casa Parlamentului) is one of the examples. By 1989, it was about 70%-80% complete. Casa Parlamentului is the second-largest administrative building in the world. However, for some Bucharesters it is an unwanted symbol, physical reminder of a period of austerity and deprivation that everyone wants to forget. Demolition of such a structure was difficult so Various alternative re-uses of the building were suggested, including a casino, a museum of totalitarianism, a theme park and a shopping mall. Since 1996, there is the home for Romania's post-socialist parliament and a part of the building is open for visitors.

Therborn argues that relatively little seems to have come out of the new Romanian interest in modernist architecture and projects for Bucharest. [25]

6. Dismantling the arguments against

The city space reflects social relations. Studying the agents involved in the construction of space and their behavior in the process, we can understand the functioning of the social structures.

According to Lefebvre [15] every society produces its own space or landscape; Changes in political regime often bring with them changes in the organization of public space. Lefebvre determines two components of any city: material reality (*ville*) including architecture, and social reality (*urban*) produced in the city including relations between the citizens, constructed and reconstructed with their actions and thoughts. [14] Of course, social studies are primarily interested in the urban life and urban society, which may be viewed separately from the material basis as opportunities of applying knowledge and implementing ideas of various levels. The city does not develop as a result of local actions and ideas of the inhabitants only. Its construction is at the same time defined by impersonal industrial relations and relations based on ownership, means, relations between classes, class struggle, ideologies (religious, philosophic, etc.) transcending the urban functioning level. [14] In order to "read" the city, to understand it, you should know the language and the system of symbols its creation is based on. Levebvre argues that the city can be read because it writes, because it was written. [14]

7. Conclusions

The city cannot exist outside time. Authorities and inhabitants inevitably convert certain buildings, districts, monuments connected to certain historical events or periods into the city symbols. *La belle Époque* was different in the post-soviet area. According to Portnov and Portnov, post-Soviet Lviv in Ukraine was looking for its "golden times" in the Austrian Empire, post-Soviet Odessa was looking for it in the Russian Empire, and post-Soviet Dnepropetrovsk was looking for it in Brezhnev's epoch. In this case, we can talk about another local example of secondary disposal of recognizable soviet symbolic structures under the conditions of no signs able to adequately reflect the post-soviet situation and post-soviet experience. [21] As a rule, choice of "a reference epoch" leads to urban development policy aimed at the reconstruction of this epoch in the urban space. The lack of vision of what a city should look like is, unfortunately, a rather widespread case.

Moscow is one of the examples of lack of orientation at any historical period. The city consequently loses a significant part of its historical environment. According to UNESCO experts, Moscow has already trespassed its point of no return. [17] As a rule, the cultural heritage is located in the central districts of the city where land plots are expensive. The city still has the so-called "prestige of the center". Social status is defined by cultural differences as well (for example, consumption). That is why purchase/rent of apartments or offices in the central districts of Moscow is in demand, and the demand requires new buildings.

The city environment changes due to political, economic and social transformations. Technical progress contributed to the social interactions transcending far beyond a certain geographical area due to the large-scale use of new communications, intense development of the transport infrastructure and, finally, global expansion of the internet. Today human life cannot be limited to the frames of one group existing "here and now" only as far as it disseminates more and more in the unlimited flows of network interactions. [8] However, the society cannot live without the past. Otherwise, it would be difficult for it to build the future.

Buildings or parts of buildings often visually represent memories, thus echoing the close connection between space and memory that goes back to antiquity. Whereas spatial order often indicates the easy accessibility of the past, spatial disorder suggests that the access to the past is difficult, intricate or even impossible .[19] Despite the importance of the urban landscapes of capital cities in expressing national identities and political order, cities are rarely complete expressions of the dominant political ideology and identity; for this to be achieved the city would need to be made entirely anew to fully express in built form the aspirations and agenda of the ruling order [16]. Urban landscapes are expressing national identity. Cities are full of Symbols. The city presents itself as an entity that has been subject to repeated refigurations and in which layers of history paid more or less attention thus overlap. [29]

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