

City as an open educational space: theory and practice

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Abstract - The process of urbanisation has dramatically changed the cultural reality of the late 20th - early 21st centuries. A number of academic claims that cities (not states) play the most important role in it today. This article analyses the opportunities of using city space as an open educational space, the conditions determining the pedagogic impact of the urban environment on its inhabitants are also discovered. The experience of implementing participatory educational projects in Nizhny Tagil, an industrial city in the Urals, is presented. Two cycles of historical quests are described. Both were initiated by the pedagogic university in order to enhance the historical memory of the city dwellers. The commemorative cycle includes the quests dedicated to the events of the Russian Civil War and the Great Patriotic War, as well as political reprisals. The second cycle, the Addresses of Child Creativity, presents the supplementary education system in our country. The authors come to the conclusion that a modern city can be seen as an open educational space, comprising various educational content in terms of its scope and quality. The open educational city space is used more intensively in bigger cities, where there are more informational, organisational, financial and other resources. The experience of Nizhny Tagil shows that it is possible to enhance the open educational space in medium-sized and smaller cities through participatory commemorative projects. Historical quests in the city are a good example of such projects. Various historical institutions take part in developing these projects. Apart from the educational results, these quests help to shape the city's identity and to found social partnerships between cultural and educational institutions. The inclusion of monuments and memorial plates on the buildings into the quest itinerary allows attracting the attention of the city-dwellers to the problem of the preservation of cultural legacy.

Keywords - city, city space, open educational space, city-dwellers, quest, historical memory, Nizhny Tagil.

I. INTRODUCTION

The process of urbanisation has dramatically changed the cultural reality of the late 20th - early 21st centuries. A number of academic claims that cities (not states) play the most important role in it today [1]. The transition towards postindustrial, information society and the establishment of education as one of the most important development drivers for national economies, as well as the trend towards the educational society and a number of innovations in the education system in Russia, enhanced the academic reflexion upon the city's educational capacities.

A proper literature review representing the pedagogical view of the city can be found in the article by T. A. Chichkanova [2], M. S. Yakushkina made an attempt to highlight key points concerning the notions of *educational space* and *educational environment* [3]; a large number of researchers analyse the role of universities in shaping the city's educational space in Russia [4, 5] and abroad [6]. We assume that the issues of social partnership between various institutions are covered in significantly smaller scales in professional literature concerning the establishment of a city's educational space, finding and creating the city's educational content enhancing the inhabitants' historical memory. That is why the authors of this article investigate these matters.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS (MODEL)

Prior to analysing the relevant practices of establishing and using open educational space of a given Ural city, let us clarify the authors' theoretical positions and approaches to the topic.

There is still no shared vision concerning the content and the relationships between the notions of *educational space* and *educational environment*.

Within this article, the open educational city space (OECS) is the space where educational processes take place, including the city's material and non-material cultural legacy, and the inhabitants' culture-establishing activities, that are open and available to people of different ages and social standing. The educational gist of the city space is not always obvious. People have to "reveal" it. We agree with the researches who claim that the city's pedagogical capacities depend on the amount of opportunities being used to reveal it. These capacities are revealed through the content, forms and methods of educational activities and eventivity.

The pedagogic capacities of the city space can be actualized in several global practices. Among the most vital ones are the following: *City as School*, aimed at teenagers, whose education within the traditional class-and-lesson system was deemed impossible [7]; *Jerusalem - Educational City*, proposing the development of individual educational itineraries for students and allowing to consider everybody's weak and strong points [8]. Within the scope of the latter project, the boundaries of the basic school were extended through the use of all possible

resources of the city (museums, parks, etc), the connection between formal and informal education was established, and students underwent practical training in various organizations. Both projects were aimed at socialization of the younger generation.

Ideas brought up by our compatriots are also worth being mentioned. For example, there was an idea to transform Moscow in Paideiapolis, the City of Education, through the rearrangement of the spaces and the creation of new ways of working with spaces, which can be later introduced throughout Russia.

Recently, while some power groups and states are carrying out large-scale manipulations concerning the past and vandalism at sites of memory occurs more frequently, it is becoming more urgent to instill historical memory in the younger generation and to motivate them to preserve the cultural legacy, in which this memory is materialized. The concept of the city as open educational space can help find various instruments, formats and methods to address the aforementioned issue.

An educational quest can be one of the formats, actualizing historical memory and motivating youngsters to conscious reading of the “commemorative city text”. The “commemorative city text” is a symbolic structure in the cityscape, incorporating the “sites of memory”. According to P. Nora, “a site of memory” is “any significant unity of material or ideal order, turned into a symbolic element of the memorial legacy of some community by people’s will of the work of time” [9]. In the space of a given city, these sites include monuments, memorial plates on buildings, streets, squares, etc with commemorative names, as well as the institutions preserving the memory of the past (such as archives, museums, libraries, educational and research centres).

There is a trend among modern memorial institutions to arrange participatory projects, based on the idea of involvement, alongside with the affectation policy [10], aimed at creating specific conditions in order for visitors to experience a special emotional state. These trends bear show that cultural and educational institutions started to accept the fact that general audience becomes more and more used to interactive education and entertainment, and it is not satisfied by just “attending” these institutions and their events. According to N. Simon, “a participatory cultural institution is a place where visitors can create, exchange opinions and socialize while considering the topics connected to the institution”. The following three ideas are crucial for participatory cultural institutions:

Cultural institutions shall be *audience-oriented*.

While interacting with culture, visitors create *their own meanings*.

Spectators’ feedback can *actively and creatively influence* both the organization of exhibitions and the audience-oriented programs [11].

We assume that a city can be seen as an open participatory institution, and therefore, when developing educational projects to be implemented in the city space, the ideas of N. Simon are worth considering.

In Nizhny Tagil, one of the major industrial centres of the Urals founded in 1722, there is a great experience of developing and executing historical quests in the city space, aimed at enhancing the historical memory of the younger inhabitants of the city. These quests are virtually participatory. This experience is analysed in the next section.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In 2018, the authors developed a quest called *Heroic Names*, mainly aimed at attracting youngster’s attention to the city’s historical and cultural legacy connected to the Great Patriotic War, its participants and heroes.

Among the organisers of the quest, there were the Nizhny Tagil branch of Russian State Vocational Pedagogical University (RSVPU), Nizhny Tagil museum of fine arts, the municipal headquarters of All-Russia Social Movement of Victory Volunteers, Nizhny Tagil centre for the development of tourism, and secondary general school No. 1 n.a. N. K. Krupskaya.

Students of general and vocational schools aged over 14 were offered participation in the quest. They had to create a team and apply for participation in the game.

The preparation for the quest included the study of the materials on the *Virtual Tour. Travelling to monumental history* website, which was developed by the personnel of the fine arts museum, and on the displays of the *Heroic Names* exhibition. The quest itinerary led the teams to eight objects, monuments and buildings located in Nizhny Tagil and connected to the Great Patriotic War.

While preparing the tasks, we used the facts given directly on the memorial plates or the facts leading to the creation of monuments. We did not strive to check the students’ knowledge but to create and enhance their interest in the events that must not be forgotten. Due to this fact, the tasks had different forms, focuses and levels of difficulty.

For example, at the memorial plate on the building, from which the soldiers of Ural Voluntary Tank Corps left for the front, the participants of the quest got the task testing their attention and teamwork. They were offered a text about the Ural Voluntary Tank Corps, which they had to read and then answer questions to it together. As a result, the students learnt when the idea of the Voluntary Tank Corps appeared, how many entry applications were handed in in Nizhny Tagil, which cities were freed by Ural tankmen, how many medals the members of the Corps got, etc.

The questions concerning tanks were asked by the T-34 tank located near the regional museum. Firstly, participants’ general knowledge was tested when they had to name some facts about Soviet tanks used in the Great Patriotic War, and secondly, they had to match the pictures of tanks with their technical specifications. The quest practice showed that today teenagers have little knowledge of military equipment, but the tasks given allowed them to learn more about legendary IS-1, KV, T-34.

The technical theme was continued by the memorial plate for the formation of mobile artillery regiment at 39

Frunze st. Having remembered the most famous mobile artillery vehicle of the Great Patriotic War (vehicle-mounted rocket launcher Katyusha), the participants sang the famous cognominal song.

Commemorating the biographies of the citizens of Nizhniy Tagil, whose names were given to the city streets, began at the memorial plate in the Hero of Soviet Union S. A. Chernykh Street. The quest participants had to show their awareness about the heroic townsman, picking from the large set of cards provided by the organisers those connected with the life of S. A. Chernykh (the cards included dates, portraits, biographic data, branches of troops). The participants learned about the branch of troops, in which the hero served, his military rank when he became a hero and what was he pronounced hero for. At another memorial plate, the participants named their famous townsmen after hearing about their deeds. In order to complete this task, the participants had to remember what they learned from the *Heroic Names* exhibition.

The next task was practical. At the memorial plate commemorating the law enforcement personnel who died fighting for Motherland, the teams had to show their rifle assembling skills.

The memorial plate on the building, from which women volunteers of Nizhniy Tagil left for the front, reminded the students of the hardships experienced by women at war. The corresponding task, however, was funny enough, because the team captain had to tell his team about the functions of women at the frontline by gestures only. As a result, the participants learnt that women at the frontline were signalists, paramedics, pilots, snipers, scouts, etc.

The monument of the workers of Vysokogorsk Iron Mine (VIM) was the first memorial in Nizhniy Tagil, dedicated to the townsfolk perished during the Great Patriotic War. The participants were asked to think about the meaning of some of the monument's elements.

Having completed all of the tasks, the students handed in their itinerary charts to the quest organisers. When summarising, the following factors were considered: the accuracy of answers, the itinerary completion time, the presence of photographs from every object. Irrespectively of the results achieved, the participants were satisfied with the quest and ready to walk the streets of the city again in order to learn about the events, in which their townsmen took part.

This quest was held twice. The first time, on May 12th, it started in the city's oldest school, No 1 n. a. N. K. Krupskaya, at the premises of the *Victory Has Our Faces* exhibition, held by the school museum as a participatory project. Teachers, students and their parents collected photographs, prepared historical notes and put up a photo gallery about 71 participants of the Great Patriotic War, including 32 great-grandfathers of the students', 34 graduates and 5 teachers of this school [12]. This quest finished in the fine arts museum. Here, while waiting for the results of the quests, the participants could see the exhibition of child paintings dedicated to the war, and try the bread and soup prepared by the volunteers using the war-time recipes.

The second time the quest was held on May 22nd. It started at 6 a.m. (4 a.m. Moscow time) as a symbolic memory act on this Sorrowful Day for our country. The quest got an emotional and semantic conclusion in the form of *War is...* installation on the square by the Pedagogical institute, including a one-minute silence and a music and dance performance by the creative clubs of the institute and the city schools.

To mark the centenary of the Russian Civil War, a quest called *Fighting for the Great Dream* was prepared. One of the social partners of this quest was Nizhniy Tagil historical archive, which led to the archive station in the quest itinerary, where the participants had to show their interpretation skills using the archive documents presented at the exhibition in the archive's reading hall.

The social significance of the quest consisted in the attraction of townsfolk attention to the events of the Civil War that took place in our city. The Civil War is the conflict between the citizens of one country because of social dissociation. It is hard to say that our modern society is united. Unfortunately, nationalism, extremism, and social inequality can be found there. The quest organisers think that commemorating the events of the fratricidal war shall encourage young people to think about the lessons of the past and be more tolerant and responsible today.

The quest had the following scenario. The teams gathered in the morning at Nizhniy Tagil museum of fine arts, signed up and, having received the itinerary chart and the map of the city, went to the quest locations near the monuments and memorial plates dedicated to the events of the Civil war and in the exhibition hall of Nizhniy Tagil historical archive.

In the building housing the first Komsomol club after the Revolution and from where the volunteers went to the Polish front in 1920, the quest organiser offered the teams to look at the agitation posters of the Civil War period. Each poster had one work blanked so that the participants had to reconstruct it.

By the memorial plate on the building of the city's first RYCL committee (7 Prospekt Lenina), the organiser spoke about the significant role of the Komsomol members in the battles for the Soviet regime and offered the participants to study the text about the Komsomol organisations in the Urals during the Civil War. After reading the text, the participants were able to say which front the Komsomol members were sent to by the decree of the II All-Russia RYCL conference; how many Komsomol members fought in the Civil War, what the Komsomol youth group did in Yekaterinburg during Kolchak rule; which medal the Soviet government gave to the Komsomol for their heroic efforts during the Civil War, Intervention, etc. Through the text, the students got facts and statistics about the participation of the Ural youth in the Civil War battles.

By the monument of the Freedom Fighters Perished in 1917 –1930es (Komsomolskiy square), the teams had to remember fictional works representing events of the Civil War. The organiser laid out a number of novels including *Chapayev*, *Rout*, *White Guard*, *How the Steel was Tempered*, *Road to Calvary*, *Quiet Flows the Don* in front of the participants and gave them six excerpts from these

books. The participants had to match the excerpts with the novels.

At the memorial plate on the building where the Red Army regiments were formed (17 Prospekt Lenina), the organiser recalled the opposing forces in the Civil War. He spoke that among the red and the white were talented commanders and heroic soldiers. At this location, the participants had to work with two sets of cards. Among the name cards, the students had to find the red commanders, the white movement leaders and those who were not involved in the Civil War. The medal cards also had to be divided into groups according to which army had them, and find those that have nothing to do with the Civil War.

At the memorial plate on the building housing the Red Army headquarters in 1918 (21 Prospekt Lenina), the organiser recalled specific terminology of the Civil War and asked the team leader to define the terms in a card within three minutes. The cards had such terms as the Civil War, white guardsmen, red guardsmen, intervention, the Entente, Volunteer army, prodravystka, Komsomol members.

The teams found the task given by the monument of the first Komsomol members in Nizhniy Tagil, also known as the Youth of the Soviet Country (the square in front of the Sovremennik cinema) especially interesting. The organiser discussed the concept of the Youth of the Soviet Country monument with the participants and asked them to stage the dialogue between the girl and the young man leaving for the Civil War. This task gave the participants an opportunity to think how their agetates felt when they said goodbye to each other, presumably forever. After that, the participants were asked to sing the Komsomolskaya Proshchalnaya song. The lyrics were given out, and the participants found the music on the Internet.

By the Monument to the Czechoslovak Legionnaires Perished on the Way to the Free Motherland in 22.09–18.10.1918 (55 Krasnogvardeyskaya st., Skorbyashchinskiy monastery), the organiser asked the participants to recall the facts about the battles with Czech legionnaires in Nizhniy Tagil, posted on Virtual tour. Travelling to monumental history website. The task was to find true facts among the data provided by the organiser.

The organiser read statements and assessed the participants' answers. For example:

1. The monument to the Czechoslovak legionnaires perished during the Civil War is located in the place where in the autumn of 1918, there was the defence line of Nizhniy Tagil.

2. The funeral service for the perished Czechs was held in the Church of Holy Mother's Isagoge (Vvedenskaya Tserkov), and they were buried in the graveyard of Skorbyashchenskiy women monastery.

3. *This monument has 67 named, corresponding to the number of legionnaires perished in battles near Tagil.*

4. The Czechoslovak legionnaire corps was one of the military regiments of the Russian army, composed in the autumn of 1917 from the volunteer Czechs and Slovaks.

The quest tasks were given out and assessed by student volunteers.

Upon the completion of the itinerary, the teams came to Nizhniy Tagil State Social and Pedagogical Institute, where they could have hot tea and army-style pearl porridge. While the organisers were summing up the quest results, the participants could attend a dispute lecture prepared by history students under the supervision of their teacher. All in all, 17 teams (98 people) took part in the quest. They were students of various educational institutions and youth associations of Nizhniy Tagil.

After the quest, the participants shared their emotions. We would like to quote one of the reviews from a schoolgirl from Prigorodnyi district: "It was the second time I took part in the quest. It was really exciting! We have not yet covered this topic at school, so we had to read the material ourselves and visit the fine arts museum website. It helped to go through the quest. There was a great lecture by university students. Now I want to study at their institution. We will definitely take part in the next quest."

In our opinion, the quality indices for the implementation of this quest are:

1. the satisfaction of the participants, their positive attitude to the tasks provided, their intention to participate in the future educational quests organised by us;
2. careful fulfillment of their responsibilities by the volunteer students who organised and facilitated the quest (there was no reprimand from the teams concerning the tasks at certain quest stations).

Results for a participant:

- enhancement and improvement of the knowledge of the Civil War events, its participants, and the connection of this war to the history of Nizhniy Tagil;
- active information acquisition experience, formulating civilian values;
- mastering new cooperation experience;
- personal reflexion development.

Results for a team:

- emotional pull towards further search activities;
- development of communication skills and small group cooperation;
- acceptance of the moral code and the rules of cooperation;
- developing analysis and self-awareness skills during group reflexion.

Results for volunteer students and quest organisers:

- getting professional and methodical competences in civic and national education

Results for pedagogues, supporting the quest participants

- getting practical experience in organising and facilitating educational quests.

Results for social partners:

- implementing their educational functions;
- drawing attention towards their institution's work.

The third commemorative quest was called *Terror topography. Political reprisals in Nizhniy Tagil* is due to be held in October 2019. It is based on the cognominal excursion route, developed by Professor V. M. Kirillov [13], the head of historical information science lab of NTSPi, created in 1996 as a research centre for the history of political reprisals in the USSR. The quest, like the signature excursion of V. M. Kirillov, consists of three information blocks. The first includes objects and buildings of the period between 1917 and 1928, famous for the harsh terror of the Civil War, the establishment of labor camps and the legislation leading to the reprisals of the 1930es. The second block includes objects and buildings connected to the forced collectivization, dekulakization and special settlement. The third information block is dedicated to the events of the Great Terror in the period from October 1936 to November 1938, when in Sverdlovskaya oblast only, there were about 48,000 people arrested, over 18,000 of whom were executed. The fourth block is connected to the reprisal period of the 1940es - 1950es. During the Great Patriotic War, there were 7 camp systems in Sverdlovskaya oblast: Ivdellag, Sevurlag, Tagillag, Bogoslovlag, Lobvinlag, Vosturallag, and Tavdinlag. The first five of them were located in the Nizhniy Tagil area. The quest finishes with the Penance block, including the monuments and memorial plates dedicated to the victims of political reprisals.

. When developing a reprisal quest, we decided to change the organisation methods for the participants' activity at quest locations. That is why we focussed on recording information in itinerary charts (filling the gaps in the texts, short answers to questions, evaluations, "emotional scale", etc). The quest must be information-intensive and emotionally rich, it must include some activities aimed at searching for information by the participants themselves.

Therefore, the commemorative quest cycle allows the participants to get a small-scale but direct experience of the most pressing historical issues of the first half of the 20th century through interactions with the city.

In the spring of 2019, our institute entered the project for social and pedagogic reenactment of extra curriculum routine of the Soviet school students in the second half of the 20th century, which was initiated by a research group from the Educational pedagogic and psychology institute of Moscow city pedagogic university [14]. The fieldwork of conducting narrative interviews [15], audio records and videos on the routines of Tagil schoolchildren during the Soviet period inspired a new cycle of educational quests that could be held in the city space. The draft title of the cycle is *Addresses of Child Creativity in the City*. In Nizhniy Tagil, there is a rather large network of supplementary education institutions allowing children to do various kinds of creative activities: music, arts, dancing,

and technology. One of the quests from this cycle is dedicated to the addresses of child creativity clubs during the Soviet period. During the Soviet childhood quest, today's children could try some activities typical of Soviet schoolchildren in various clubs, pickup games, and school celebrations.

This quest cycle can be educational for participating children, informative for their parents and pedagogic students, and presentational for supplementary education institutions.

While assessing the educational results of the city quests, it is possible to note down the following:

1. Quests allow intensifying understanding, acquisition and creative employment of the knowledge when solving practical problems. The efficiency is ensured through the more active involvement of the students into the processes of both acquisition of information and direct (here and now) usage of it.

2. Quests increase participants' motivation and involvement in solving the problems discussed, which gives them an emotional push towards further searching activities, motivates them for specific actions, and raises their awareness of the education process.

3. Quests promote the participants' ability to think outside the box, to see the problem and its solutions, to justify their position and life values; they also help develop such skills as listening to other points of view, cooperation, collaboration, tolerance and goodwill towards the opponents.

4. Quests help to get new experience of activity, its organisation, communication, and emotions [16].

IV. CONCLUSION

Thus, a modern city can be seen as an open educational space, comprising various educational content in terms of its scope and quality. The open educational city space is used more intensively in bigger cities, where there are more informational, organisational, financial and other resources. The experience of Nizhniy Tagil shows that it is possible to enhance the open educational space in medium-sized and smaller cities through participatory commemorative projects, aimed at the enhancement of the citizens historical memory. Historical quests in the city are good practice for such projects. Apart from the educational results, they help to shape the city's identity and to found social partnerships between cultural and educational institutions. Using city monuments and memorial plates on the building allows the city dwellers to learn about the past from these silent "stone witnesses".

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