

Problems of Structural Understanding of the Image of Medieval Town/City

Aleksey Shchenkov^{1,*} Nataliya Antonova^{1,a}

¹Scientific Research Institute of the Theory and History of Architecture and Urban Planning, branch of the Central Institute for Research and Design of the Ministry of Construction and Housing and Communal Services of the Russian Federation, Moscow, Russia

^aE-mail: antonovane@mail.ru

*Corresponding author. E-mail: alexseraf@yandex.ru

ABSTRACT

The main object of the article is a problem of interconnection of material and non-material in the image of city. The authors start with a supposition that elements of non-material heritage of a settlement or its historical centre possess a structure, in many aspects similar to that one of the complex of material heritage. There also some substantial dominants, as well as links of the second and third level could be highlighted. At that, structures of material and non-material heritage are coordinated in a different way in various cases: their substantial dominants and substantial links can coincide or not. The topic is presented as two case studies of famous historical cities of Russia: Nizhny Novgorod and Novgorod the Great. Their comparison shows that historical and cultural component – the memory of the past of the city – takes a significant place in the content of their non-material heritage. The images preserved in memory interact with the real view of certain monuments of material culture; together with them, these images reveal the historical, symbolical, and sacred essence of the city heritage.

Such interaction is especially actual if it is ensured by the coincidence of the dominants of the habitual system of historical and architectural objects with dominants of images preserved in the urban culture, in the memory of the citizens. An analysis of the data of opinion polls gives as a right to say that material and non-material heritage participates in the shaping of the general image of a city, connecting such image with its identity.

Keywords: image of town/city, identity, material and non-material heritage, architectural and spatial characteristics, cultural traditions

I. INTRODUCTION

The traditional understanding of the problem in question is based on the supposition that the image structure is formed with a hierarchy of architectural and spatial peculiarities of a certain town/city, as well as some elements of historical information (of a location or a construction specific in its historical role and connected with some famous persons).

Nowadays, it is clear that the problem is not limited with architectural peculiarities of a location. Since the late twentieth century, the role of non-material heritage of settlements has attracted more and more attention. Beside habitual spatial features of a certain historical town/city, its singular local cultural traditions and local

ideas on the city character are taken for something important [1].

Traditions can manifest themselves in some forms of common day life and behavior, in shaping and developing some local creativity, in the level of interest to the local history and architectural monuments, as well as to the peculiarities of the city and suburban landscape, and so on. Today, it is recognized that only the totality of material and non-material heritage gives a complete characteristic of a town/city, depicts its individuality – or, using a contemporary concept, its identity.

Recent decade, a significance of non-material heritage is an object of regular discussions – mainly, in the context of the tasks of “branding” of historical settlements. The problem of interconnections between material and non-material elements in the city image

*Fund: This paper was funded by the Program of Fundamental Researches of the Ministry of Construction, Housing and Utilities of the Russian Federation and the Russian Academy of Architecture and Construction Sciences 2020, the Research Project 1.5.4.

stays aside. The article is centered at some aspects of such interactions.

The authors proceed from the assumption that elements of non-material heritage of a settlement or its historical centre possess a structure, in many ways similar to that one of the complex of material heritage, which is more accustomed. That is, they also can contain substantial dominants of the second and third levels. They also can demonstrate interlinks. At that, structures of material and non-material heritage can be combined in various ways: with or without coincidence of substantial dominants and substantial interlinks between them.

Realizing the complexity of the proposed topic, we will try to consider it on the sample of two Russian historical cities – the authors possess a sufficient volume of data on them.

II. ANALYSIS OF TWO CITIES: NIZHNY NOVGOROD AND NOVGOROD THE GREAT

It is very instructive to compare the two famous historical cities of Russia with similar names: Nizhny Novgorod (Novgorod the Low) and Novgorod the Great. Both of them are well-known with their rich history, and architectural constructions and monuments. Even mentioning these cities provides a row of associations in images. But a preliminary survey of the

data proves an obvious difference between a contemporary historical and architectural image of these two cities, as well as a different perception of their heritage.

First of all, it is seen in the analysis of the evaluation of these cities by their inhabitants; secondly, it is evident from the professional observation of their architectural merits. The identity problems of both cities are assessed by us largely on the basis of socio-anthropological opinion polls. Among such surveys on Nizhny Novgorod, the most detailed and informative one is the work by N. C. Radina [2], on Novgorod the Great – the work by N. G. Fedotova [3]; so, we will rely on them mostly, also attracting data from other sources and publications.

Let us start with Nizhny Novgorod. In their interviews, its inhabitants mention about their wonderful Kremlin but do not develop the topic. One respondent says about nice roses cultivated in the Kremlin; another one mentions that it is a pleasant place for walks, as well as Pokrovskaya Street. Only one person mentions, that in the Kremlin you “feel old times” (“Fig. 1”). Only a few general mentions are given on other city antiquities. Inhabitants speak with enthusiasm about the panoramic river views and the river landscape. They often note colossal steps from the Chkalov’s monument down to the river.



Fig. 1. Nizhny Novgorod. Panoramic view of the Kremlin.

It seems that the Kremlin and the antiquities are just historical and cultural ideas which have no specific content for the most part of citizens. In contrast, the landscape peculiarities are noted much and enthusiastically.

Among the historical events, people mention the volunteers’ militia of 1612 gathered in Nizhny Novgorod, which initiated the liberation of Moscow from Polish occupation during the so called the Time of Troubles; citizens recall leaders of that militia – Minin and Pozharsky. At that, nobody says that Kuzma Minin

had been buried in the Arkhangelsky Cathedral of the Kremlin, in Nizhny Novgorod. We should resume that the historical topic is detached from material testimonies, which could prove and illustrate it. Paying tribute to historical issues, residents necessarily note that Nizhny is an actively developing large metropolis: “trade centers are growing here as mushrooms after the rain”. They mention the significance of the Trade Fair over the Oka River – not only as a historical sightseeing, but mainly as a notable contemporary commercial centre (they often say that thanks to that fair Nizhny was called “the purse of Russia” in the past). But the city inhabitants speak surprisingly few about the contemporary local industry.



Fig. 2. Nizhny Novgorod. Pokrovskaya Street.

The totality of the collected statements and their comparison with the complex of historical monuments of Nizhny Novgorod makes us note the peculiarity of estimates of local residents¹. They often mention the architectural heritage, but say only in short about it and in general terms. Maybe it is explained with a loss of a number of city dominants – cathedrals and important churches in the main city streets. But there is another explanation: maybe citizens are not ready to describe architecture. When they speak about contemporary buildings, the descriptions are basically limited with the word “beautiful”.

The analysis of data on Novgorod the Great gives us another picture, in some aspects similar to that one of Nizhny Novgorod, but in many other aspects rather different one. Partly it can be explained with another size of the city, and with other methods of gathering data². The general picture of Novgorod presented by N.

A popular topic is the character of the city life. Residents stress that it is active and interesting. In this context they often mention the main street of the historical city – Pokrovskaya street; people like that it is pedestrianized, that there are many café, shops, and theatres in it. There are many beautiful contemporary buildings in this street, and it is never boring here (“Fig. 2”). On the residents’ opinion, Nizhny Novgorod is a large contemporary city with a calm rhythm of life – they even call it “a quiet city”, opposing to Moscow, the rhythm of which is evaluated negatively.

G. Fedotova as a statistic analysis of residents’ statements is more laconic, although quite representative. And the results for two cities are quite comparable.

Local citizens also prefer to name but not to describe precious objects and features of their city, but their “naming” is more detailed, and they mention more objects of attention. The Kremlin is at the first place (more than a half of statements); the second place is taken with the Cathedral of the Holy Wisdom (Sofiisky); about a quarter of respondents use concepts of “ancient city” and “unique architecture” as a whole (“Fig. 3”).

¹ N. K. Radina was interviewed twice, in 2002 and 2014. For the first time, more than 500 people took part in the polls, and at the second stage – more than 300 people. Respondents of different ages and educational levels were recruited.

² N. G. Fedotova was based mainly not on exclusive interviews, but on the processing of Internet data.



Fig. 3. Novgorod the Great. Panoramic view of the Kremlin from another bank of Volkhov.

Looking at the details, we see that under the concept of “unique architecture” they mean churches (from other online sources we know that there are about 60 churches in Novgorod now, and a half of them are used for the holy service) (“Fig. 4”). Sometimes, they speak about fragments of preserved pre-war urban blocks

which are perceived as a part of historical sightseeing. A few respondents mention the Monument for 1000 years of Russia, birch-bark manuscripts, ancient republic, and its *Veche*. The main historical figure for residents of Novgorod is Alexander Nevsky.



Fig. 4. Novgorod the Great. Yaroslav's Court.

There is an important note by N.G. Fedotova about “a modest place” of water spaces of the Volkhov River and Ilmen Lake “in the spectre of cultural phenomena significant for Novgorodians”, in spite of the fact of the great significance of Volkhov and Ilmen in the landscape and their obvious attractiveness. The author supposes that it could be explained with the fact that the landscape is included into big semantic compositions, which prevent its perception as a singular precious object; but we agree with it only in a part. In some case, for instance, in the panoramic composition of *Detinets*,

as it is seen from another bank of Volkhov, the river plays only a secondary role – and the main attraction is at the town wall, bell tower, and the cathedral of the Kremlin. But, from the other side, it is important that on a local flat relief there are no dramatic view points at the water space – oppose to Nizhny Novgorod.

A typical feature of the city image, consciously accepted and verbalized by the residents is the organic connection of the verbal, conceptual characteristics with the images of urban architecture as they are

perceived today, the connection of material and non-material heritage. The leading role in this imagery belongs to the Kremlin and to the Cathedral of the Holy Wisdom in it; they are described as “majestic” and “ancient”; the abundance of preserved churches allows to speak about “unique architecture” of the city. The ancient historical nature of the city is proved with archaeological findings on the territory of the city – they are mentioned by respondents, as well as a museum of wooden architecture by the city.

We could add some other observations from various sources, which characterize a connection between the history and the modernity of Novgorod. Citizens appreciate a band of park adjacent to the walls of the Kremlin. Beside walking paths, there are several café, monuments, and fountains in it. The net of the paths allows to make views at the fortress towers. In the

centre the park is divided with a large square, where an impressive building of the local authorities is located – it is decorated with a mighty colonnade (“Fig. 5”). The Museum of Fine Arts, and a number of boutiques are aside. A street with an unusual name *Gazon* (Lawn) starts from the park and the square [4]. It is considered the main street of the city. The key common spaces of the contemporary city are subdued with its historical ring structure, which determines the already made connection between the descriptions of Novgorod the Great with the location of its historical monuments. It is one of the most important factors of the totality of the city as a living social and cultural body. Let us note, that residents almost ignore serious changes in the urban planning made in the latest half of the century. After the destructions of the WWII, they forget the earlier city. But the key constructions of the pas are still on their places keeping the image of the “ancient city”.



Fig. 5. Novgorod the Great. Sophiiskaya Square.

Opposite to Novgorod the Great, we do not observe the unity of two systems in Nizhny: we mean material characteristics of the city and its virtual images – the unity of which could connect historical knowledge and contemporary images-pictures. As the opinion pool made by O.S. Chernisvskaya shows, many residents of Nizhny hardly can distinguish individual peculiarities of their city [5].

Now, we do not set a task to understand, why features of the city history were not imprinted in the historical memory of inhabitants of Nizhny Novgorod. Let us stress the losses of cultural monuments in the twentieth century only. We have already mentioned that – as it was in many cities – in 1930-s, in Nizhny Novgorod all leading cult buildings were destroyed, and they had determined the very image of the city. In the

Kremlin, they demolished the Transfiguration and the Assumption Cathedrals, near the Dmitrievsky Gates – the Annunciation Church. The image of the Kremlin was impoverished. In the historical centre, they destroyed the Intercession, St. Barbara, and Tikhvin Churches, which gave their names for the most important city streets (Pokrovskaya, Varvarkaya, Tikhvinskaya), as well as some other churches. The traditional buildings disappeared in whole blocks. The old image of the city was wiped out, but new constructions did not create a compositional unity. Even the main street – Pokrovskaya – does not noteworthy: shops and restaurants are not enough to shape an image. Precious old blocks with their dominants exist as small locations on the edge of the old city, in the zone between the Pochainsky Combe and the Oka River.

Actions for the sake of amelioration of the centre of Nizhny Novgorod in 2016-2018 made that part of the city better, but it had no influence at the opinions of respondents and online visitors. Now, they also mention Rozhdestvenskaya Street – it is located along Oka, as well as Fedorovskaya Embankment over Oka, on the upper line of the bank. It proves the importance of contemporary improvement works and activity for the sake of attraction of the city. Noteworthy, there are no preserved historical buildings on Fedorovskaya

Embankment, there are contemporary multistoried buildings only. But the view from the embankment at the monuments of the lower terrace, at the panoramic landscapes over the river, and at the main block of the Fair of Nizhny Novgorod are picturesque. It is important that contemporary urban planning of that upper line of the bank was oriented at some monuments and the Oka River (they are regularly mentioned as the city sightseeing) (“Fig. 6”).



Fig. 6. Nizhny Novgorod. Improvement of Fedorovskaya Emb.

III. CONCLUSION

The material allows us to draw some conclusions. The main conclusion is about the obvious common participation of material and non-material components of heritage in shaping the image of two historical cities, which we have considered in the article.

Our arguments show that the historical and cultural component, the memory of the city past, occupies a significant place in the content of non-material heritage. The images preserved in the collective memory interact with real views of monuments of material culture; and together they reveal the historical, symbolic, and sacred content of the city heritage. Such interaction is especially efficient if it is based on the coincidence of the dominants of the habitual system of historical and architectural objects familiar to us with the dominants of images preserved in the city culture, in the memory of local residents. However, the coincidence of the dominants can be complete in various degrees; it can be clearly seen in the urban environment of Novgorod the Great, and it is weakly presented in Nizhny Novgorod.

Another result of the analysis consists in understanding the significance of the natural landscape for the image of the city. This is clearly demonstrated in the description of the city given by inhabitants of Nizhny Novgorod. Here, the perception of the material

beauty of the local landscape dominates; and noteworthy, that this beauty is realized “by itself”, as a part of the image of a particular city, as a feature of its identity. Such native, habitual beauty of familiar places is perceived – and it is clearly manifested in descriptions of the city by all respondents from Nizhny Novgorod. But at the same time, the landscape is also connected with the image of the culture of a certain settlement, because it is also included in the consciousness of the inhabitants as a space of their activity (a river is a waterway, it is fishing; a forest is a natural storeroom, etc.), as such, nature is presented in the memories of residents of Nizhny Novgorod. (We point out that in some cities the landscape also manifests itself as a keeper of memory about significant events and traditions, but it is not observed in the samples considered in this article).

Finally, there is a special aspect of non-material heritage which reflects mainly the features of the culture of everyday life (what psychologists characterize as a cognitive component of identity). The pace of life, habits of behavior and a number of similar features of urban life also form a part of the image of the city. The traditions of the rhythm of life, the nature of the relationship of citizens, and the manner of their communication are of importance, as well as and established standards of comfort. As we can see,

residents of both cities considered that aspect as a significant one, although it is presented in a more detailed way in the statements of respondents from Nizhny Novgorod. However, this seemingly pragmatic component of the image also corresponds in one or another way with material heritage. The pace of life and manner of behavior inevitably fit into the historically given channel of the urban planning; recreational spaces in their structure are determined not only by functional motives, but also by the desire to connect everyday life with the need to perceive the peculiarities of the cultural content of a certain place. It can be observed in the nature of the improvement of the ring park in Novgorod, oriented at the city walls and towers, in the new improvement of the upper part of the embankment in Nizhny Novgorod, which connected recreational functions with the ability to contemplate a preserved fragment of the old city.

Of course, the presented observations are only a small fragment of the topic requiring further studies. Our field of attention in the article was limited with the samples of two cities. Incomplete research tools were based only on interviews of general character. But even under these conditions, we begin to comprehend how non-material and material heritage participate together in the shaping of the city image, how such city image and its identity are related.

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