

Changes in the Idea of a Soviet City in 1960s — Early 1970s*

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Abstract—The article analyzes one of the critical points in the history of architecture and urban planning of the late Soviet period. The article reveals the structure and the content of the creative problems that were discussed in 1960s – early 1970s in the context of growing professional and public dissatisfaction with the results of the formation of the new urban environment based on the industrial approach to housing construction. The author shows that the main aims set before the architects and urban planners of late 1920s – early 1930s and of late 1960s – early 1970 were mostly similar. At the same time, absolutely new problems became a subject of a broad discussion: the loss of space commensurable with human beings, the view of historical environment of cities as a source of inspiration for architects, the possibility of creative self-expression in industrial construction. It was the first time, when the city was viewed by the professional community not only in relation with industry, but also with urbanization in a broad sense of the word.

Keywords—*creative problems of urban development; the reconstruction of urban centers; the historical environment of cities; industrial methods of construction*

I. INTRODUCTION

The dissolution of the Soviet city as a functional and artistic unity, having already started at the end of the period of the post-war reconstruction and continued through the second half of the 1950s, left architects and urban planners to deal with a shrinking area where they could implement principles and aims of their profession [1]. Between 1950s and 1960s, a dissatisfaction with the results of the industrialization of the architectural and construction complex, and the new residential districts being built in the outskirts of cities, started to grow in professional and public opinion. This led to the formation of new ideas of the city, which later influenced the Soviet urban planning.

II. OLD PROBLEMS AND NEW AIMS

Information accumulated from different regions for the preparation of the 3rd Congress of Architects in 1961 showed that the new methods of construction made communications longer, the costs of beautification higher, transport networks expanded, the urban-planning unity of the city was disrupted. At the same time, the old problems of Soviet urban planning, such as numerous redesigns of general layouts of cities caused by contradictions with economic planning, uncontrolled construction of industrial objects in larger cities, pollution of water and air resources, exhaustion of land resources of cities, etc. remained unsolved [2].

Meanwhile, the country saw a new colossal construction program, which demanded to eradicate all these drawbacks. It was possible only through consideration of regional planning principles grounded in the new system of resettlement in the country. This problem was the main topic at the 3th Congress of Architects [3].

The political document adopted at the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party in 1961 - the program of building communism in 20 years — introduced an “ideological platform” to this problem. Just like in 1920s~1930s, the pressing issues of formation of a new system of resettlement at a whole country scale appeared, but this time it was not a “socialist”, but a “communist” resettlement.

In 1972~1975, a number of largest scientific institutions under the supervision of the Central Institute for Urban Planning Research and Design (L. Avdotyin, Yu. Bochrov, V. Vladimirov, I. Smolyar and others) [4] developed the first General Chart of Resettlement in the Territory of the USSR up to 1990. Further transformations required many years of research and design activity, coordinated efforts of all state system, in other words, complex work that exceeded the customary boundaries of the architectural and urban planning profession.

The architects faced essentially the same problem that existed in the late 1930s during the period of industrial zoning of the country [5]: it was required to create an ideal image of a communist city and express its nature. Just like in

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the 1930s, the attention of architects gradually drifted away from the search of complex social and functional balance in the development of the city towards new artistic means of expression.

“We should thoroughly reflect on the incontestable fact, — said the main report at the meeting of Moscow architects. — that the settlements of a communist society are founded today. Our architects should clearly and on a scientific basis imagine the ideal communist city and pursue this goal, struggle for it” [6].

III. THE IMAGE OF THE CITY RETURN TO THE PAST

In fact, as early as in the beginning of the 1960s, when the first results of colossal housing construction started to appear on the outskirts of cities, the professional community gradually began to recognize the necessity to return to the reconstruction of city centers. This process was not brought to an end in the post-war decade, many architectural designs remained unfulfilled or were changed under the influence of a whole range of practical problems [7]. New approaches needed to be found because of the unsatisfactory previous experience. However, it was not clear what creative ideas should be put in the basis of the reconstruction of city centers. Speaking about the social role of the center, the 1960s architects most often mentioned the idea of the center of a Soviet city as a place for active and well-organized social and political activity: demonstrations, rallies, parades, and folk festivals, which had prevailed in previous decades.

At the same time, a number of articles and speeches of that time indicated the desire to implement in the reconstruction of city centers the new ethical and stylistic principle of the era — the “truthful expression” of the functional basis, which was considered the basic principle of the “socialist style”. When translated to the language of urban planning, it meant trying to adapt the principles of planning of new residential microdistricts to the reconstruction of the historical environment of city centers.

In the first half of 1960s, there was a number of tenders for projects of centers of Vladivostok, Tselinograd, Perm, Murmansk, Arkhangelsk, Tashkent, Ivanovo, Vilnius, and others. Despite the very different geographical locations of these projects, there was one thing in common: the desire to turn the city center into something similar to a microdistrict, bringing a city center into accordance with the indicators of development density, service, etc. that had been developed for new districts. It seems that the idea was most consistently realized in the center of Tashkent, which was rebuilt after the 1966 earthquake.

At the same time, the same ideas were developed in a reversed way: as it is difficult to organize a microdistrict with all the necessary services in the city center, the central districts cannot be recognized as a supportive living environment. Housing should be removed from the center and replaced with standardized complexes of administrative and public institutions grouped by their functions. We can notice that in this aspect the planning of the center was supposed to be based on the principle that was introduced into industrial construction of that time.

In many cities, large specialized buildings were constructed — Houses of Industry, Houses of Planning Organizations, Houses of Press, etc. It was viewed as a continuation of the tradition of the first five-year plans. Administrative and office complexes were gradually becoming the embodiment of aesthetic characteristics of the city [9].

However, the idea of a microdistrict also underwent a transformation at that time. The architects started to express the idea that it is wrong to see a microdistrict as an isolated urban-planning unit, the idea to concentrate in it as many functions of cultural and social services as possible cannot be justified. Such institutions should be located in the center of a residential district, and in smaller towns — in town centers [10]. Thus, the idea of a microdistrict gradually devaluated.

By the end of 1960s the official architectural and urban-planning policy in fact retained the direction that it used to have since mid-1930s — the center of the city started to be perceived, first of all, as an “embodiment of the ideals of social formation”. These changed reflected in the proceedings of the VI Plenary session of the board of the Union of Architects of the USSR, which was held on July 10-11, 1968, in Leningrad [11]. The place was chosen as a symbolic return to traditions. At the Plenary session, it was advised to stop the using standardized designs of Houses of Soviets, theaters and other public buildings in city centers. The centers should be developed by individual projects, tenders for development should be held. The rights of chief architects of cities that were brought to naught during the previous decade were advised to be significantly extended.

Meanwhile, the Soviet society, having diverted from the ethical ideal of the Thaw by the end of 1970s, experienced an increasing disappointment with the direction that architecture took in mid-1950s. In the 1972-1973 discussion on the pages of the journal “Architecture of the USSR”, the new districts of cities were called “the strongest architectural image in the whole history of architecture... with the negative sign” [12].

A.V. Ikonnikov pointed out in these years that the illusionary amenability of simplicity is a “psychological trap”. He said that while simplicity was a feature that made an object stand out against the background of others, it was associated with a particular ethic meaning (truthfulness, sincerity) in the minds of people. But the increase of number of “simple” objects made clearer the difference between simplicity as a quality of art, a result of synthesizing work of an artist, and the automatically appearing product of shrinking complex of aims of architecture at the cost of exclusion of artistic aims [13]. Professional editions one again were filled with such words as architectural complex, artistic image, traditions, synthesis of arts, plastic arts.

A page about architecture appeared in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (Literary Newspaper), where they published numerous “letters from laborers”, who were outraged by boring “T-square architecture” that engulfed cities. Many of these letters directly asked architects to return to the imitation of classical forms.

And yet, in early 1970s, a return to the way of copying of classical architectural forms was found unreasonable [14], but such certainty disappeared in regard to the space of the city. The artistic problems of the city were discussed even in professional editions using the wording of 1930s~1940s. An architectural complex was once again viewed as “a higher form of conceptual and artistic organization of the city”, inevitably emerging from the “plan-oriented essence of Soviet urban planning”. The architectural complex of a capital center was supposed to be large-scale and to be “rich with big conceptual and political content”.

IV. THE FOUNDATION OF A NEW IMAGE OF THE CITY: SCALE AND INFORMATIVE VALUE OF SPACE

Between 1960s and 1970s, it was commonplace to say, while discussing the reasons for bleakness of contemporary development, that the uniformity of residential houses and public buildings, certainly, enhances the amplifies the impression of monotony, but does not cause it. As it was usually pointed out, the reasons have an urban-planning nature. Thus, in January 1970, at the IX Plenary Session of the Board of the Union of Architects of the USSR dedicated to the main trends in Soviet architecture development in the recent fifteen years, it was said that the reason for monotony and uniformity in not in standardization and unification of the produce of construction industry or in the scarceness of the stock-list: the stock is large, it is architectural and planning techniques that are very similar. It was advised to not to think about single objects, but about large urban-planning units, complexes, districts, microdistricts [15].

The increase of scale of the planning structure resulted in the loss of architectural and spatial interconnection of single compositional nodes and the loss of compositional integrity of architectural environment of the city. In early 1970s, a new for Soviet urban planning problem was born: the relation between huge developed spaces and the capabilities of human reception. The loss of commensurability between the human and the city space was discussed not only in professional, but also in popular press [16].

It became obvious that intervals between architectural accents should not increase proportionally with the increase of the scale of planning structure of a district or a city, but should be commensurable with the established conditions of human perception. At the same time, it is especially important to make compositional bonds unify architectural accents into a certain system [17]. The necessity of integrity of impression made by architectural space created long houses with curved outlines that were popular in that time [18], and the connection of separate buildings by insertion blocks.

Another problem of that time is quality and commensurability of architectural fragments with which people engage into direct visual interaction. Standardized houses are “bricks”, while complexes that consist of them are architecture with a new scale of volumetric and spatial solution. The quality of each “brick” gains special meaning, because people don not grasp the composition of the whole

district momentarily. The image appears through temporal overlay of pictures [19].

Communicative qualities of development became the main subject of 1970s research, and in a broader view, this was a search for unique social identification, because the monotony of the environment was, first of all, found as improper for “social values of the society that is building communism”.

The problem of integrity of the artistic image of the city became more and more pressing; the scale of the new construction gradually devoured and devaluated what was traditionally thought to be a city. M.G. Barhin emphasized the problem in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, where he published the article titled “How many cities are there in Moscow...” Tyoply Stan, Izmaylovo, Vykhino, Borisovo, Chertanovo, Belyayevo, Matveyevskoye, etc. — these are not Moscow anymore by their character. These are not just districts that are located at a distance from the center, but huge self-sufficient urban-planning units, where a unique way of life is formed, different from both urban and rural [20].

The new situation in Soviet urban planning created a new attitude to the city in its traditional sense, to the historical urban environment. A historical city appeared before the planners not as an object for total reformation or destruction, but as a complex “performance of a city” with its own aesthetics as a source of new ideas in understanding contemporary problems. Unlike in the post-war decade, when the problem of combination of the old and the new was understood as conservation of certain unique monuments integrated into a new urban-planning contexts, between 1960s and 1970s, a new aim appeared — the combination of the old and the new at the level of urban-planning structures [21]. For example, this problem was discussed in connection with the reconstruction of the Old Town in Baku at the end of 1960s [22].

The most interesting aspect of the historical environment for architects those years was its structural integrity and the unity of artistic impression that appeared despite its being fragmentized and its elements being diverse [23]. In comparison with the new construction, historical environment started to be perceived as spiritually and emotionally rich and shining with the “light of culture” [24].

V. THE NECESSITY OF THE ARCHITECT’S CREATIVE SELF-EXPRESSION

Behind the hard-to-solve organizational and financial issues of complex development of new areas, there were unresolved and much more complex problems of architectural creativity in the conditions of industrial construction — everyone understood this.

The variety of possibilities, having become a trend in the development of the house-building industry by the first half of the 1970s, immediately actualized another problem — the freedom of creativity based on industrial housing construction may eventually emerge, but does the country have a sufficient number of qualified architects to use the opportunities that will appear? The issue of “enhancing the

architectural culture on the ground", heatedly debated in the 1930s-1940s, and having become one of the reasons for the development of typification, was again on the agenda. It was discussed not only in professional but also in the popular press [25].

The answers to the questionnaire of the journal "Architecture of the USSR" on the nature of the architectural image, published in 1972-1973, showed that the problem of finding an image in urban planning is inseparable from the possibilities of self-expression of the architect as a creative person. According to the majority of respondents, the search for an image is defined by the time and its requirements, reflected in the personal view of the architect.

The IX Plenary session of the Union of Architects of the USSR (1970) recognized the architect's right of individual self-expression, the right of experimentation, but ... within the limits of standards. It is necessary to work — said the proceedings of the session — on the standards themselves, so that they do not limit the creative initiative [26].

From these positions, the organization of special experimental activities was proposed as a special component of the general urban development process, encouraging architects and customers "who are ready to risk experimenting within economically justified limits" [27]. However, this trend quickly faded away, having faced with the realities of the construction complex. One of the most striking examples is the construction of the Chertanovo Severnoye district in Moscow, where many designs were never implemented or replaced with much simpler "standardized" solutions.

At the same time, the futurological direction in understanding the problems of the city that emerged between of the 1950s-1960s, in the following years fundamentally separated itself from attempts to shape the future from the elements that technologically remain within the limits of what was possible that day. These are the projects for the reconstruction of Ploshchad Ilyicha in Moscow (I. Gunst and K. Pchel'nikov), the "Space City" (V. Loktev), the work of NER and NER-2 groups (headed by A. Gutnov) and the "Kinetic City" (A. Ikonnikov, K. Pchel'nikov, S. Grechanikov, A. Panin). The exhibition of futurological projects held in 1967 and the three-day-long discussion were successful, but the 1970s this direction, which sharply disagreed with the "current standards", turned out to be marginalized within the profession.

VI. NEW ASPECTS OF THE URBAN-PLANNING ART

Between the 1960 and the 1970s, Soviet urban planning thought came to the conclusion that the image of the city depends on the patterns of perception of urban-planning compositions, their dimension, rhythm, and recurrence. But this area, as it was noted, was not sufficiently studied, which hindered the development of practical work. At the 1972 symposium on the architectural and artistic images of Soviet cities, the main report (M.G. Barhin) spoke of the need to investigate and create a certain scientific system of principles that appear when perceiving images of cities [28].

At the same time, in those years the image of the city was no longer associated with an unambiguous expression of the functional structure of residential areas, as it was a decade earlier. It was recognized that the functional-spatial structure and artistic structure are two different systems that should not be confused. These are structures of different types, designed to solve different problems.

In A. Gutnov's opinion, it is the deficit of theoretical constructions of a new type based on the knowledge of the general principles of artificial environment that made it impossible to obtain proved and effective practical recommendations. Such a theory was supposed to equally treat as objects structures, cities and settlement systems. In his 1973 article, A. Gutnov, perhaps most fully formulated theoretical problems of architecture and urban planning that urgently required solutions [29].

Such problems, in his opinion, appeared in four areas: architecture as organization of space; architecture as an informational system; architecture as a living environment; architecture as a field of activity. In each of these areas, new aims arose, requiring a fundamentally different, universal approach. Gutnov's program for researching the fundamental interrelationships of space, function and time, the spatial perception of architectural objects, the relations between structure and form, the semantic context of the architectural image, the living environment and the intensity of its spatial development, the nature of an architectural project as an implementation strategy, etc., undoubtedly gave an impulse to the creation of a new integral science about the city, the formation of which is continuing up to this day.

Another frequently discussed problem in these years is how is regularity and randomness correlated in the appearance of the city? This topic was discussed, in particular, in the *Literaturnaya Gazeta*. G.B. Borisovsky said that regularity by itself cannot create great architecture, the state-of-the-art architecture. And to make our homes more beautiful, we need to introduce a system of higher order, where there would be a place for randomness. If we want to fill our cities with poetry, we cannot build them by one strict pattern, no matter how beautiful it might be [30].

A few months later *Literaturnaya Gazeta* published an article by the Swiss architect B. Guber "The charm of randomness in this rational world" [31], which discussed the issues of irrational principles in urban planning. The author, in particular, argued that in the wish for randomness reflects the rejection of the destiny, the predetermination of the future, in other words, it contains a fundamental conflict with the aims and content of urban planning. From the satisfaction of needs, one must move towards joy. What urban planning can give us is stable satisfaction of quickly growing needs, which is not the same as the rise of human happiness. Planning of cities can provide only the external framework necessary to ensure that every individual and the whole society can live a fulfilling life. But within these frames and beyond them there must be enough room for human actions and feelings in all their complexity.

It would have been impossible to publish such an article in the Soviet press a few years before. But the situation

changed. It was recognized that the absence of rigid constraints of material environment, complexity and uncertainty better answered to the psychological characteristics of a person than its simplicity. Apparently, an attractive environment can be achieved some other way, not only through scrupulous calculation, rather — through some incompleteness of the environment, openness giving people a chance for personal interpretations, for the manifestation of individuality [32].

A fundamentally new view of the city began to form between the 1960s and 1970s and in connection with the emergence of a new scientific trend — the sociology of urbanization — in the USSR. In May 1969 the Scientific Council on the Problems of Specific Social Studies of the Institute of International Labor Movement of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR held the first symposium dedicated to the social problems of urbanization in the situation of scientific and technological revolution. The Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Moscow State University and other scientific organizations participated in the symposium.

For the first time, the city was seen "from the outside" of usual professional problems of architects, began to be understood not only as a spatial environment, but also as a social environment, as the center of the spiritual life of society. Such concepts as urban culture and urban lifestyle appear. The development of cities for the first time in Soviet history was associated with urbanization in the broadest sense of the word - as a multilateral social process that causes changes in different spheres of society's life [33]. It was noted that urbanization ceases to be associated only with industrialization, the latter no longer plays the main role. The development of scientific production, service industries, management and culture has become an important source of growth for large cities. Cities are increasingly playing the role of cultural and informational centers and this role is increasing. The multifunctionality of the city becomes its main feature [34]. The city began to be seen primarily as a system of communications, the field of human interactions, the space of choice [35].

The theory of the "optimal city", popular a few years ago, was criticized from the new positions. One of its main points — limiting the growth of large cities — cannot be effective, because it does not take into account the great industrial and social efficiency of a large city. The city as a limited unit with a certain configuration and scale does not correspond to new trends in the urbanization process — the formation of urban agglomerations, urbanized areas, complex systems of interaction between cities and rural settlements.

The authors of the monograph "Planning Structure of a Contemporary City" published in 1973 [36] concluded that a transition from a static to a flexible dynamic planning and urban development system, viewing the city in its continuous development in terms of population and planning structure is necessary.

Between the 1960s and 1970s, it became clear that the urban science can no longer remain within the framework of descriptive, empirical ideas, urban planning lacks theoretical depth and methodological culture. The new town-planning

theory must employ the latest achievements of technical sciences, and, first of all, cybernetics.

Thus, in 1963, the Central Institute for Urban Planning Research and Design carried out the first experiments on the use of computers for solving urban planning problems: allocation of cultural and service organizations that provide services on a certain territory with a certain population, allocation of transport stops, distribution of the population of cities based on the places of employment, the character and range of people's mobility [37]. Later, a thesis was put forward that the systematic research methods associated with the use of computer technologies should be used not only to solve purely practical fragmentary urban planning problems, but it should be extended to the urban planning theory as a whole [38].

VII. CONCLUSION

The problem of an integral, systematic approach to the city, taking into account the whole complex of knowledge about it, was put forward for the first time in the past forty years. Originating in Soviet urban planning of the late 1920s~early 1930s, this direction, based on a meticulous study of the city, did not see any further development. But now, just like in the 1920s~1930s, this approach required a serious research foundation, organized according to a single plan.

The period between the 1960s and 1970s can be seen as a turning point when fundamentally new issues of urban development were raised, but it so happened that the architectural community searched for answers only in later decades. Obviously, the most difficult part in this process was to overcome the common for the Soviet architecture sectoral specialization of architectural science that favored applied research to the overall theoretical studies.

And from these positions it is difficult to overestimate the role of that qualitative leap in professional thinking that occurred at between the 1960s and 1970s. However, this did not mean at all that the conditions of architectural and urban planning activity that formed in the country for many decades changed substantially, and thus, many stereotypes in planning and development of cities continued to exist.

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