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Аму-

STALINIST TOWN PLANNING IN MOSCOW

Soviet town planning is a very important component of the economics and culture of the Stalinist epoch, a historical experiment of the transformation of the urban environment based on the totalitarian state establishment under the circumstances of a lack of a private property on land. The general appeal to the public "luxury for all" in the town planning served as a compensator for the poor living conditions of the separate human being, and simultaneously was forming the new, may be utopian reality which made to believe in future, patiently to wait for it ... 'The Ideal City' has been realizing on the huge territory during several decades in historical and new towns, and especially in the restoration of cities destructed in the USSR during World War II (more than 1700 cities!).

Soviet town-planning was supposed to be an alternative for the Second and Third World until the USSR downfall in 1991. The Vth Congress of the International Union of Architects on the theme of construction and reconstruction of cities from 1945 to 1957 which was held in Moscow in 1958 became a triumph of soviet town planning. One of the principle reporters, the Soviet architect N. Baranov wrote: "In the conditions of the socialist society where the political power and all material goods are owned by the people the ideal and artistic power of architecture and first of all the means of the spatial composition of the architectural ensembles can be developed immeasurably more than in the precedent historical epochs.

But there are the town planners with a different opinion. Making an attempt to compare architectures of west and east, some of western architects consider that the vast spatial compositions are peculiar only to despotism.

We suppose that those conclusions reflect a misunderstanding of the fact that a lack of spacious architectural ensembles and a domination of town planning of a number of countries by the separate buildings is a consequence of the supremacy of the private interests over the social ones, the results of spontaneity which depressed the needs of a development of cities. The successful creation of the architecture of cities is unthinkable without the wide application of the ensemble principle of town planning.

In the organic combination with a diversity of natural circumstances the ensemble town planning is the main means of the creation of the complete city architecture, their bright individual image."

All these principles were taken from the 1935 year's Enactment of the All Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks and the Soviet of Peoples' Commissars (government) on the General plan of reconstruction of Moscow which due to its influence on Soviet, European and world town planning can be considered as a "bible" of the Socialist reconstruction of towns.

Before this Enactment special activities were undertaken in order to create a new professional mentality and new professional boards acclaimed to realize "a new charge of party and government". These were created in 1933 by the All Union Academy of Architecture and the Moscow Architectural Institute. The Palace of Soviets' competition was that one which showed to the whole world the changes in architectural and urban policy. On the pages of the newly created magazine 'Architectura SSSR' a lot of articles and discussions were dedicated to the challenges of town planning between which it is necessary to emphasize 'The River and a City' by S. E. Chernyshev and 'About an Architecture for the Capital City' by A. V. Bunin where the challenge to resolve Moscow as an artistic entity was formulated for the first time. As the basic principle it was supposed that the socialist city and first of all Moscow – "Red Moscow", "the capital of the socialist motherland", "the hope of the whole world" – is an expression of the ideals of the socialist society, its structure, order and harmony. It should be a city of a new type of the architecture of space – "the social space dedicated to the mass actions". The architecture ought to be addressed not to the individual, but to the broad masses of working people, and later it led to the violation of the proportions of cities, ensembles, buildings, details. Squares, avenues, embankments, esplanades were conceived for the grandiose movements of the crowd.

Permanently it has been declared that the Soviet socialist city radically "differed" from the capitalist ones first of all by the "plannificated" character of its buildings. As the only right method of the Soviet town planning the "ensemble approach" was admitted. And the city itself transformed in a vast ensemble consisting of the whole hierarchy of the less important ensembles. It was approved that an ensemble is the highest step of the architectural creative activity.

But the principle that the city is a result of the planned and scientifically justified action of a socialist society on the guidance of nature ("the transforming of nature" – both natural and artificial ones) was considered of high importance.

Three objects were chosen: the historical environment, the river, the natural landscape and vegetation. The general aim was that instead of the traditional "capitalist" city with slums, the communist ideal city had to be erected in only 10 years, not as an utopia but as a reality. The model of the ideal city with the regular plan, axial composition and classicist architecture was imposed on the existing historical city. The characteristics of this model were: the severe hierarchy of composition – the subordination of periphery to the centre, the enlarged central ensemble and the hypertrophy of the inner spaces expressed in the social destination of buildings, the saturation of the high orientires closely linked to the main dominant of the capital.

According to the magazine 'Architectura SSSR' Soviet architects enthusiastically create in all cases and without any exceptions the centre as an unconditionally dominating complex. But this fact itself leads to the concentration of the biggest public buildings which are most monumental and expressive by their skyline.

Historical buildings which could be obstacles for the realization of such grandiose conceptions had to be demolished in favour of the future. It is interesting to underline the paradox of the General Plan of Moscow from 1935: It constituted megalomania on one hand in its destruction of the texture of the historical city, and the erection of representative new buildings, and on the other hand, the city was still considered as an entire historical organism. According to the General Plan of 1935 the historical city should have been conserved, but because of the constructions in the centre of Moscow many architectural monuments were destroyed in a barbaric way.

The role of the main landscape and architectural axis of the city marked by the new monumental buildings, with the Palace of the Soviet at the head, was destined to the Moscow river. The constructions on the embankments had to impact strongly on the creation of a new image of Moscow. The General Plan provided the following: a) The extension of the city according to the historically established radial concentric system which included the rivers Moscow and Yauza in the inner composition, and its perfection according to the needs of the contemporary city. b) A development of the central ensembles of the city which are orientated directly to the river. c) The design of the embankments as a majestic city highway architecturally saturated, unifying all the significant ensembles and gathering in a composition both parts of the city which are divided by the river. d) The utilization of embankments for the construction of residential quarters with comfortable housing alongside of them. e) A concentration along the river of great and important spaces (of parks and squares) with a definite function, supposed to accommodate the majority of the city population. f) Conjunctions between these spaces and the river: highways, squares, centres of housing districts. g) The realization, if possible, of the intervals constructed by housing.

Covered by granite the embankments had to become the transit highways. The grandiose sightseeing could be opened in front of the traveller visiting Moscow in 1945. But there were realized only some pieces of embankments and the construction of new bridges. These bridges were erected in such a way to provide a passing of big ships from the Volga river which sailed by the channel Moscow-Volga.

One of the principle ideas of the General Plan was also a transformation of the rivers Moscow and Yauza in the green zones and the creation of green zones along the radial highways until the city centre. This idea of the creation of an entire ensemble of parks alongside the whole sector of the river permitted to gather big masses of people. Unfortunately only fragments were realized: Central Park of Culture and Rest (Park Gorky) and the Park of Moscow State University, the sportive complex at Luzhniki. Moscow of the future was dreamed as "a garden city", as "an artificial oasis in which the blossoming life of the whole geographic and historical space of our country must develop."

For the realization of this symbolic and entire town planning ensemble which was foreseen in the General Plan of

Moscow 1935, there were founded the projective architectural-urbanistic workshops under the guidance of V. Semjonov and S. Chernyshev.

The town planning activities began already in the period of the General Plan's approval. In 1935 the first stage of the underground was opened. The giant construction sites extended the channel Moscow-Volga. The enactment of the Central Committee, the Party and the government of the USSR on the General Reconstruction Plan of Moscow mentioned that "in the ... replanning of the city it is necessary to realize the entire architectural structure of squares, highways, embankments, parks, using for the construction of housing and public buildings the best patterns of the classical and newest architecture, as well as all achievements of architectural and constructive technics". So the imagination of architects drew the city of the future, "the socialist Red Moscow".

The most important enterprises in the realization of the General Plan of Moscow were the reorganization of the city centre and the main highways: Gorky street, Avenue Mozhayskoye, Pervaya Meshchanskaya, and Bolshaya Kalushskaya street. The highways were straightened and widened until 60 metres and were constructed by the multi-storied houses and public buildings (the height of the constructions varies: 6 to 7 storeys for housing estates, up to 20 storeys for public buildings). During that decade the breaking through of three wide streets which were laying in the city were projected in order to link and correct the existing streets. As a consequence of a number of such reconstructive actions foreseen by the General Plan, Moscow found the perfect centre. It was considered as an entire space formed by the interconnected squares – Red, Revolution, Sverdlov, avenue Marx. Now radial highways linked the city centre with the periphery. An architect could think about the town planning only as a sum of ensembles, he could work only in an "ensemble" way.

In the Soviet architecture from 1930 to 1950 the problem of the architectural ensemble was considered as of the first priority. The famous theoretician and art historian David Arkin wrote: "An ensemble – which is the highest form of architectural creation – is based in our understanding not on the emphasizing of a definite city segment from the mass of surrounding houses but by the construction according to the plan of a whole city". The art of an ensemble could be reboant exclusively "in conditions of socialism", and the space for human life and activity was provided as "the main content of the architectural ensemble". So an ensemble has been becoming the new unit of the measurement for architectural space put over a street, a square, a boulevard, a district and an entire city. The socialist city was foreseen by its creators as "an association of big artistic ensembles". Many discussions and reports were dedicated to the problem of an ensemble. Architects were recommended to construct in the way of city ensembles which promoted the evidence of the architectural character of every city unit by the architectural means. The city was treated as an entire and indivisible architectural organism which composed a mosaic of a set of the repeated elements concentrated in their own non-dismembered compositons. "The fight for the ensemble city construction, for the expression and the strength of an ensemble is a significant und unseparate part of the fight for the style of Soviet architecture, for the architectural style of

the great Stalinist epoch" – declared Arkin. The main ensemble of each city centre had to become the square "for manifestations and parades on the territory of which during the days of feasts and great political events the people's masses meet the elected leaders and their heroes".

Architects tended to supply these squares by comfortable accesses and streets for the evacuation of masses. The space of this ensemble was a scene, the buildings were decorations for parade meetings and assemblies. Often squares looked like antic agoras and forums, due to their closed composition. On the main squares of cities there were usually situated the Houses of Soviets, governmental and administrative edifices. They created the nucleus of an ensemble.

According to the General Plan of 1935 the embankments had to be enriched by new representative buildings. The author's collective under the guidance of Z. Rozenfeld was inspired in the projects of the embankments Smolenskaya and Rostovskaya by the architectural heritage of the past. According to the author's words the quest for a majestic, festive and optimistic architecture has led to the creation of features being relative to the style of French classicism and the ideas of the French Revolution.

Designed by Rozenfeld and others, buildings ought to be united along the river which created the background for "the strong and fulfilled theme of arcades, accesses and columns". The entrance in the city along the Smolenskaya street is flanked by edifices with a height till 50 metres, having a complicated rhythm of façades and columns. The height of some houses was 8-storeyed (32 m). To avoid the impression of a river's "pression" there were intervals of green spaces up to 100 metres between the building. All designed constructions were situated along the river on the embankment.

In the project of A. Shchussev and M. Rostkovsky "the houses of 8, 9 and 15 storeys form picturesque ensembles and were orientated to sunset, creating the new image of Moscow". The houses are situated on the perimeter of the embankments. According to the original plans, the semicircular buildings were turned to the river and put in both quarters – Smolenskaya and Rostovskaya. The axis of the composition of these quarters were linked with the axis of the opposed bank of the Moscow river. The corners were marked by 25-storeyed towers.

Thanks to arcades which opened a view to the courtyards a connection was created between the quarters' interiors and the river banks. From this impressive ensemble only the well known building of Shchussev on Rostovskaya embankment was erected. The construction of Smolenskaya embankment was finished in 1957, but the high building on Smolenskaya square by V. Ghelfreikh and M. Minkus was constructed from 1949 to 1953. Nowadays the embankments panorama is formed by buildings of the thirties, fifties and seventies.

A very characteristic example of the constructions of the period from 1940 to 1950 is the Frunzenskaya embankment, one of the most important realizations of Stalinist architecture ensembles. The constructions of the Frunzenskaya embankment had to be expanded up to the new highway linking the square of the Palace of Soviets and the University on Lenin's Hills. The whole project was conceived as a complex formed by a number of big housing quarters united by the common compositional idea. One of the positive

characters of this construction (N. Ullas guided the collective of architects) was the emphasize on the central dominating building on the background of each quarter. These buildings formed the linking compositional assembly pieces and created a rhythmical row leading to the planned majestic Palace of Soviets.

The town planning by ensembles became a norm. Just along the length and depth of its quarters the highway had to form the entire artistic ensemble. In the context of the General Plan of 1935 the Gorky street had been transformed in a boulevard, lined by big multi-storeyed edifices. In the following years of the reconstruction it was continued by buildings of a rather pompous architecture, when the theme of victory, memory and heroicism sounded stronger and stronger. "In most cases these are rather the project-dreams of ideal cities which became monuments of victory themselves. The image of the culture of the war period cannot exist without them" wrote M. Astafieva-Dlugach about the numerous reconstruction projects of destroyed cities which were elaborated just after the war in 1945. The main streets of the restored cities were considered as the triumphal roads and couldn't be presented without high buildings. The construction of those buildings in Moscow was the continuation and development of this theme. The creation of big ensembles of streets, squares and city complexes were projected in this context.

The construction of the University of Lenin's Hill coincided with the beginning of the majestic construction of the new capital district. The highness of its composition was an obligatory condition by governmental enactment. The main building of the University crowned by the spire and a star had to dominate over the whole complex. Lower parts of the building attended to the main tower form the gradual transfer to the lateral wings. The ensemble develops in space the precise axial composition. On the south-western side the symmetrical buildings of faculties form the courtyards for the solemn accesses to the highest central part.

The same solemn approach to the Moscow river is realized as a system of green alleys, squares, parterre with a huge water mirror and fountains. The building of the University was situated on the axis of the highway coming from the Lenin's Hills to the south-western district. This central highway was attended by two radial streets of such a length which could underline the significance of the composition. These high buildings enormously influenced the taste of Moscow architects. High units began to appear in all projects of quarters, squares, highways.

The construction of the University imitated the realization of "high buildings", constructions that were decreed by the enactment of the party and the government in 1947. The city needed new dominants. The system of high buildings develops two principal historical traditions for the distribution of verticals: along the Moscow river and around the Kremlin. Seven high buildings were situated in the assembly points of the city plan on the intersections of radial highways with the ring Sadovoye and the Moscow river having the University as a keynote on Lenin's Hills.

High buildings created the entire giant ensemble in the city space. There is an opinion that these buildings found the pyramidal skyline after the direct instruction of Stalin to strengthen "the muscovite characteristic". Of course their huge volumes have broken the old Moscow's scale, have

changed the height of the central part of the city, have intervened the strong accents in its skyline. From the beginning these buildings were conceived as "monument buildings", glorifying the victory in the Great War for the Motherland's Defence. Generally these buildings rather favourably were enlisted in the context of city.

The All Union Agricultural Exposition in Moscow, built just before World War II (1939/1940, reconstructed from 1950 to 1954) represented the creative top of the Stalinist architecture of the fifties. The master plan of the ideal city: regularity, regular geometrical spaces put in a row along the main axis, the parade architecture of pavilions. During this period the role of the monumental and decorative art in the construction of cities strongly increased. Sculpture became practically an obligatory unit of city ensembles, and the architecture of exposition was saturated by the sculptural compositions in honour of "the free labour under socialism".

In the nineteen-fifties a clear theoretical model of ensembles came to the forth concerning a set of postulates and conditions to which all projects and practical realizations in this field had to be reported. The complex of the Exposition of the achievements of people's economy was the perfect example of this model's realization. Now its architecture provokes rather contradictory opinions. They often call the ensemble of the Exposition "the Soviet monument of the epoch" created especially for the immortalization and conservation of the image not of the separate historical event, but of the image of the ensemble of that epoch. It had a lot of negative marks, became a synonym of bad taste, eclecticism, decorativism ... Today we look at the Exposition as a curiosity, a heritage precisely reflecting "the spirit of an epoch".

Some conclusions: why should we conserve the remnants of unrealized utopias which are the fragments of the Stalinist ensembles? The imperial range is felt in the majority of the buildings of the nineteen-fifties beginning with the monumental architecture of those houses, the increasing dimensions of the district, the height of the buildings. This architecture has links with the utopian projects of the French Revolution. And it seems to be approved that the experience of Soviet architecture developed during 20 years from constructivism to a sort of Stalinist Art Deco. This represents a great interest, especially in comparison with the architecture of other totalitarian dictatorships.

Created as a result of planned ideological activity the ensembles of the city of Moscow from 1930 to 1950 can be considered as a grandiose performance – an experiment as-

sembled for the decoration of demonstrations, meetings, processions, revolutionary feasts. Unfortunately the majority of them were not realized because of World War II.

The inclusion of the city board in the ensemble, the strict regulation of the architectural composition from the top to beneath led to the fact that the Stalinist architecture with its diversity of the architectural and spacious solutions represents a stylistically eclectic, but common section of such a great historical city as Moscow.



Project for Vosstaniyaplatz, Moscow

Every generation learned certain lessons from the experiences of the preceding generations. In this sense the architecture of the "epoch of Stalinist masters" left an extremely rich heritage not only in national, but also in the universal architecture of that epoch. Otherwise how is it possible to explain the fact that numerous unrealized utopian projects of that era representing neo-antic ideal cities populated by "free Soviet people" are of the "irrepeatable" beauty and mastership of the graphic expression which admires the contemporary architect by its range and inspiration? And don't you have a presentiment that the "environmental approach" in town planning is going to fail in favour of the "ensemble one"?

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▷ *Illuminated skyscraper of Smolensk Place on the 1st of May*

▷▷ *Entwicklung des stalinistischen Architekturstils in der Ukraine beim Bau des Dzerzhinskij-Platzes in Charkiv, 1925-1934: Funktionalismus in der Architektur des 'Dom Gosudarstvennoj Promyshlennosti' (Haus der Staatlichen Industrie) von S. Seraftimov, S. Kravez, M. Felger, 1925-1928 (Seite 78)*



