The Fate of the Creative Legacy in the Modern Architecture in Russia

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Abstract: In relation with the celebration of the 80-th anniversary of Saint Petersburg (Leningrad) union of architects in 2012, the central museum of communication technologies (named after A.S. Popov) opened an exhibition “Architecture of Leningrad. 1930s-1990s”. Summing the results of this exhibition, the authors of the article give their evaluation of architecture in Petrograd-Leningrad-Saint Petersburg. The basic principle implemented in the exhibition is continuous sequence of development stages. This exhibition is not only a report, but also the description of painstaking efforts and a difficult road passed by architects of Saint Petersburg. The way ahead, or back, or aside, but, as a result, to understanding how we, once a prominent architectural country of the world, unreasonably rejected those capabilities, changed our creative attitude to architecture and then rejected that altogether. That exhibition reminds us about the way we were assisted and the obstacles we met; how we created our own problems and then found brilliant solutions to them, enriching the cultural legacy of this country and the world. The exhibition is unique, because it helps us understand what the architecture of tomorrow may look like.

Key words: Architectural legacy • Technologism • Soviet architecture • Humanistic architecture • Synthesis • Continuity of architecture • Paradigm of humanism • Architectural doctrines of the XX century

INTRODUCTION

The XX century made a deep impact onto Russian culture. The architecture of the soviet period is no exception. Abrupt, largely, induced changes in the concepts after the revolution were dictated by the authorities, so the architecture in Saint Petersburg, in a way, reflected the dominating ideas and purposes of the “dictatorship of proletariat” [1-3].

It is obvious that half-century long practice of unbalanced changes in directions had significant influence on the modern post-perestroika architecture [4, 5]. It is the analysis of the influence of architectural legacy of the previous century that can help predict future tendencies in construction and architecture [6, 7].

Methods: For the modern architecture, variety is typical in styles, concepts and creative methods. The authors analyze revolutionary and evolutionary regularities in development of architecture in Leningrad-Saint Petersburg in the XX century The authors’ approach is based on integrated studies of textual, graphic and illustrative material in Russian and foreign literature on architecture and construction. The investigation also uses the graph-analytical method and the method of comparative analysis. The comparative analysis of design principles and design composition of objects used photographic images, drawings and 3D-images of architectural objects.

The Main Part: The Experience of Architecture in Petrograd-Leningrad-saint Petersburg: The exhibition starts with the epoch of avant-garde of 1920-1930-the period before the Union of architects was created, which was a great incentive of the development of soviet architecture.

Rapid development of avant-garde (first of all, suprematic constructivism that rejected the references to the previous traditions) made it possible to improve the functional and material-technical design of buildings.
The progress was immense: entirely new type of buildings were developed; those buildings were in high demand from the state; new architects came forward-A.I. Gegello, A.S. Nikol'skij, E.A. Levinson, I.I. Fomin, N.A. Trotsky and others [8, 9].

However, the language of avant-garde, which lacked continuity, based on harmonizing material-technical elements, was not flexible and variable enough to “discourse” the achievements of socialism. The next stage which was comprehensively reflected in the exhibition, the pre-war and post-war Soviet neo-classicism in Leningrad. This was a heroic attempt in late 1930–1940-es to form the architecture that tried to include and recycle previous creative ideas [10, 11].

The turn to the legacy meant the beginning of the search of technological and technical achievements of material culture, with references to the well-tested and expressive language with its comprehensible signs and metaphors. Pluralism sprang up; leaders came forward. They are, first of all, Levinson, Fomin, Trotsky, Ol' and others. They approached neo-classicism in their own separate ways and had their own sources and preferences. E.g., Levinson and Fomin were guided by the works by Auguste Perret, Trotsky was inspired by the works by Ivan Fomin, Vladimir Šchuko and the romantism by Giovanni Piranesi. At the same time, the trend for novelty was clear.

Among the amazing public buildings created during the 1950-e, there is the stadium named after S.M. Kirov; it was designed by the architects A.S. Nikol'skij, K P. Katin and I.I. Stepanov, with assistance from A.L. Zavarzin.

The outstanding objects shaping a unique variety of post-war Leningrad neo-classicism or pre-war art-deco include the first underground stations. Gradual transition from the ideas of revolutionary avant-garde to evolutionary projects of historical architecture caused the creation of unique forms. Architecture came back onto the path of evolutionary development and, at the same time, it received powerful incentives for innovation. These incentives helped overcome outdated stereotypes, refresh the order and subdue it to the new and radical entirety. Architectural forms of that period can be reasonably called the architecture of the integrating type, when the historical experience was not rejected, but integrated into the new paradigm. Consistent development of such forms could afterwards have made our country a leader in the sphere of architecture [12].

However, during the early 1950-es, a crisis of the genre began to set in. Standardization of expressive means more and more hampered the development of architectural forms. The necessary ratio of novelty and tradition was shifted towards tradition.

In the conditions of Khrushev’s “thaw” of 1950–1960 and a new opening of the outer world, the crisis was resolved by the order of authorities. This was the end of a heroic attempt to create the full-fledged modern architecture of the “inclusive” type. After that, we got to copying the Western experience of the decaying architecture of the “exclusive” type [13].

The dominant trend was not the complex of human needs, including the spiritual needs, but the means to achieve them: industrialization conditioned by limitless trust in the technical progress of the XX century. Therefore, the means replaced the purpose. Thus emerged the architecture of “technologism” of 1950-es. The entire volume of construction was carried out by standard projects, by industrial methods, out of the minimal set of standard elements. Thus was implemented the worst variant of functionalism-technologism [14, 15].

The necessary continuity of the evolutionary development was disrupted. The keystones of architecture now were geometrically simplistic forms and total rejection of the legacy. No attributes of the past - columns, porticos, pitched roofs. And, surely, no decorative elements. As a symbol of handicap, it contradicted with the principles of machine aesthetics and mass production.

Such architecture could not become a natural descendant of the historical environment, because it did not understand the historical language. It did not want to understand it, either, because it only wanted to talk about itself, its own technical and functional superiority. It was anti-contextual. Implanting its objects into the historical prospective quite often was related to demolition of historical buildings: the Greek church, Uspensky cathedral in Sennaja square, Pirogov’s museum in Pirogovskaja embankment and others. Such are the expenses of technologism. But, surely, there also were big achievements. Technologism helped solve unprecedentedly large and important functional tasks - ensure mass production of residential buildings and amenity public objects [16].

During the late 1960-early 1970, some forms appeared that started to gradually sway the doctrines of technologism and approach the paradigm of humanistic architecture. In order to do that, designers mostly use the following means:
• New design and technological solutions;
• Integration of inter-related functions (from the simple to the complex);
• Rejection of univocal and uncompromising relations form–structure, form–function, – in other words, of the ethics of straightforward construction and the method of designing “from the inside - on the outside”;
• The “environmental approach” stating the necessity to search for the correlation between the new form and the context and the method of designing “from the inside - on the outside” and “from the outside - on the inside” [17].

These processes impose more and more influence on the volumetric-planning of new residential areas. It is becoming clear that urban areas (yard, street, square) need to be even better structured. Their better configurations are being searched for. This is further promoted by the comprehension of the value of the continuous historical contexture, the meaning of the “red threads” that were an important tool to organize urban areas and their architectural framework. And, finally, at the border of 1980–1990, a new turn to legacy happened, or to the principle “get both” [18].

Then, why the total renovation and newest technologies and materials, or better-functioned buildings did not bring the desired results to the full extent? One of the reasons was a semantic disaster conditioned by appearance of an entirely new architectural lingo - the Esperanto, dead and obscure for common people. The words” of this Esperanto of new architecture bearing the material-technical meaning demanded an unambiguous and exact translation. This is how new combination of practical properties and expressive architecture was deprived of art’s great merit - limitless variety of form [19].

Another reason was contraposition of new and better forms to the historical forms. It was also conditioned by the ideology of modernism forming the architecture of the “exclusive” type. Its forms were created by excluding from the cultural-historical process. Thus some self-consistent monumental buildings were created. Their self-standing established their own insulated mythic microcosms predicting a new and better future.

At the same time, getting rid of the enchanting myth of never-ending technical progress and development of art (the latter is only relative, because art is not technology or design); we gradually comprehend the drawbacks of the “exclusive” architecture [20]. Its forms were developed on a narrow path of searches for novelty, but could not solve the entire complex of tasks that the art of architecture was facing. The heaven-sent alternative was the inclusive type of architecture combining novelty and tradition. Its new values are formed by including, but not excluding the accumulated knowledge and each new form becomes a fragment of the continuous evolutionary process. Including traditional elements into new context does not limit the creativity, but, on the contrary, expands its borders; it sets pretty difficult tasks before the creator for synthesizing what have been considered impossible to couple.

Ambitions and searches of architects of Saint Petersburg in the late XX and early XXI centuries are, to some extent, identical to the abovementioned processes. The historical experience has been rehabilitated. Rejection of taboos on using the historical experience generates a powerful stream of creative search and pluralistic variety. Historical issues come into being, that combine new functional and technological achievements with allusions to the historical context. At the same time, the variety of historic-related forms is determined by various methods of using such allusions: pastiche, association or modernized methods [21].

However, the experience of revolutions of the past left its traces for our architects and builders. Rejecting the anti-historical approach of functionalism, architects develop its social and technical achievements that had such important social effect in the past in the sphere of residential construction.

Obviously, many specialists remember that experience, but now it is not only the number of and cost of buildings, but also their quality. Their works indicate a new combination of practical properties and expressive capabilities of both the interior and exterior of buildings. This is what lets us say that a process of intellectual and aesthetic transformation of functionalism is taking place. This expands the range of the present-day pluralism.

CONCLUSIONS

• Such quick and creative assimilation of new foreign construction technologies and materials has had the result that the creative energy accumulated during the period of standardized designing has now exploded in numerous projects.
• Competition has increased in the market of projects. Variety and brilliance of new forms, as well as the number of new architects seem improbable. Whereas there used to be no more than about ten
successful and prominent architects in Leningrad (Saint Petersburg), now there are three or four times more of them. This is a great incentive for each specialist: there are more possibilities to say things one’s own way and leave a trace in Russian architecture.

- The experience of the XX century should warn us against many mistakes in the future. Anti-contextuality of the past epoch seeks to resurrect nowadays through actions of large construction corporations that regard architecture not as the harmonic and balanced structure, but as a fast way of making money without considering the existing architectural, cultural and spiritual context.

- Looking back, we can say with assurance that abatement with Rogozhin’s approach (Rogozhin - a character in F. Dostoyevsky’s novel “Idiot”) should become an important component of modern architects’ view of life. Comprehension of the urban space as integrated issue, but not collection of bits for use by businessmen to make big bucks, is necessary for our architectural paradigms to occupy the leading position in the world market.

REFERENCES