El papel de la arquitectura dentro de nuestra sociedad contemporánea.

Cuando recibo la Medalla de Oro tenía en la cabeza que detrás de cada pueblo desfigurado hay un arquitecto cómplice, pero no formúlico en positivo; “no olvidemos nuestra responsabilidad, creemos en la arquitectura, pensad qué mundo estamos haciendo”!

Hay un sector de la arquitectura, poco o poco reconocidos, que trabajamos con el corazón, no dejamos la piel. Ya lo decía Oriol Bohigas, es solo un pequeño porcentaje de los arquitectos. La especulación despiadada no solo no ha sido consentida, también ha sido dibujada primero por los urbanistas y luego por los arquitectos con el pretexto de que si no lo hago yo lo hace otro. No olvidemos que el arquitecto tiene una inmensa responsabilidad hacia la sociedad.

Otra cosa contra la que me rebelo es la denuncia de este mundo neoliberal y competitivo que fomentaron Reagan y Thatcher. Nos han puesto a todos los arquitectos unos contra otros en una competición cuantitativa, a volumen y metros, no a calidad, y con currículos que caducan. He hecho dos paseos marítimos y no puedo entrar en los concursos porque ha pasado un tiempo que ha decidido un pliego. No se valora el pensamiento.

Y existe también un problema de ética, porque el arquitecto siempre está al lado del poder...

Pero esto también ocurría con Le Corbusier...

Es distinto, fíjate que Le Corbusier se situaba próximo al poder porque el trabajaba para la arquitectura de la sociedad. Es importante el contexto, se salía de una guerra con enormes problemas, había que dar vivienda a mucha gente, afrontar edificios públicos de gran magnitud, todo estaba por hacer después de una guerra... Le Corbusier quería vender su producto, a quien fuera, y los franceses no se lo han perdonado nunca. La arquitectura siempre está al lado del poder, pero eso hemos de tener claro quién es nuestro cliente, que siempre es la sociedad, e ir más allá de quién realiza el encargo.

Hoy en día, en el marco de la sociedad neoliberal en la que estamos inmersos, una carta de Atenas o un manifiesto de los CIAM serían imposibles, no hay en la que estamos inmersos, una carta de Atenas o un manifiesto de los CIAM serían imposibles, no hay voluntad para hacerlas.

¿Y qué hacemos de hacer?

Hemos de batallar y nos hemos de unir. Recientemente en un jurado de un concurso tuve la suerte de coincidir con Ramón Sanabrías. El concurso estaba mal planteado y entre los dos pudimos reorientar el debate.

Un cierto “retour à l’ordre”.

No me cansaré de repetirlo: honestidad, conservar la esencia, responsabilidad...

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INVESTIGACIÓN

1. The situation in Kharkiv before the start of construction

In the mid-20s, many different institutions and organizations had their headquarters in Kharkiv. Having become the capital of Soviet Ukraine, the city began to expand immensely, and active industrialization turned the city into an industrial giant. Dozens of plants and factories were opened, which required hundreds of managers. The old buildings of the provincial administration, financial and other institutions were barely enough to accommodate local authorities, which led organizations of the Ukrainian SSR to occupy residential buildings. Thus, in the 1920s, a vast majority of the trusts were located on Sumska Street in the former apartment building of the Salamander Insurance Company. More than 1,500 employees worked there in cramped conditions.

Therefore, it was decided to construct a building to accommodate various public institutions. To this end, they organized the State Shared Partnership, whose members were public trusts, Prombank, Zovsrohing and Derzhtorg. The shareholders agreed to finance the construction. The competition program set the urban planning parameters of the building, such as the presence of an expansive silhouette and presumable viewpoints (Zvonitska E., Leybreyd A., 1992).

The commission considered several options for locating the building: at the end of Sumska Street, near the current Gorky Central Park of Culture and Leisure, on the square near the Palace of Labours, on the Railway Station Square and others. But they decided to build Derzhprom (State Industry Building) on the site near the projected round square of the new north-western region.

The territory, where an enormous square appeared more than a hundred years ago, belonged to...
Kharkiv University in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Clinics and educational buildings of the medical faculty were located here, followed by wastelands and ravines. Before 1917, only a small square named after the Veterinary Institute at Kharkiv Imperial University was located in this part of the city. After the approval of Kharkiv as the new capital of Ukraine, the city planners of that time decided to create a new city centre of a metropolitan level on the place of wastelands and tiny houses (Hrybovykh O., 2020).

The new public centre of Kharkiv was created at the junction of the old and new city and was supposed to become the focus of the political, economic and social life of the new capital of Ukraine. In 1923, a closed competition was held for a preliminary design for the layout of the former university lands to locate a new residential area and a public and business centre of the capital of Soviet Ukraine on this site (Bondareva-A., 2018).

For implementation, the contest commission adopted the project of the architect V. K. Trotsenko, the idea of which was to organize a round square adjoining the city park along Veternyma Street (now Sovsoda Square).

Dzerzhinsky Square was immediately designed not only as the main public space of the capital but also as a key for future residential quarters outside the administrative centre, which in the future will be called Zaderzhprom’ya (Behind Derzhprom). The system of concentric circles diverging from the shifted axis of the square became the form factor for a large part of the city. Radial and longitudinal streets arose here, which by the way, in the 1930s, were called the 1st radial and 2nd radial. And only much later they got their names. And today, these streets are known as Nauka Avenue, Romain Rolland Street, Independences Avenue, Chichobban, Danilovsky and Culture streets.

Mostly, this district hosted residential buildings that were all in the same style of constructivism. Moreover, each building had a name that reflected its residents’ activity field and was constructed by the corresponding administrative centre. The first on the territory of Zaderzhprom’ya, a block of rows buildings “New Life” (1929-1930), architect M. F. Pokorny emerged, limited by Danilovsky and Culture streets and Lein Avenue. In 1929, the construction of the houses of departmental affiliation began, such as “Tabaknich” - Tobacco Industry (1931), architects A.Z. Kogan, P. Frolov, “Red Industrialist” (1929-1930), architect S.M. Kravets; “Khimik” - Chemist (1931), architect Yu.V. Ignatovych, “Woroni” (1928), architect M.I. Dashechkin, “Pochatrik” - Painter (1930).

Over time, new tenants began to move into the houses behind Derzhprom and violated the department principle. Gradually, the buildings lost their names, and today few Kharkiv residents will say that they live in Khimik or Pochatrik (Marshala O., 2019).

2. Conducting a tender for the Derzhprom building. Origins of constructivism in the architecture of the USSR

On March 1, 1925, the Supreme Council of the National Economy announced a competition for the project. The competition program already set the city-planning significance of Derzhprom and turned out to be a theoretical and style-forming part of the design: it was conceived as the core of the future administrative centre of Kharkiv and its main dominant structure. The

constructed building determined the unique character of the square - a dynamic space saturated with traffic and human flows.

In the conditions of the competition, the technical and artistic requirements for the future building and its composition were set out, which corresponded to the ideas of innovative modern (Shvydenko O., 2009). The result of the contest was a pursuit of a new style for Soviet architecture in addition to the creation of a new city’s symbol. Architecture of Derzhprom corresponds to fundamental composition principles of Constructivism (also known in the world as Functionalism), which were later (1928) brought together by La Corbusier into the famous Five Points of Architecture: support-pillars, flat roof, free plan, free facade, horizontal windows.

The authors of Derzhprom used avant-garde means of architectural expression, which destroyed the centuries-old tradition, with extraordinary inspiration and courage (Abyzov V., Markovskiy A., 2015) (13). Even at the time of the first competition there were no constructed constructivist public buildings, the principles of the concept of constructivism were already set (1922 - the book of Osipkilo Gan “Constructivism”, where the term of the same name was officially used for the first time).

In architecture, the main theses of constructivism were formed in the theoretical works of Moses Girsburg “Rhythm in Architecture” (1923) and “Style and Era” (1924) and in the projects of the Vesnyny brothers (competition project of the Palace of Labor (1923)) and Vladimir Tatlin (the project of the II Communist International Monument (1920)).

What is more, there are visible parallels with Italian futurists’ works from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century in the presented projects. For example, the architectural exhibition project “Citta Nuova” by A. Sant’Elia and Mario Chiattone in 1914 in Milan, which combined traditional manifesto sketches, draws the outlines of the futuristic architecture of the city of the future. The Citta Nuova project rejects decorations and proposals of traditional historical styles with elevators and escalators, using new materials for construction.

A. Sant’Elia, Mario Chiattone, and F. Marinetti outlined the vision in Manifesto dell’architettura. These ideas find reflection in the design principles of the projects – imitation of machine-production aesthetics, large glazing surfaces, a significant scale, as well as functional filing – a combination of public functions, not only administrative and service but also providing for everyday life and leisure.

The implementation success of the Derzhprom building greatly influenced the establishment of the constructivism as one of the key directions in the late 20s - early 30s of the 20th-century architecture on the territory of the USSR. The functionality of the plans, the use of reinforced concrete and emphasizing its texture in aesthetics were manifestly not only in the construction of public buildings (Government Houses in Minsk, Belorus (1934, arch. I. Lungard), Zuev Workers’ Club in Moscow, Russia (1929, arch. I. Golosov), Cinema Zhvutzen, Kyiv, Ukraine (1931, architects N. Totsky and V. Ryko), as well as in the industrial (Dnipro HPP, Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine 1932; architects V. Vesnin and N. Koldi, Kushnerovskiy bread factory, St. Petersburg, Russia (1932, arch. G. Marsalkov) and residential construction (Norkomin building, Moscow, Russia (1930), architects M. Grubina and I. Milinis, Ul'itschovskiy residential building, Ekhimburg, Russia (1933, arch. M. Grubina, A. Pestansk, S. Prikhovskoi, Narkomyt residential building, Kyiv, Ukraine (1922-1923, arch. S. Tezere) throughout the territory of the Soviet Union.

Moreover, the construction of large objects in this period became a cultural event for the whole Soviet Ukraine. The same thing happened with Derzhprom, where hundreds of workers worked. Some researchers reported on each stage of construction and even talked about the technical details of construction (Kazheyko I., 2016). During the construction of Derzhprom, a chaotic plan was also filmed. In the same way, the lighting of the building process of the Dnipro HPP in Zaporizhzhia took place, where, in addition to media coverage, one of the cinema’s gems of the first half of the 20th century was filmed - “The Eleventh Year” by Dziga Vertov. Massive construction media coverage marked new public values in Soviet Ukraine then. It was vastly used for propaganda, turning Derzhprom and Dnipro HPP into symbols for the USSR government.

3. Features of S. Serafimov’s project and solutions for adapting the building to the environment: the building embracing the city

Despite the often-similar stylistic solutions, the competing projects often did not solve the urban tasks set by the competition program, rather deraunting the newly created squares and the planned residential quarters with the building, as it was necessary to ensure connections between different departments. The project of S. Serafimov, which eventually became the winner, solved this issue with the help of a system of transitions on the 3rd, 5th and 6th floors, without blocking pedestrian and traffic flows of neighboring urban structures. Many of the presented objects played with the reinforced concrete frame on the facades, but it is the bridges transitions between the buildings of the implemented project that demonstrate the possibilities of the framework made of reinforced concrete spatial frames. Transitions on the 6th and 5th floors (more than 20 and 28 meters long, respectively) were made without additional columns. Only the bridges on the 3rd floor needed additional supports, the distance between which in the narrowest part is an impressive 18 meters for a building almost a century old.

Moreover, the additional axes formed by the central parts of each building became visual landmarks for the future of the Zaderzhkin’s area, which complex, which resulted in the volumetric and spatial solutions of individual buildings.

The architects of the 1920s used flat roofing as part of the new architecture. The authors of the winning project use it as the principal expressive element, along with aesthetically meaningful utilitarian means of communication and engineering. The project awarded by the jury represented a complex spatial form. The volumetric composition proposed by S. S. Serafimov was notable for its complexity and efficiency (Shvydenko O., 2009).

When completed, this was the largest building in Europe by floor area - 11,706 sq.m (Russian State Planning Data, 2012). The building divides into three parts, in the plan of each, there are interpretations of the classical public multi-storey buildings complex, which resulted in the volumetric and spatial solutions of individual buildings.

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During the design and construction of Derzhprom, there were only low-rise buildings and buildings of three or four floors from Sukmaka Street, and the authors' efforts to adapt it to the 65-story building led to such an environment. The architectural composition is dynamic, built on a zigzag rhythmic increase of masses within the composition in contrast to the centre of the city, and due to the successive lowering of the level of the bridges over the channels. The perspective of the street should be seen in a more significant scale. The symmetrical structure of the composition, taking into account the volumes of the central and lateral buildings is also observed. The lateral parts directed to the square appear higher, and those located closer to the residential formations are lower, on the contrary, the buildings from this side are set on a more humane scale. Thus, with the enormous area and height, the Derzhprom is very large-scale compared to its surroundings - both existing and future.

4. Changes in the environment and the building itself

Work on the other buildings that were supposed to complete the Image of the square and complement its function as a centre of public life began immediately after the completion of the Derzhprom building. Therefore, in 1932 the House of Projects appeared (now it is Kharkiv State University), and also designed by the architect S. Serhienko. House of projects is built in a similar style but it is shorter. From 1932 to 1935, it repeated its compositional solutions, except for the growth of the building from the lateral parts to the centre and horizontal decorative elements. The 14-story central part is made in the form of a blade and separated from the side buildings by transparent transitions, which gives a perception of the dynamics of the composition. During World War II, it was partially destroyed and restored with elements of the Stalinist empire in the early 1950s.

The cooperative building, now the northern building of KhNU, the construction of which began in 1929. According to the idea of the authors of the original project, Munts O.H., and Dmitriev O.I., the building was supposed to be a combination of two 6-7-story brick buildings with a central 17-story tower building uniting the entire composition (Girgor’yev A., 2021). Meeting halls, a library, and a post and telegraph station were designed in the Co-operative Building. In the early 1930s, the building was put on hold. Later in 1934, it was transferred to the Ministry of Defence to construct the Military Economic Academy. The first part of the building was put into operation in 1941, and the tower was completed only in 1954. After numerous alterations, the building partially lost its original constructivist design, combining elements of Art Deco and the Stalinist empire, and its highest part became five floors lower than the project of 1927.

During the retreat, the German troops tried to blow up the Derzhprom building, but they failed, not least because the building was built entirely of monolithic reinforced concrete, but most of the windows and doors were destroyed by the blast wave. The restoration of Derzhprom from damage during World War II lasted from 1945 to 1954. Since 1945, the building housed a television centre, for the operation of which a 45-meter-high television antenna tower appeared in 1955. Thanks to this antenna, the total height of the building reached 108 meters.

Cumulative models of the surrounding buildings Derzhprom were created based on 3-D models created using city maps from the 1930s-1950s. German aerial photography from 1942, and data from Google Earth Pro for 2021. Due to analysis of the cumulative models, a significant increase in the development adjacent to the building was observed, primarily due to the ones built at the beginning of the 21st century. It threatens the disappearance of Derzhprom’s role as a spatial dominant not only in the context of the city but also within the district. The importance of establishing a security zone around Sovetivny Square and Derzhprom is described in the work of K. Cherkesova, 2014.

From 2001 to 2010, the building underwent a large-scale restoration that saw the plaster replaced, free of the mica impurities that gave the building its shine, windows replaced, and doors renewed. Despite that, only five authentic elevators out of 12 have been restored in the Derzhprom building up to this day. According to thekharkiv.com, the Derzhprom did not have meridian-oriented partitions, so that the eastern sun shines through the building, but the layout of the premises also changed, occasioning the disappearance of this effect.

Since 2017, Derzhprom has been included in the UNESCO Tentative List, due to its uniqueness and the importance of the building’s role in the development of the modernist architecture of the first half of the 20th century. However, if other buildings of this period are on the main list, Derzhprom is still waiting for its decision due to major changes and deviations that appeared during numerous restorations and repairs. In 2021, the Kharkiv authorities announced that they would carry out a new restoration works to restore the building’s lost elements (Siaukun O., 2021). However, the war in Ukraine and the great destruction in Kharkiv are changing the priorities of the allocation of city and state budgets. Moreover, Kharkiv has been under constant shelling since February 2022, and many historic buildings around Derzhprom have already been partially damaged or destroyed, but the building itself is lucky to have survived, at least for now.

5. Conclusions

The Derzhprom building was the first office building built in the Constructivist style. In addition, Derzhprom is endowed with unique architectural properties, which in many ways influenced the image of Soviet modernist architecture. Moreover, considering the number of workers on the construction site, which was more than 5,000, the entire enterprises created for the construction of Derzhprom, its role in the development of the region is also difficult to overestimate.

A whole series of adopted scaling decisions, on the one hand, create a coherent composition of Derzhprom itself and emphasize the building as the central element in Freedom Square, and on the other, the building’s buildings around it tolerate, despite all the “otherness” of the architectural language, on the other. In the structure of the new district, which appeared on the site of the former suburbs, Derzhprom became the legislative not only of the stylistic decisions of Zaderzhprom’ya but also influenced the formation of additional compositional axes in the residential area.

Since its construction, the building has undergone several internal and external transformations, and even changed its silhouette, by adding new elements. Despite this, Derzhprom is still arguably the most significant architectural and monumental object in the history of Kharkiv for the vast majority of Kharkiv residents.