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УДК 72.01

Soviet Architecture in Provincial Towns as a Means of Humanization of Residential Environment (Based on Chernogorsk Town in the Years 1920-1960)

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Received 14.03.2012, received in revised form 19.03.2012, accepted 29.03.2012

The article deals with the development of humanistic ideas in Soviet architecture based on the example of Chernogorsk town, one of the industrial towns situated in the South of Eastern Siberia, in the period of its formation and development. The author describes historical sociopolitical processes of the middle of the XX century focused on humanization of the architecture of residential, public constructions and accomplishment of the city environment. The research considers architectural and constructing activity that led to improvement of the Soviet people's life and the humanistic ideas that reflected in the urban architectural objects of Chernogorsk. Article materials are analyzed on three basic positions: 1) residential architecture, 2) architecture of public buildings and complexes, 3) city accomplishment. The time framework of the present research covers the period from 1920s to 1960s.

Keywords: humanism, residential architecture, public architecture, city accomplishment, Chernogorsk town.

Introduction

Architecture is one of the most humanized kinds of art, the base of which is intended to create comfortable environment for the people's life. Humanism in architecture reveals itself at the stage of creating objects and areas that embody universal human values; architecture is a way of passing the humanistic traditions of the society on the next generations in different periods of its existence. But at the same time architecture is one of the most dependant on the state kinds of art, and it is closely connected to the current political

power and ideology of the country. For example, development of humanistic ideas in architecture is a reason to research it along with the history of the political development of the state and to find the reflection of policy pursued by the leading party in the architectural objects.

The main tasks of the present article are summed up to revealing the social and political process that influenced the development of humanism in architecture, to determining of humanistic ideas in the projects and finished architectural objects of the Soviet era based on

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one of the towns located in the South-East of Eastern Siberia called Chernogorsk.

The goal of this research is to define the factors that affect the development of humanistic ideas in architecture of the Soviet Union, and the revealing of real actions taken to improve the people's life.

The architecture of the Soviet period is studied by many researchers. Yu.L. Kosenkova, M.G. Meerovich, A.V. Ryabushin, Khmelnitskiy and others dedicated their works to the architecture and urban planning of the USSR and various regions of Russia; however, nowadays the problem has not been resolved yet. In their works, the researchers regard architecture and urban planning of the Soviet period from various positions. D.S. Kmelnitskiy (Khmelnitskiy 2006) and M.G. Meerovich (Meerovich 2010) hold on to the radical points of view; A.V. Ryabushin (Ryabushin 1986) supports Soviet architecture, the idea of Yu.L. Kosenkova (Kosenkova 2009) about the historical facts is closer to neutral.

The scientific studies of theoretical and social issues of the history of humanism development are being carried out by such researches as Kuvakin V.A. (Kuvakin 2006), Orlov I.B. (Orlov 2007), Reshetnikov V.A. (Reshetnikov 2004) and other authors.

It is customary to divide the development of architecture of the USSR into three periods based on social and political background: the first period is from 1918 till the beginning of the 1930s, the period of comparatively free constructivist architecture, the time when the Soviet power was establishing itself in the country, the time of the first five-year plan, the development of agriculture and the beginning of industrialization, the period of general and social instability in the life of people; the second period is from 1932 till 1955, the formation of neoclassicism, "Stalin Empire Style" that quickly replaced the messy post-revolutionary style was meant to

improve the living conditions of the people and replace an ascetic image of Constructivism by pompous and luxurious neoclassic constructions, the period of improving housing of the people and positive changes in the social environment; the third period is from 1955 till 1990, the period of simple architecture, the period of real actions taken towards cheapening the design and construction in order to provide Soviet people with accommodation.

The present research regards the material from three typological positions, which are: 1) residential architecture; 2) architecture of public buildings and complexes; 3) urban amenities.

1. Residential architecture

At the end of the 1920s, the policy of the USSR was mostly aimed at industrialisation, turning the agricultural country into a state with developed industrial complex. The slogans of those years called to improve the life of Soviet citizens and raise the income of the people. It was planned to boost the migration of the people from the countryside into cities, to create conditions for comfortable residence, to build objects of cultural and public services, resolve the housing problems of the citizens. One of the researchers believes that industrialization was begun not for resolving the housing problems of the Soviet citizens; "its only objective was constructing heavy, and as a result, military industry. It was done at the expense of decreasing the living standards of the population to the minimum" (Khmelnitskiy 2010).

It was planned to build separate apartments for the workers. At the Plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of July 1926, it was stated that "the housing problem of the workers is one of the most topical issues that must be resolved to improve the living standards of the people" (All-Union Communist Party resolutions 1970: 351). But in fact the state did not have

the opportunity to provide all the workers with separate accommodation. That is how such new kinds of accommodation as communal flats with separate rooms for families, hostels and commune houses appeared. Commune houses were a coercive measure that was caused by the social conditions of the country and the policy of the government, the lack of individual accommodation, prohibition of individual construction and private property (All-Russian Executive Committee Decree 1918).

As an example of the way the Soviet government implemented its social ideas into architecture, we can study one of the industrial Siberian towns called Chernogorsk.

Chernogorsk is located in the South-West of Eastern Siberia, on the territory of the Republic of Khakassia. This republican town grew out of several mining villages that were built near coal mines of Minusinsk coal basin (Lemytskaya 2011).

In the 1920s, Chernogorsk town was an urban type settlement called Chernogorskie Kopi with the population of 1,4 thousand people (according to the first All-Union Population Census of 1926). The village was suffering severe lack of accommodation, as it consisted of not more than fifty houses (Gorodetskiv 1986: 45). The workers used to live in mud huts and barracks, 2-3 families in each room. The buildings were primitively constructed, with double walls made of hunches with some sawdust or slag between them. A typical room would have the dimensions of 4 x 4 metres, and it served as a living-room and a kitchen for 6-8 people both (Gorodetskiy 1986: 14). The housing problem was compounded by the flow of the workers to the mines, which was the consequence of the fast development of coal industry.

The basic problem for the decision of a housing question was the absence of construction materials, as the village was situated in the middle

of steppe with no clay deposits around. Sun-dried houses were made of imported clay, the bricks were made manually, right at the construction site. In the second half of the 1920, secondary construction materials were used, when some abandoned houses from "Julia" and "Ulen" mines were brought to the area (Gorodetskiy 1986: 45).

The opportunity to bring construction materials first appeared after Abakan-Achinsk railway was complete, and after the railway to Tasheba station was built. After that, bricks brought from Krasnoyarsk started to be used in construction, such new materials as slag blocks and sun-dried bricks appeared. It all moved the construction to a new higher level. A district of sun-dried brick houses with flats for miners, builders, engineers and technical personnel along with a small colony of butoh-gerardovskih and two-storey wooden houses was built. For specialists, a special 12-apartment house was erected!

In the period of 1930-1940s, workers' accommodation in Chernogorsk was represented by one or two-storey barracks made of sun-dried bricks, wood, bricks or slag blocks. As a rule, residential buildings had normal appearance of common residential houses: plastered and painted facades, V-shaped or hip roofs, several entrances with wooden porches, windows with shutters. Outside there was a frontyard, behind the house there usually was a small vegetable garden and outbuildings like tool-sheds or coal-sheds, so-called "uglyarka". Flats in such houses usually consisted of two rooms and a kitchen. The houses were equipped with stoves for heating.

Social equality declared in the country, manifested itself in social differentiation of the Soviet people. There was no private property in the USSR, all the housing resources belonged to the state. People were granted accommodation according to official regulations, that considered such factors as occupation, party membership,

merits and others. More comfortable flats were made for the party and administration heads (2-5% of the population), communal flats were for workers' families (70-80% of the population), no frills housing like barracks, mud huts, billets, commune houses, hostels and other were for single workers (15-20% of the population) (Meerovich 2010a).

In the middle of the 1930s, after the political, economic and cultural reforms carried out in the Soviet architecture, Constructivism was replaced by so-called "Stalin Empire Style". Constructivism was replaced by architecture that simulated classic style. It was the beginning of the mass construction in the USSR. As a result of unification process, improved accommodation projects were designed, and later it was spread all over the country.

It was planned to erect houses with improved apartment layout. However, despite of the "universal equality", there was obvious differentiation of the people according to the social strata to which they belonged, as it revealed itself in the residential architecture as well.

Workers' houses had a primitive layout that did not include any rooms with special functions, like a dining room, a study, a children's playing room, a guest room etc. The ceilings were not high, the rooms were also not big in comparison with those made for the Soviet leaders or directors of industrial facilities.

Barracks of slag blocks, houses of sundried bricks and tarred railway sleepers were replaced by typical individual residential houses of one or two floors, 6-12 apartments each. Such houses were made for workers' families. The flats consisted of 2 or 3 rooms with a kitchen, a living room and 1-2 bedrooms. The houses were made of bricks, plastered and painted. The facades were decorated in a classic manner with cornices, consoles, rustication. In the yard of the residential house there usually were some outbuildings like

sheds, garages, root cellars. You can see examples of such houses in Chapaeva and Oktyabrskaya Streets.

The flats made for the local party elite, directors of factories and artistic intelligentsia usually had 3-4 rooms, high ceilings of over 3 meters, stuccowork decorated interiors. Some layout variants foresaw such rooms as a study, a dining room, a children's room. In Chernogorsk such houses can be found in some areas of Sovetskaya, Lenin Streets, on the crossroads of these streets with Dzerzhinskogo and Mira Streets. One of such houses is situated on the crossroads of Sovetskaya and Dzerzhinskogo Streets and is called "the Sputnik". The house is r-shaped, made of bricks, has four floors, the first of which is social, and there is a bel etage in the central corner part of the building. The facade facing Sovetskaya Street has bow windows in all the floors of the building. The facades are decorated with cornices, consoles under the balconies; the gable facades are rusticated (Fig. 1).

According to typical design plans, individual residential granges with small plots, for one or two families each, were built. Such houses can be found in Initsiativnaya, Pushkina and Ugolnaya Streets.

So. to characterize the residential architecture as a means of environment humanization, it is worth mentioning some of the factors that influenced its development. The migration of the countryside population into the cities that occurred in the 1920s, compounded the complicated housing situation in the country. In general, the government's policy was aimed at improving the housing situation in the country. Despite the obvious social inequality in the distribution of citizens' apartments and lack of finance for providing all the citizens with accommodation, the state was trying to solve this problem by means of building commune houses, hostels and propaganda of the "common



Fig 1. Chernogorsk town, Sovetskaya / Dzerzhinskogo Streets, residential house "the Sputnik". Photo of 1960s.²

household", commune living and communal flats, conducting massive building of unified typical residential houses. The results were positive: by the 1960s, the situation had improved. Chernogorsk is a good example of this process. In the first years of the Soviet era in the 1920 and 1930s the residential architecture of Chernogorsk was mostly represented by mud huts, barracks and rare examples of residential houses. In the next period from 1940 to 1960, the situation in the city changed when typical design residential houses with improved layout began to be constructed, and it aided resolving the housing problem in the town as a whole.

2. Architecture of public buildings and complexes

New social conditions of life set the new tasks for the architects: the social and cultural spheres needed new cultural objects that would at the same time carry some ideological meaning, like cultural centres, houses of Soviets, children activity centres, clubs, schools, sports facilities; health sphere needed new hospitals, recreational centres, pioneers' camps. One of the tasks of the Soviet government was to organize recreation of working people, liquidate illiteracy, protect people's health by means of providing them with health and sports facilities.

However, the main cultural and political object of the social centre of a Soviet city has always been the House of Soviets. The construction of the three-storey brick building of the House of Soviets in Chernogorsk had been planned since the year 1936 (the municipal council did not have a building of its own and had its office in a residential house). But due to the lack of finance, the construction works were begun only in the year 1938. Another socially significant object, the House of Communication, was planned to be built in the years 1938-1939.



Fig. 2. Chernogorsk, Bograda Street 100, Pioneers' House (on the right). Photo made in the 1960s. 4

In Chernogorsk there was no finance for constructing new objects of cultural sphere. Many of the establishments were located in residential houses built of secondary constructing materials. For constructing the first Pioneers' House in Chernogorsk town, "Khakassugol" business organization transferred a recreational centre building that was situated 45 kilometres away from the town, to the Municipal council. The building was dissembled and moved to be used for erecting the new Pioneers' House. The construction of the Pioneers' House in Bogradsky Lane was begun in the year 1939³.

The special building of the Pioneers' House was built in the same place, in Bograda Street, 100, only 15 years later. The project was made in 1949 by the architect E.A. Anichkova-Platonova in joint authorship with T.V. Kovalevskaya; the construction was carried out in the years 1950-1955 (Slabukha 2004: 23-25). The architecture of the Pioneers' House corresponded to the artistic and ideological requirements of the time. The two-storey building was made of slag-concrete, plastered and painted. The facade was decorated with a portico with a hemispheric caisson dome supported by a semi-circular architrave, leaning against Ionic order columns. Under the top of the dome there are bas-reliefs depicting pioneers

reeling around a fire. The interior of the palace was decorated with fretwork, in the hall there was a grand staircase with mosaic steps (Fig. 2).

In the 1950s, according to the project of the architect N.A. Rumyantseva "Russia" cinema was built (Slabukha 2004: 287). Its two semicircular colonnade ornamenting the main facade looking out to Sovetskaya Street, enchased the entrance of the City Park. The facade was decorated with a portico with a hemispheric caisson dome, on the two sides of the building there were two arched gates leading into the park, and inside the semicircular colonnades looking out at the main street, there were ticket offices of the park (Fig. 3).

In the design and construction special buildings for primary and secondary educational institutions there was no immediate implementation of government decrees. Radical changes in the sphere of education and culture of the country occurred after issuing All-Russian Executive Committee Decree dated 14.08.1923 "On eradication of illiteracy among the population of RSFSR". The Decree said that "Eradication of illiteracy among rural and urban population is one of the most important tasks of the education of the people, which is also closely connected to the industrial revival of the country".



Fig. 3. Chernogorsk, Sovetskaya Street, "Russia" cinema and entrance into the City Park. Photo made in the 1960s 5

In the year 1934 the first secondary school (school №7) of the village Chernogorskie Kopi with the places for 400 children was opened. There were families of different nationalities living in the village, for instance, Khakass, Tartar, Korean. For teaching children several primary schools were organized: a four-year Korean school for 48 children, where one of the classes studied all the subjects in Tartar language, and a National Khakass school for 20 children. Because of the lack of education facilities, teaching in all the schools was organized in two shifts. For the junior children, two kindergartens for 150 children were made, one nursery for 100 children and an infant health centre were opened.

Such measures as opening regular schools and national schools, teachers' training, work on making up writing for the peoples that had no writing for their language, changing the writing of some peoples into Cyrillic were supposed to resolve the problem of mass illiteracy of the population. As a result, by the end of the 1930s the level of illiteracy had been decreased, illiteracy lost its status of an acute social problem and by the end of the 1950s, the task had been generally completed⁷.

The Healthcare system that was created during the years of the Soviet era is considered to be one of the most remarkable achievements in the social sphere. The first tasks of the 2nd Program approved at the 8th Plenum of the Russian Communist Party in March 1919, were: the healthcare of the population settlements, preservation of the soil, water and air, development of public nutrition on the basis of the health and hygiene, drawing up sanitary legislation, providing the population with affordable or free qualified medical assistance etc. The Soviet healthcare was based on the most humane principles: availability and free-of-charge, preventive trend development, involving wide masses of workers into healthcare system organization (Healthcare 1969-1978).

The organization and development of the Healthcare system in the village Chernogorskie Kopi was considered to be very important. Two hospitals for 95 people were built, a clinic with an X-ray cabinet and physiotherapy equipment, three emergency assistance cabinets at the mines and some drugstores were opened. 7 kilometres away from the village, on the bank of the Yenisei river a summer recreation centre for the miners was constructed.⁸

A lot of significance was granted to resolving the problems of everyday services, public nutrition and trading organization. There were 11 points of trade and everyday services. All the trading network of the village was subordinate to the mine management. So-

called WSD – Workers' Supply Departments were opened. Each of them was fixed at one certain enterprise. The workers could purchase goods only at the WSD that were connected to their enterprises. There were 9 WSDs and two independent shops in the village. A city market was also functioning. There were 8 public canteens in the village and its surroundings⁹.

The constructing of sports facilities in the city was begun with the administrative reformation, the founding of the town of Chernogorsk in the year 1936. According to the urban amenities provision plan for the year 1936, a 200-300 metre long open-air swimming pool was planned to be built in the City Park. The social significance of the construction of this facility was supported by a real public participation in the mine excavations during construction. For the same year, a stadium was planned to be constructed on the left side of Abakan road between the secondary school and the irrigation ditch¹⁰.

During the military period, the architecture was mostly aimed at designing the objects of industry and defence, at constructing sites for evacuated factories and enterprises. The objects of culture, residence and sports were very rare during the period.

In the first ten years of the post-military period (1945-1955) the architects had to solve the problem of reviving the cities, erecting new residential buildings, cultural and general services objects.

In the spring 1945, a new stadium called "Shakhter" was introduced into service. The place for the construction was outlined out in the sandlot between the streets Bograda – Sadovaya – Krasnykh Partizan and the market. Generally, the stadium is a social object construction. The stadium was erected by the students of the Mining School and the citizens of Chernogorsk. The central entrance is looking towards the market, it is made out of grid wooden construction shaped

like the letter "n", next to the main entrance the ticket offices are located. The central lane leads from the entrance to the tribune. The central part of the tribunes was covered with a velarium, and was designed for musicians and official people. The territory around the stadium was beautifully decorated with garden fixtures. In front of the tribune entrance there was a flower bed in the centre of which there is a monument of J.V. Stalin, and a monument of V.I. Lenin opposite. On the two sides of the football pitch there are plaster figures of athletes. The stadium complex consisted of a football pitch, a basketball court, two volleyball courts, a gorodki ground, high jump and long jump areas, javelin and discus throwing, shot put areas, gymnastic and weightlifting apparatus, along with a summer shower and dressing rooms for the athletes. In winter, a skating rink was made (Sipkin 2006: 70).

The resolution "On Eradication of Excessiveness in Design and Construction" issued in the year 1955 started a new stage in the Soviet architecture. The resolution was aimed at maximal decrease of the construction costs in order to provide the people with accommodation and to create the infrastructure for the life in towns and smaller settlements. However, this economic policy led to the uniformity and poorness of architectural solutions.

Thus, it is worth noting that the policy of the Soviet state included certain methods and principles of design and construction of the social and cultural objects. The state was trying to compensate the impossibility to provide the people with decent housing with constructing social, cultural objects for the people's leisure. In the years 1920-1940 the major part of the population remained illiterate or semiliterate. Illiteracy eradication was one of the priority trends in the state policy, which boosted the construction of regular, national and evening schools all over the country. The state's care about the population's

health manifested itself in the construction of sports facilities, hospitals and recreation houses. Unification and typical building design helped to decrease the construction costs, increase the construction volumes and create a highly developed network of everyday service in all the cities and smaller settlements of the country.

3. City accomplishment

At the first All-Russia Plenum on Healthcare of the settlements carried out in 1921, the People's Commissariat for Healthcare (PCHealth) and the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (PCIA, or NKBD), the problem of the absence of any urban planning and urban amenities policy discussed. At the Plenum it was admitted that some special urban planning legislation is necessary. The main points of the legislation were to be: the healthcare, sanitary care of the settlements and their rational replanning (Kosenkova 2010).

The policy of the Soviet state demanded the architects and the city planners to create an urban environment, that would be comfortable from the ecological, functional and aesthetical points of view. Organizing parks, squares, recreation areas, urban amenities and greening were supposed to solve the set problems.

The social significance of improving the living space was raised by involving the citizens into the activities. So, works on an accomplishment and gardening of cities were carried out with the participation of the people. "Subbotnik" activities that were obligatory for everyone to take part in were conducted. The Subbotniks were aimed at planting trees, making flower beds, greening the urban territories, constructing some small garden fixtures (Lemytskaya 2011a). Every enterprise had to provide the activities with their workers, machinery, tools, materials. One of the employees had to be appointed to be the responsible, a detailed plan and report were drawn up.

All the enterprises located in the town, all the organizations and the education establishments had their own territories to look after. The territories around residential houses were taken care after by their residents and supervisors. So, the whole town was divided into areas to be improved.

The most active works on improving the village Chernogorskie Kopi were begun in the 1930s. A system of parks, squares and boulevards had been completed by the year 1935, and it included: the Park of Culture, the Soviet Square, the Central Electric Station and Mechanic Factory Square, Sovetskaya Street Boulevard, Lenin street Boulevard.

The trees planted in the village Chernogorskie Kopi were poplars that were brought from Potroshilovskie islands in the river Yenisei and the islands close to Wood Processing Factory (at present, the territory of Ust-Abakan village). Siberian wind apple trees and Siberian pea tree were purchased in Minusinsk forestry establishment. Such bushes as dogrose, gooseberry, blackcurrant and raspberries were brought from the nearby mountains and islands to be planted in the town. Greening was carried out during Subbotniks with the help of the local citizens, workers and the transport of the factories and mines. Together with planting the trees, flower beds were organized, lightening works, numerating the houses, streets and lanes naming were carried out11.

In the 1950s the City Park was completed, some attractions, sculptures, outdoor amenities, a fountain designed as a bear with five cubs were made (Fig. 4). In the spring 1951 the first children's railway in Khakassia Republic (that time, Khakass Autonomous Province) started functioning.

This way, the policy aimed at providing urban amenities and creating comfortable living conditions for the people led to the general



Fig. 4. City Park of Culture, photo made in 1960s.¹²

improvement of the ecological situation in the town. Due to the greening, constructing boulevards and parks, recreation facilities for the citizens were organized.

Conclusion

Having studied the social and political context of architectural development at the example of the environment of one of the industrial Siberian cities, Chernogorsk town, it is possible to come to conclusion that the policy was socially oriented and was aimed at improving the living standards of the Soviet people. However, humanistic ideas often could not be totally put into practice, for the reasons causes of which were among others the lack of funds and constructing materials.

The studied period of all three positions, residential architecture, architecture of social constructions and complexes and urban amenities,

is characterized by special ideas of humanizing the architectural environment.

The architecture underwent changes from social and general disorder to improvement of housing conditions, positive tendencies in the social sphere and providing the Soviet people with individual accommodation.

The policy of the government in the sphere of social buildings and complexes was aimed at creating a sufficient general service system, objects of cultural and political significance, healthcare and education facilities, comfortable city environment, which was all reflected in the rise of the living standards.

A special place in implementing the amenities program is taken by the organized social works (citizens' volunteering). All the citizens were involved in doing the works, which was also an important tool in patriotic education of the people.

Archive of Chernogorsk town Administration. F. 1, op. 1, vol. 1, p. 81.

² From private archive of the author.

³ Archive of Chernogorsk town Administration. F. 1, op. 1, vol. 5, p. 13.

From private archive of the author.

⁵ From private archive of the author.

⁶ Archive of Chernogorsk town Administration, F. 1, op. 1, vol. 2, p.17-18.

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Советская архитектура в провинциальных городах, как средство гуманизации жилой среды (на примере города Черногорска 1920-1960-х годов)

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В статье исследуется развитие гуманистических идей в архитектуре СССР на примере города Черногорска, одного из промышленных городов юга Восточной Сибири в период его формирования и развития. Автор описывает исторические социально-политические процессы середины XX века, направленные на гуманизацию архитектуры жилых, общественных сооружений и благоустройства городской среды. В исследовании рассматриваются: деятельность в архитектурно-строительной области, которая привела к улучшению жизни советских людей; гуманистические идеи, отразившиеся в архитектурных объектах города Черногорска. Материалы статьи анализируются по трем основным позициям: 1) жилая архитектура, 2) архитектура общественных зданий и комплексов, 3) благоустройство. Временные рамки исследования охватывают период с 1920 по 1960-е годы.

Ключевые слова: гуманизм, жилая архитектура, общественная архитектура, благоустройство, город Черногорск.