

Between Architecture and Identity



Die approbierte gedruckte Originalversion dieser Diplomarbeit ist an der TU Wien Bibliothek verfügbar
The approved original version of this thesis is available in print at TU Wien Bibliothek.

Master Thesis / Diplomarbeit

Between Architecture and Identity:

A Case Study on Kazakhstan

carried out for the purpose of obtaining the
academic degree of Diplom-Ingenieurin (Dipl.-Ing.)
under the supervision of

Andrea Rieger-Jandl, Ao.Univ.Prof. Dipl.-Ing. Dr.phil.

E251-01 Institute of History of Art, Building Archaeology and Restoration

submitted at the Vienna University of Technology,
the Faculty of Architecture and Planning by

Aknur Zhussip, BSc

01229141

Vienna, June 2022



Die approbierte gedruckte Originalversion dieser Diplomarbeit ist an der TU Wien Bibliothek verfügbar
The approved original version of this thesis is available in print at TU Wien Bibliothek.

Thank You

To my parents, who above all valued education and gave me an opportunity to pursue my dreams

Andrea Rieger-Jandl, for her interest in my work, for giving me motivation, guidance and for her insight

Peter Fattinger, for showing me importance of this discipline and inspiring me to be a better architect

Christine Höhenbuchler, for her support and motivation in my creative endeavours

Adil Nurmakov for showing interest in my work and answering my questions

To my dear friend Saltanat, for her continuous support and help while I was staying in Kazakhstan, for answering to all of my questions and helping me interview other residents, Moldir for helping me with online survey, Nurila for taking her time and showing me around the city, Aida for answering all of my questions, to all other people who took their time for an interview and survey

and Timo, for your patience and support



Die approbierte gedruckte Originalversion dieser Diplomarbeit ist an der TU Wien Bibliothek verfügbar
The approved original version of this thesis is available in print at TU Wien Bibliothek.

In loving memory of my *ata* and *aje*

Abstract

The question of identity or a quest for identity is becoming more and more acute in the realm of rapidly changing modern world, globalization and spread of information. The pace with which things around people are changing oftentimes does not fit the pace with which people's perception of the "self" and "collective" changes. Identity through time can be shifted or changed and people are then met with a task of re-identifying themselves. This is especially true for post-colonial and post-soviet countries, and Kazakhstan is no exception.

Architecture is a physical reflection of changes in society and its values. The architecture in Kazakhstan has been shaped by a number of different influences. Its architecture underwent a constant change, ever since the half sedentary civilizations of that area turned to a nomadic lifestyle, who were then colonized by Russia, and have now been trying to create a new nation in the last 30 years. Architecture in the USSR was shaped by politicians and was used as a tool to create a particular society. After gaining independence this method has been used again in order to create an image of a sovereign nation. This process has undoubtedly had an influence on the society that has emerged. It can be observed in the case of a newly built part of the capital, where an effort to build a new national identity has been made. In that sense it is relevant to look at what kind of identity the architecture in Kazakhstan is creating and if people are able to identify themselves with it.

Kurzfassung

Die Frage nach der Identität oder der Suche nach Identität wird im Bereich der sich schnell verändernden modernen Welt, der Globalisierung und der Verbreitung von Informationen immer akuter. Das Tempo, mit dem sich die Dinge um die Menschen herum ändern, passt oft nicht zu dem Tempo, mit dem sich die Wahrnehmung der Menschen vom „Selbst“ und „Kollektiv“ ändert. Identität im Laufe der Zeit kann verschoben oder verändert werden, und die Menschen stehen dann vor der Aufgabe, sich neu zu identifizieren. Dies gilt insbesondere für postkoloniale und postsowjetische Länder, in denen Kasachstan keine Ausnahme darstellt.

Architektur ist ein physisches Spiegelbild der Veränderungen in der Gesellschaft und ihrer Werte. Die Architektur in Kasachstan hat unterschiedliche Einflüsse in ihrer Gestaltung gehabt. Anfängen von alten halb sesshaften Zivilisationen bis hin zu nomadischem Lebensstil, russischer Kolonialisierung und der Schaffung einer neuen Nation in den letzten 30 Jahren. Die Architektur in der UdSSR wurde von Politikern geprägt und als Werkzeug zur Schaffung einer bestimmten Gesellschaft verwendet. Nach der Erlangung der Unabhängigkeit wurde diese Methode erneut verwendet, um ein Bild einer ganzen Nation zu schaffen. Dies hat zweifellos einen Einfluss auf die entstandene Gesellschaft. Dies kann im Fall eines neu gebauten Teils der Hauptstadt beobachtet werden, wo Anstrengungen unternommen wurden, um eine neue nationale Identität aufzubauen. Insofern ist es relevant zu schauen, welche Art von Identität die Architektur in Kasachstan schafft und ob sich die Menschen damit identifizieren können.

Table of contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Prologue | 13 |
| Introduction | 15 |
| Research interest and research question | 16 |
| Methods | 17 |
| Remarks | 19 |
| Identity and architecture | 21 |
| Identity and culture | 22 |
| Traditions and invented traditions | 24 |
| Identity in architecture | 26 |
| The process of becoming | 29 |
| Context | 32 |
| Nomads | 40 |
| <i>Kiyiz üy</i> | 46 |
| The Soviet influence | 52 |
| Architecture as a political instrument | 54 |
| Constructing identity | 61 |
| Nation-building | 62 |
| Designed capitals | 64 |
| New capital - New state - New society | 70 |
| Abstract Symbolism | 79 |
| Identity markers | 85 |
| Global and iconic | 86 |
| In search of one's "own" | 90 |
| <i>Kiyiz üy, shanyrak, kerege</i> | 92 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Ornaments | 98 |
| Ornaments in architecture | 102 |
| Kazakh folklore | 108 |
| Creation of a myth | 112 |
| Türkistan - contemporary myth | 116 |
| The Circle | 120 |
| Symbol of unity - Palace of Peace and Reconciliation and Presidential Park | 125 |
| Shell and Core | 128 |
| Other perspectives | 133 |
| The story of three worlds | 134 |
| Survey | 142 |
| Nature | 148 |
| To the question of architecture | 151 |
| House of my memories | 154 |
| Conclusio | 156 |
| Epilogue | 161 |
| Glossary | 162 |
| Literature | 164 |
| Dictionary | 168 |
| Internet links | 169 |
| Figures | 170 |
| Appendix | 174 |



Die approbierte gedruckte Originalversion dieser Diplomarbeit ist an der TU Wien Bibliothek verfügbar
The approved original version of this thesis is available in print at TU Wien Bibliothek.

Prologue

Coming back from my trip to Kazakhstan, I told my boyfriend excitedly about all the impressions that I got. The feeling that the country was still in a state of finding itself, that the younger generation was looking for answers. I saw their desire to find their own identity. This was the generation that didn't see the second world war, the Soviet Union and its fall. This generation was born in a free country and demanded answers. They wanted to know who they are, and weren't content with their corrupt government. Our parents are content with the current regime, because they experienced all that, they knew the price of independence, so as long as they lived "under a peaceful sky" as my parents would always say, they were grateful. However the new generation which had not experienced all that wanted more. And I saw a hope in this new generation. For a better Kazakhstan, for a better future. As I was recounting all of that, my boyfriend asked me how much of that was me projecting. And that got me thinking. I am also a part of this new generation, I was also born in an independent Kazakhstan and I am also trying to find my own identity. This search for the roots was probably the very reason why I wanted to do my thesis about this topic in the first place. So this work and this search for meaning is very personal to me.



Die approbierte gedruckte Originalversion dieser Diplomarbeit ist an der TU Wien Bibliothek verfügbar
The approved original version of this thesis is available in print at TU Wien Bibliothek.

Introduction

Research interest and research question

Each culture has its own unique architecture that has been shaped throughout history. Through amalgamation of different currents emerges its' own identity that gives an insight into the way a particular collective identity has been shaped, its set of values and its way of thinking.

The architecture in Kazakhstan has been shaped by a number of different influences. Its architecture underwent a constant change, ever since the half sedentary civilizations of that area turned to a nomadic lifestyle, who were then colonized by Russia, and have now been trying to create a new nation in the last 30 years. Architecture in the USSR was shaped by politicians and was used as a tool to create a particular society. After gaining independence this method has been used again in order to create an image of a sovereign nation. This process has undoubtedly had an influence on the society that has emerged.

The purpose of this work is to take a look at the architecture of a particular country and its influence on creating an identity. The perception is subjective. However there are also collective identities which can be defined by ethnic belonging, religious affiliation etc. Architecture can also build an identity, or at least be used as a tool to construct or influence an identity. Thus the research questions would be: What kind of identity is being created in Kazakhstan and what is the role of architecture in it? What kind of expressive elements in architecture are being used? What is the role of vernacular architecture in identity process? Whose identity does an architecture represent? Are local and global architectural styles used and adapted in order to implement certain ideologies and intentions? Can people identify themselves with created architecture?

Methods

A Methodology for this thesis was to thoroughly research and analyze all relevant data in form of literature and internet research. Additionally a trip to Kazakhstan was taken in order to do research on site, access literature in local libraries and conduct interviews with experts in their respective fields and local residents as well. In total 20 interviews were conducted with one professor, one assistant of a professor, three architects, two urban planners, two interior designers and eleven residents of Astana. In order to get additional perspective, an online survey was conducted where 21 participants answered open questions.

Fieldwork

A visit to Kazakhstan gave me valuable insights into various aspects of the country, and its social and cultural uniqueness. I used to visit Kazakhstan only for couple of weeks before, however this time my extended stay helped me reevaluate the way I perceived things. Coming from Europe I used to look at things from a “western” perspective and automatically compare two parallels. This time my prolonged visit helped me dive into the culture and gain a deeper understanding of the way people lived and thought. I think in creating something, especially when it comes to planning for foreign projects it is important to understand the cultural context as well. Nowadays, what happens a lot is that renowned architectural firms design similar projects all over the world, similar to copy pasting activity. This can be seen in projects of renowned starchitects in Kazakhstan as well. Further meetings with professors, practicing architects as well as residents also helped me evaluate a state of affairs. This was followed by research at the libraries, visits to museums, various public buildings and walks through the cities itself.

Remarks

Architecture and identity are complex terms which can be interpreted in many different ways. The aim of this work is to contribute to this topic of discussion. Especially in a country where identity is being constructed through various different influences be it the elites in power, social media channels or the desire to have roots, it becomes harder to define oneself let alone form the collective identity of a whole country. The aim is to not necessarily arrive at one final statement. Due to the limited framework of a diploma thesis and empirical approach it is hard to arrive at a representative result, however an attempt was made. Also gender neutral language was used.



Die approbierte gedruckte Originalversion dieser Diplomarbeit ist an der TU Wien Bibliothek verfügbar
The approved original version of this thesis is available in print at TU Wien Bibliothek.

Identity and architecture

Identity and culture

The question of identity or a quest for identity is becoming more and more acute in the realm of rapidly changing modern world, globalization and spread of information. The pace with which things around people are changing oftentimes does not fit the pace with which people's perception of the "self" and "collective" changes. Identity through time can be shifted or changed and people are then met with a task of re-identifying themselves. This is especially true for post-colonial and post-soviet countries, where Kazakhstan is not an exclusion.

The word itself it does not have one particular definition, but rather multiple different ones. The APA Dictionary of Psychology defines the term personal identity as "an individual's sense of self defined by a set of physical, psychological and interpersonal characteristics that is not wholly shared with any other person and a range of affiliations (e.g., ethnicity) and social roles."¹ In other words identity of an individual is defined by different factors one of which is its' affiliation (or lack of affiliation) with a certain group.

Certain groups consist of different individual identities which share a common set of values and create a new "collective" identity. A collective identity gives people a sense of belonging. The way to differentiate this collective identity is through its unique features which do not exist in others which could also mean through exclusion of others. According, to Andre Gingrich identity means a personal and collective, multiple and contradictory subjectivities and subject movements that include "difference from others" as well as "belonging to similar".² These two conflicting feelings of wanting to be different from others but also to be included in certain groups makes the understanding and formation of identity complex. In the desire to identify oneself is also the

1 APA Dictionary of Psychology. Link: <<https://dictionary.apa.org/identity>> (retrieved 28.04.2022)

2 Gingrich, 2005. P. 23-49

desire to distinguish oneself.

Cultural identity is another term that is relevant in identifying oneself. The word culture has various meanings and interpretations. Anthropologists have around a hundred different definitions. According to Henry Pratt Fairchild, culture is seen as behaviour patterns which are socially acquired and transmitted by means of symbols. These patterns include language, tool-making, art, science as well as material artifacts in which cultural achievements are embodied.³ Architecture falls into the category of material artifacts through which intellectual, cultural features are manifested and thus becomes a part of a culture.

Cultural identity is defined as “a notion of order that is formed by specific cultural features such as language, religion, political system etc. and can be distinguishable in comparison to others.”⁴

³ Fairchild, 1967. P. 80

⁴ Rieger-Jandl, 2009. P. 36

Traditions and invented traditions

Tradition is a “set of social customs or ethnic or family practices handed down from generation to generation.”⁵

Rieger-Jandl defines tradition as an anonymous product created by an unconscious collective process. It is a cultural phenomenon where the process of handing down certain practices to the next generation is very important. In that way traditional architecture can be defined as a cultural product which combines forms of appearance based on regional building materials, adapted to topographical, climatic, social, historiographical and cultural conditions and that has been passed from generation to generation.⁶ The search for identity is often linked to reconnecting with the past, where traditions play an important role. This desire to find the “roots” might be seen as a reaction to the external influences and reconnection with the past can be seen as a negation of the values imposed by modernity.

When however the established relations in a society are weakened and there is a need for transformation, traditions can be invented. Eric Hobsbawm defines the term invented tradition as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. ... However, insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of ‘invented’ traditions is that the continuity with it is largely factitious. In short they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition.”⁷ These invented narratives are used primarily by the elites in power as

⁵ APA Dictionary of Psychology. Link: <<https://dictionary.apa.org/tradition>> (retrieved 28.04.2022)

⁶ Rieger-Jandl, 2009. P. 26

⁷ Hobsbawm, 1983. P. 1

an ideology to govern society and justify their credibility. Hobsbawm defines three overlapping types of invented traditions : a) used for establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or groups, b) used for establishing or legitimizing institutions or authority, and c) used for the main purpose of socialization, implementation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour.

⁸ Among these traditions, establishing and symbolizing social cohesion seems to be most used and most efficient, especially by using symbols. If we look at the meaning of symbolic constructs such as National Flag, National Anthem or National Emblem, even though they are invented, their power over the personal identity and consequently collective identity is undeniable.

In the history of Kazakhstan invented traditions were used on a wider scale twice already in order to construct a certain collective identity. The Soviet Union at the beginning of XXth century saw it as their mission to modernize society and imposed a certain identity of a “progressive” nation. After gaining Independence the authority in Kazakhstan tried to create a new identity for a nation and invented traditions were used again. The use of symbols in constructing this national identity was strong and by observations in demonstrations it can be seen that symbols such as the National Anthem and National Flag were the most powerful ones that were able to unite people. Under the motto “New Capital - New State - New Society” the First President tried to construct a new identity by building a new capital and filling it with symbolic forms, which were supposed to redefine a society.

8 Hobsbawm, 1983. P. 9

Identity in architecture

Architecture or built space plays an essential role in people's lives. There are buildings which provide the essential need for humans, places to live in and that offer protection. There are other buildings which are not meant to function as a dwelling. There are buildings which surround people's habitat and stand in the built environment as "signs". Egener defines them as "symbolic buildings." The protective function of a cathedral, city hall or a museum is less important, while the "sign-factor" plays an essential role in people's lives and their perception of the surroundings. This type of buildings with their prominent existence make "accents" in the regulated spatial structure of the cities, by which people can orient themselves. Not only in the spatial, but also in the mental sense this type of buildings can tell about the "essence of the city". Urban planning in recent years has shown that people do not only expect architects to fulfill their physical needs, but also respond to their mental needs. Every building, whether only as a sign or also by having a function of shelter, is ultimately by definition is connected to a specific location and makes up a space. Groups of buildings then makes up a network and through their positioning, their form and social units associated with them make a lasting influence on the perception of people. Because we find ourselves born into a specific network, we live there, we grow there and our lives shape themselves there. Everyday this network unconsciously influences our behavior, by classifying us, including us somewhere while excluding from other parts.⁹

Thus the connection between architecture and identity is not about how identity can be represented in architecture, it is rather to create architecture with which people can identify themselves. Architecture is a physical reflection of changes in society and its values. Identity differs from one subject to another and architectural identity can also differ in relation of the subject (person) to

⁹ Egener, 1980. P. 7-9

said object (architecture). Some buildings become meaningful for people and they can identify themselves with them while others can not. That is the ambivalence of individual and collective identity, it unites some, while excluding others.

Identity is a process which is not stagnant, it is in constant state of “becoming” and can not be viewed as “finished product”. However a certain form of identity in architecture can emerge through time and mixture of different influences be it local or global. With globalization simmering into different parts and cultures of the world imitation can be seen as a tool which “provides security and relieves one from the difficulty to carry itself.” On the other hand the desire to differentiate oneself leads to counter-movements in architecture. It is often linked to a past, where traditions play an important role.¹⁰ Hanging on to the cultural heritage and traditions or an attempt to revive them can also be seen as outdated in a modern world where inclusivity and non-discrimination is of utmost importance as well.

After becoming independent Kazakhstan has been put with the task of re-identifying itself, and architecture was used as a tool in a nation-building project lead by the government. According to Vale “many political regimes make especially powerful symbolic use of the physical environment.”¹¹ Public buildings in this case become a primary tool used to construct an identity for an individual as well as collective.

¹⁰ Rieger-Jandl, 2009. P. 84

¹¹ Vale, 1992. P. 3



Die approbierte gedruckte Originalversion dieser Diplomarbeit ist an der TU Wien Bibliothek verfügbar
The approved original version of this thesis is available in print at TU Wien Bibliothek.

The process of becoming

fig. 1

Landscape of Kazakhstan





Context

The vast steppes of Kazakhstan have been home to various nomadic tribes throughout history. The Bronze Age Andronovo culture, followed by ancient nomadic tribes of scythians and persian achaeminids was spread over the territory of much of modern Kazakhstan. Caravans of the Silk Road passed through the ancient cities of Kazakhstan some 2000 years ago. This undeniably lead to an exchange of knowledge, culture and skills among citizens as well as travelers which spread from China to Europe and East Africa. ¹²

During the Medieval times, turkic nomads established the first khanates in these territories. In the VIth century, turkic nomads established the First and Second Turkic Khanates, followed later by different nomadic tribes taking over the ruling. In XIIIth century the country was under the influence of the Mongol Empire lead by Genghis Khan and later by his sons. In 1465 the Kazakh Khanate was established in the southern part of the country under leadership of Kerey and Zhanibek. Modern kazakhs perceive these two khans as the ancestors and first rulers of the Kazakhs. Consequently, through consolidation of other nomadic tribes the land would become the modern territory of Kazakhstan. ¹³

As a result of the administrative-territorial regulation and attempt to unite numerous different clans and tribes, the Kazakhs were divided in three *Juz* (Horde) - Great *Juz*, Middle *Juz* and Junior *Juz*. (fig. 3) Exceptions were clans of arabic missionaries (*koja*) and descendants of Ghengis Khan (*tore*). They are considered aristocrats and outside of this system. Each *Juz* was ruled by their own Khans. ¹⁴ Historians are still unsure about the exact time and circumstances under which this division took place as a result of lack of written evidence. Among Kazakhs themselves there are several different legends

¹² Meuser, 2014. P. 506

¹³ Gumilev, 1964. P. 148-150; Meuser, 2014. P. 514-515

¹⁴ Kondybai, 2008. P. 242



fig. 2
Map of Kazakhstan

surrounding this division. However first written evidence dates back to the XVIIth century.

The consolidation of the Kazakhs by the Russian Empire began in 1731, with the Junior *Juz* being the first, and the Great *Juz* being the last to join. More than 200 years of influence of the Russian Empire and consequently the USSR has left a huge impact on the way of living and “being” of nomads of the Great Steppe. “The forced settlement of the nomadic Kazakhs in the Soviet period, combined with large-scale Slavic in-migration, strikingly altered the Kazakh way of life and led to considerable settlement and urbanization in Kazakhstan. The Kazakhs’ traditional customs uneasily coexist alongside incursions of the modern world.”¹⁵

Kazakhstan has gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and became a Republic of Kazakhstan. The modern Republic of Kazakhstan is a young and independent country located in Central Asia. Kazakhstan’s proximity to such countries as Russia, Mongolia and China has made a huge influence on how it became the nation it is today. The country shares borders in the north and west with Russia, in the east with China, in the south with Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The area of the country is 2,7 mil. km² making it the 9th largest country in the world.¹⁶ Geographically, a large part of the country is located in Asia and a small part on the western side is located in Europe, making Kazakhstan “Eurasian”. This term has been used largely in the XXth century and helped identify multinational country’s belonging.

The population of Kazakhstan as of February 1, 2022 is 19,143 million people, with the urban population representing 59,5 % of the people and the rural

¹⁵ Smith David Roger, Kazakhstan. In: Encyclopedia Britannica, link: <<https://www.britannica.com/place/Kazakhstan>> (retrieved 02.04.2022)

¹⁶ About Kazakhstan. Link: <https://www.gov.kz/article/19305?lang=en> (retrieved 02.04.2022)



fig. 3
Ethnic division of Kazakhs

population 40,5 %. The ratio of men to women is 48,6 % to 51,4 %.¹⁷ The relatively low number of people in relation to the vast land leads the country to have the lowest population density in the world with less than 7 people per km². The median age is 31,94 years with 34 % of people between the ages of 0-17 and 19,72% of people between ages of 14-28.¹⁸ Ethnic kazakhs are considered to be descendants of turkic tribes of kipchak origin.

The capital of Kazakhstan has been relocated from Almaty to Astana¹⁹ in 1997 and was perceived as an economical as well as political move.

The political system in Kazakhstan has become ineffective and has created huge issues such as corruption, inequality and poverty as evidenced by the demonstrations turned to shootings, known as *Qantar*, at the beginning of January 2022.²⁰ One of the huge issues in the country is corruption, which is enabled by the power of clans and can be observed in all levels of governmental positions. The current political elite is defined by power of clans, where people are given higher positions due to their connections not their qualifications. Apparently this issue started with Koneav²¹ during the times of the USSR and continued under Nazarbayev - the first president of Kazakhstan.²²

After the oppression by the Soviet Union, a lot of people in Kazakhstan are afraid of public demonstrations and rare outbursts have been met by violent oppression as evidenced by protests in Zhanaozen in 2011, where officially

17 Kazakhstan population. Link: <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/stat/press/news/details/341359?lang=en> (retrieved 02.04.2022)

18 Kazakhstan population. Link: <https://kapital.kz/gosudarstvo/100987/nazvana-chislennost-kazakhstansev-po-itogam-perepisi.html> (retrieved 02.04.2022)

19 The name of the capital was renamed to Nur-Sultan by the second president in 2019, in honor of the first president, however Astana is still used among population

20 Protests in January. Link: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/06/protesters-police-die-amid-kazakhstan-unrest> (08.05.2022)

21 About Konaev. Link: https://rus.azattyq.org/a/dinmukhamed_kunaev_/1875988.html (08.05.2022)

22 Cummings, 1999. P. 133

17 people were killed, but according to witness accounts the number is more than a hundred.²³ However, the frustration with the current regime, under which the difference between rich and poor became so huge and some people were buying their food on loans, caused people to go out on the streets and demand justice. Peaceful protests started at the beginning of January, which later turned into violent unrest where 225 people died officially.²⁴

Most of the protesters came to the Republic Square in Almaty which is also known as Independence Square. This place has a strong historical meaning as the infamous *Jeltoqsan* protests took place there in 1986. During the *Qantar* demonstrations, the mayor's offices (fig. 4) located nearby were set on fire and it unintentionally became a symbol of a historical event. This led the population to question if the building that stands for injustice should continue to house the mayor's offices. Later, news confirmed that the building will be restored within 5 months.²⁵ According to Goodman "Even when a building does mean, that may have nothing to do with its architecture. A building of any design may come to stand for some of its causes or effects, or for some historical event that occurred in it or on its site, or for its designated use; any abattoir may symbolize slaughter, and any mausoleum, death; and a costly county courthouse may symbolize extravagance. To mean in such a way is not thereby to function as an architectural work."²⁶

23 About Zhanaozen. Link: <https://masa.media/ru/site/monologi-zhanaozen> (08.05.2022)

24 Kazakhstan authorities raise death toll from unrest to 225. Link: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/16/kazakhstan-authorities-raise-death-toll-from-unrest-to-225> (08.05.2022)

25 About mayor's office. Link: <https://kapital.kz/gosudarstvo/102266/zdaniye-akimata-almaty-plan-iruyet-sya-vosstanovit-za-5-mesyatsev.html> (08.05.2022)

26 Vale, 1992. P. 9





fig. 4
Mayor's offices after *Qantar*
Almaty

Nomads

The word nomad derives from the ancient greek *nomós* which means “pasture”. It later turned to nomas, nomad - meaning “roaming in search for pasture.” Indeed, due to the harsh climates of the Eurasian Steppes ancient nomads wandered seasonally together with their livestock in search of pasture. Nomadic culture is thought to have arisen in the Eurasian Steppes around 3000 years ago due to climatic and ecological factors. Lack of food and water resources led people to depend heavily on hunting which in turn led to migration in accordance with the animals they hunted and later to domesticate animals. Due to the fertility of the soil, the nomads could not stay in one place for a long time and wandered across territories to let the grass rejuvenate for the next season. Lengthy migration also led to natural and forced selection of animals under which horses, camels, sheep, cattle and goats were most favored. Among the domesticated animals, horses have become a symbol of nomadism and have a special role in the culture of ethnic Kazakhs.²⁷

According to Zaurbekova et al. there are three main factors which influence the nomadic mentality: tengrism, nature and kinship. Turkic tengrism is the traditional belief of the nomads originating in the Eurasian steppes and centered mainly around the sky god Tengri. “Tengri” meaning “the Sky”, is represented as a huge giant holding the sky. Tengri supervises earth from the sky, protects the military and gives rain. Tengrism promotes the unity of the person with nature. A person acts as extension of nature. The worldview of the ancient Turks was heavily influenced on the concept of unity and balance of the three: The upper or celestial world, the ground world and the underworld. The other main objects of worship around Tengri are Umai and Jer-Su. According to ancient beliefs of the Turks a person was born when

²⁷ Kunanbay in Nomads. Link: <https://festival.si.edu/2002/the-silk-road/nomads-by-alma-kunanbay/smithsonian> (retrieved 04.05.2022)

“*kut*”(God’s grace) came from the sky and the favor of Tengri’s Mother “Umay” from the earth. As a result humankind is an embodiment of heaven and earth and death is the separation of both, when the soul returns to Tengri and the body returns to Umay.

Jer-Su stands for *Jer* (the earth) and *Su* (the water) and was the deity for the inbetween. Jer-Su gives prosperity and livelihood as well as responsible for everything between the upper- and underworld. Umay translates into “children’s seat” or “womb” and was considered the patroness of home, family, the arts and protector of the children. If a child would get sick people would say “Umay had left the child” and would pray for her return.²⁸

The nomad’s habitat changed with the change of seasons and represented a cycle of life. Spring was the beginning of a new cycle, where Nawryz (from persian “new day”) was celebrated. Nawryz is celebrated to this day in Kazakhstan and is equivalent to New Year. In early spring nomads moved their cattle to spring pastures where animals gave birth and sheep would be shorn. This time of year meant a new beginning and a time of hope.²⁹

Nomads believed that the immutability of the world was a rejection of the human intervention. Time was measured in cycles of nature and was associated with seasonal changes. You can, even today, find Kazakh expressions like “*biye saum uakiti*” which means “time between the milking of two mares” or “*sut pisirim uakiti*” which means “time to boil milk”. We can find the same expressions regarding space in Kazakh: “*Shakrym*” means the distance a person can hear the call or “*kozy kosh zher*” means one roaming way of a goatling. Since the nomad life involved so much roaming, the sky and celestial bodies became the main resource for orientation. The nomads even defined seasons through sky constellations: “*Tarazy tusa tan suyr, Sumbin tusa su suyr*” means “if Orion rises, morning dawn begins to cool”.

28 Zaurbekova et al. in Universal Values of Kazakhs: Experience of the Nomadic Culture

29 Kunanbay in Nomads. Link: <https://festival.si.edu/2002/the-silk-road/nomads-by-alma-kunanbay/smithsonian> (retrieved 04.05.2022)

We can really see the adaptations in everyday thinking due to the changes and observations in nature.³⁰

The most terrible punishment for a nomad was considered the excommunication from his tribe. Nomads shared many of their belongings with their kin and ethical values were mainly in respect and honor to a father, a father's house, a husband or the elders. Men had to honor the father, the father had to honor the elder. The head of the patriarchal families had the final say in everything including the fate and life of family members. You can see it in the way the *kiyiz üy* were organized. In the middle was the “*Ulken ui*” (Big *kiyiz üy*). It was a white *kiyiz üy* owned by the elder of the kin. Just outside the first “*Ulken ui*” was the second circle “*Otau*” (Young *kiyiz üy*). Gray *kiyiz üy* belonged to the married sons of the elder. The third circle also consisted of gray *kiyiz üy* and belonged to the close relatives of the head of the kin. The fourth circle was of brown and black colors and inhabited by common members of the kin. The fifth circle was used for economical reasons (sheep yards, well, pastures, etc.) If you had guests it was believed that if you would share resources with them that supernatural powers would later on reward you with a multiple of what you gave, so hospitality was very important to the nomads.³¹

30 Zaurbekova et al. in Universal Values of Kazakhs: Experience of the Nomadic Culture

31 *ibid.*

fig. 5
Cattle breeding in
steppes is still a part
of the way of living
for people in rural
areas





Kiyiz üy

Nomadic life is defined by circular movements which is also present in their traditional dwelling - *kiyiz üy*. The main principle of nomads was to not destroy the nature, but enter it as a temple without breaking its rules. The astness of the steppes possibly created a need to narrow its borders and concentrate it in one place - their homes.³² *Kiyiz üy* is known in english as yurt. The word yurt comes from russian “*yurta*” which derived from turkic “*jurt*” and means “community” or “people”. This type of dwelling has been used by nomads of Central Asia and Mongolia throughout centuries and is known under different names in each culture. Mongolians call it *ger*, Kirgiz *boz ui* and Kazakhs *kiyiz üy*.³³ *Kiyiz üy* translated from Kazakh and means “felt house”. It was developed as a flexible and portable dwelling that met the needs of nomads. It is easy and fast to assemble and could be transported on one camel.

The structure of the *kiyiz ui* consists of a wooden skeleton which is covered by *kiyiz* (felt). The skeleton of the *kiyiz ui* consists of three parts: *kerege* (lattice walls), *uik* (rafters) and *shanyrak* (dome). *Esik* (door) of the yurt consists of *mandaisha*, *tabaldyryk*, *bosaga* and *sykyrlauik*. The wooden poles of *kiyiz ui* are slightly bent which gives them a spherical form. The lattice walls are connected with a camel's leather. *Shanyrak* is lighter in comparison to the mongolian *ger* and is bent to form a 45 degree angle which helps against precipitation. The types of wood used were willow and birch.³⁴ In the steppes the sheep were shorn twice a year and from the wool of the sheep that were shorn in autumn *kiyiz* (felt) was made which was used for *kiyiz üy* as well as for rugs. *Kiyiz* is a very durable material which protected the house from wind, rain and even snow, depending on how much layer of *kiyiz* were used.

³² Karakozova, 2011. P. 23-24

³³ Kunanbay in Nomads. Link: <https://festival.si.edu/2002/the-silk-road/nomads-by-alma-kunanbay/smithsonian> (retrieved 04.05.2022)

³⁴ Mukanov, 1981. P. 20

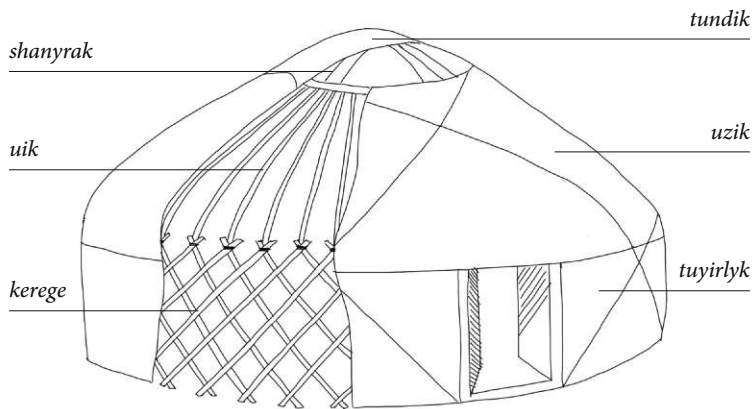


fig. 6
Kiyiz üy

Kiyiz of the house consisted of three parts: *tuyirlyk* (covering *kerege*), *uzik* (covering *uik*) and *tundik* (covering *shanyrak*).³⁵ (fig. 6) In some regions the nomads put reed mats (*shi*) between *kerege* and *kiyiz*, were put which served as an insulation layer. The division into several parts made the house very flexible. According to the weather, each part of the felt could be covered or rolled away. So at night, all three parts were covered, during the day *tundik* was opened enabling the penetration of light. On hot days, *tuyrlyk* would be raised on the shady side where cool air would be supplied and went through *shanyrak* letting the house be naturally ventilated.³⁶ The spherical shape of *kiyiz üy* leaves the least amount of exterior surface exposed to the wind, allowing the wind to move around it naturally because of the absence of corners.³⁷

The inner layout of *kiyiz üy* was divided into two parts, female and male. Right side was where dishes, utensils and female clothes were located and on the left side harness and male clothes were put. Hearth and table were located in the middle and for seating arrangement, guests or respected people sat in *tor* (place opposite the door). House owners sat on the right side while other guests on the left side. (fig. 8)

Kiyiz üy changed in size depending on the status of its owner. It could be disassembled by one family within an hour. Functionally, there were three main types of *kiyiz üy*: residential, festive and ones used for traveling/campaigning. Additional, types included *kiyiz üy* used as a storage or as a kitchen. Festive *kiyiz üy* were divided into *ak orda* (for higher ranked people, khans, sultans etc.) and *otau ui* (*kiyiz üy* for newlyweds).³⁸

Kiyiz üy through time went beyond the function of a dwelling and represent-

35 Nazarbekuli, 2005. P. 35-49

36 Shaimuratova, 2022. P. 13

37 The history of yurts ancient and modern. Link: <https://www.yurtinfo.org/yurtstory-the-history-of-yurts-ancient-and-modern> (retrieved 05.05.2022)

38 Margulan, 2012. P. 165

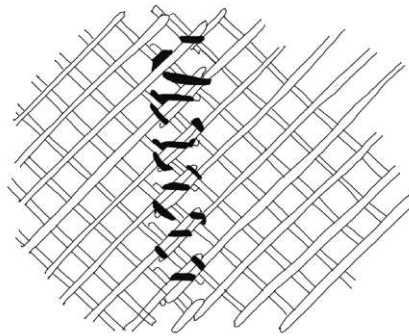


fig. 7
Kerege

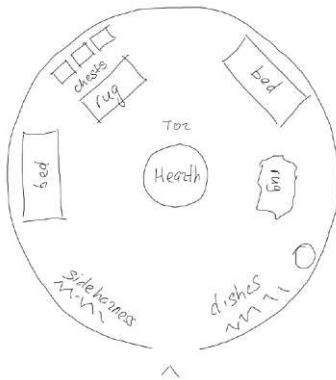


fig. 8
Floor plan of *kiyiz üy*

ed the worldview of its inhabitants. The perception of the world of nomads consisted of the world of Order and the world of Chaos.³⁹ The World of Order meant their “known” space and the world of Chaos was outside of the world of Order and was therefore “unknown” and a “dangerous” place where mythical creatures lived. The built space, their house, especially when it is the only (wo)man made structure in their vicinity, was their safe haven, their “known” world and probably that is the reason why they gave symbolic meaning to everything that was inside of their familiar world.

Parts of *kiyiz üy* itself were anthropomorphized and called after human body parts: sun - head is *shanyrak*, the body is the rays of the sun - *uiks*, the legs are the earth - *kerege*.⁴⁰ *Shanyrak*, door and hearth are full of semiotic, symbolic and sacred meaning. Various mythological or religious rituals were performed using these symbols. *Shanyrak* was the symbol of family and home. It was also perceived as opening up to the world and portal between a person and a god. All other parts of *kiyiz üy* could be replaced except *shanyrak*. It was passed down from father to son. In the case of an absence of descendants *shanyrak* was left on the cemetery of the family and meant the ending of the ancestral tribe. The door is a barrier between the world of Order and Chaos so it was perceived as something sacred. A person was not allowed to step on the doorstep or lean on the doorjamb.⁴¹ Some of these traditions are still kept to this day in modern houses or apartments. A group of *kiyiz üy* united according to economic and family characteristics was called *aul*. *Aul* had its own permanent stows for roaming: in spring - *kokteu*, in summer - *jailyau*, in autumn - *kuzeu* and in winter - *kystau*.⁴² For harsh winters nomads had stationary dwellings as well. One such stationary dwellings is known as *shoshala*. It consisted of one room, was round and had conical or spherical vault. Its

39 Karakozova, 2011. P. 27

40 Kunanbay in Nomads. Link: <https://festival.si.edu/2002/the-silk-road/nomads-by-alma-kunanbay/smithsonian> (retrieved 04.05.2022)

41 Shaimuratova, 2022. P. 15

42 Janibekov. Link: <https://silkadv.com/en/content/kochevoy-byt-kazahov-0> (retrieved 09.05.2022)

form resembled that of a *kiyiz üy*. For the construction wood, stone and adobe were used.⁴³ Adobe consisted of various proportions of straw, reed and clay and was used widely for the construction of various residential, memorial and religious monuments throughout the country. *Shoshala* used similar principle of ventilation as *kiyiz üy* due to the opening above the house.⁴⁴

During medieval times between X-XV centuries due to the Islamic influences the first mausoleums were built in the Great Steppe. Domed mausoleums of the Islamic period were derived from funeral structures of the pre-islamic period, therefore it was easier to introduce this typology to people. Mausoleums in Kazakhstan were divided into single chambered or multi-chambered, where the single chambered one was typical for Kazakhstan. Multi-chambered mausoleums were primarily spread in the southern part of the country, because it was the only region where the Arab invasion took place and left a long lasting influence in the culture of that region.⁴⁵ While a primary function of mausoleums was to worship ancestors, there are some which were used as a meditative space or a portal to talk to god. Remains of ancient cities on the territory of Kazakhstan prove an existence of sedentary way of living as well. These cities served as an important connection point between the nomadic world and caravan routes. Starting from the XVIIIth century the Russian Empire started building city-fortresses the number of which reached 30 cities and 400 settlements in total. The development of cities was related to the resettlement of Russian peasants to Kazakhstan starting from the middle of XIXth century. City planning was done by Russian planners and differed depending on the region. The planning of the southern cities was similar to Central Asian cities, and the planning of the north-western cities was similar to Russian towns. By planning naturally formed water arteries, the landscape and climatic features of the area were taken into account.⁴⁶

43 Margulan, 2012. P. 157

44 Shaimuratova, 2022. P. 9

45 Baitenov, E. Tuyakayeva, A. Abdrassilova, G. 2017

46 Glaudinov, 1987. P. 16-18

The Soviet influence

The USSR was officially established in 1922 by the oppressed radical proletariat who were filled with deep “hatred” of the bourgeoisie and who created such figures like Lenin and Stalin. The declaration which was finalized in 1924 stated that the world was now divided into two fronts - the capitalist and the socialist where the capitalist world was filled with inequality, colonial slavery, chauvinism, national oppression and war. The socialist world however was a place where “mutual trust and peace, national freedom and equality, peaceful coexistence and brotherly co-operation of peoples” existed. It further stated that it was all possible only because of the dictatorship of the proletariat.⁴⁷

The history taught in Kazakhstan tells us that the kazakhs joined the Russian Empire “voluntarily” in 1731. During the October Revolution of 1917 the Kazakhs formed the Autonomic Republic of Alash-Orda which lasted for 2 years and then turned into the Kirghiz Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic under the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic in 1920. It was later renamed into the Kazakh Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic.⁴⁸

Following the communist ideologies of Marx, Lenin wanted to promote socialism in culturally or economically “backward” countries through collectivisation, industrialization and cultural revolution.⁴⁹ Through collectivisation, Moscow wanted to “modernize” agriculture and reorganize existing social structures. In the case of the Kazakhs it meant “denomadization” - forced settling, elimination of identity markers and turning the Kazakhs into a Soviet nation. According to Sarah Cameron, author of “The Hungry Steppe”, the

47 About October Revolution. Link: <https://masa.media/ru/site/stydnye-voprosy-ob-okty-abrskoy-revoljutsii> (retrieved 07.05.2022)

48 ibid.

49 Asylbek Bisenbaev. Link: <https://camonitor.kz/31209-mozhno-li-bylo-sohranit-kochevoy-uklad-zhizni-kazahov.html> (retrieved 07.05.2022)

collectivisation resulted in the famine of 1930-1933 where about 90 percent of animal herds and about 1,5 mln. people, at that time roughly a quarter of the population, died. However it is this process that led to a formation of a new identity for the Kazakhs in accordance with the Soviet regime's "nation-building" project.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Sarah Cameron about the Kazakh Famine of the 1930s. Link: <https://blogs.loc.gov/kluge/2016/08/the-kazakh-famine-of-the-1930s/> (retrieved 07.05.2022)

Architecture as a political instrument

Most of the existing cities in Kazakhstan have been built as fortresses by the Russian Empire and later turned into cities during the Soviet Union.⁵¹ The architectural legacy left from that time had political motivations behind it. It started with constructivists who introduced modern and experimental ideas as a response to old feudal system under the Tsarist Russia. Stalin's government followed by an attempt to monumentalize surroundings by erecting expensive buildings known as Stalin's Neoclassicism. It followed the slogan from Stalin in 1925 which defined socialist and national culture as "proletarian in content, national in the form". It meant that the purpose of the building was constant while its "national form" was variable. Architects in Kazakhstan also tried to follow this national form by combining Stalin's Neoclassicism with Central Asian architectural elements. A proposal to monumentalize the nomadic yurt was not accepted, as it was not perceived as something "progressive", so architects decided to use ornaments, where "creativity was used more than knowledge." Then came Khrushchev in 1954 with the slogan "we should build faster, cheaper and better". It was achieved by the use of structural insulated panels which lead to industrialised mass production and standardization of buildings. This in turn did not only change the appearance of the cities, it changed the understanding of architecture in general. The aftermath of the Second World War led to prioritization of housing and most of the apartment blocks in the post-Soviet Kazakhstan were erected at these times and became known as *khrushchevki*.⁵² Execution guidelines of standard typologies were drawn up by central project institutes (in Moscow and Lenin-grad) and implemented by local planning institutes and building collectives.⁵³

The prefabrication of apartments meant restrictions in terms of flexibility and variety of each apartment. Houses were erected in sections and could be

51 Glaudinov, 1987. P. 16-18

52 Meuser, 2015. P. 184; Meuser, 2014. P. 53-60

53 Meuser, 2015. P. 19



fig. 9 (above)
Hotel Kazakhstan erected in 1977,
stands as a symbol of Almaty city
Architects: Yu. G. Ratushny, L. L.
Ukhobotov, A. K., Deev



fig. 10 (below)
Interior of Kazakh State Academic Drama Theater named after M.O. Auezov,
erected in 1981 in Almaty
Architects: O. Baimurzaev, A. Kainarbaev, M. Zhaksylykov

added or rotated. “The reduction of socialist housing construction to the satisfaction of a need led to an impoverishment of architectural diversity. Economy, cost and material savings dictated form, function and construction.” At the beginning of the 1960s, the residential buildings were still arranged in a row, while the residential complexes of the 1980s featured geometric patterns and meandering structures.⁵⁴

The widely successful Soviet movie from 1976 *Ironiya sudby ili s legkim parom* (The irony of fate, or enjoy your bath) begins with the following words: “In the old days, when a person got into an unfamiliar city, he felt lonely and lost. Everything around was alien: different houses, different streets, different life. But now it’s a completely different matter. A person finds himself in an unfamiliar city, but feels at home in it. To what absurdity our ancestors reached. They agonized over every architectural project. And now in all cities they are building a standardized cinema “Rocket”, where you can watch a standardized feature film.”⁵⁵ The plot of the movie is about a guy who unknowingly flew from Moscow to Leningrad and entered someone else’s apartment because the streets, buildings, doors and even furniture were the same as in his city. This plot, though slightly exaggerated, describes the reality which was happening across the USSR, where every aspect of a citizen’s life was standardized. (fig.11 & 12)

The standardization was criticized after Brezhnev came to power and in order to differentiate cities and nations from each other “national” returned in form of ornaments and decorated facades of modernist buildings. In some cases they were mounted as curtain walls and used for sun protection, in others they stayed as mere embellishment. Elements of Central Asian architecture such as domes, arches and turquoise color were also used in order to bring

⁵⁴ Meuser, 2015. P. 401

⁵⁵ The Irony of Fate, or Enjoy Your Bath 1 episode (comedy, directed by Eldar Ryazanov, 1976) Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVpmZnRIMKs> (retrieved 10.05.2022)

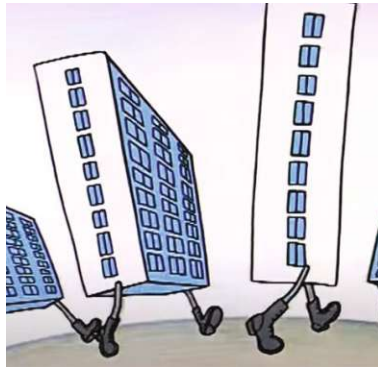


fig.11 & 12

In the beginning of the movie is a caricature drawing of how the panel houses were “conquering” the world.

Illustrations from the movie “The irony of fate, or enjoy your bath”

a local touch.⁵⁶ According to statistics, every third house in Kazakhstan is built before 1970 and around 60% were erected during the Soviet Union. The average living area of apartments or houses equals to 48 m².⁵⁷ On the contrary to the eastern part of Germany where more than 90% of panel houses were renovated, most panel houses in Kazakhstan are in a dilapidated state, which is preferred for the government, as demolition is accompanied by erecting new buildings, which, due to their height and density, allow for better economic exploitation. According to Meuser a prerequisite for sustainable renewal in post-Soviet countries is the transformation of political structures towards democratic conditions with an increasingly emancipated civil society.⁵⁸

Public buildings erected during the Soviet Union were supposed to symbolize progress and the prioritization of collective cultural activities. However the monumentality of those buildings became a symbol of totalitarian power. The image of Hotel Kazakhstan standing in the foggy sky of Almaty (fig. 9) and the brutalist facade of Auezov Theatre (fig.10) on a sunny day left me in awe and made me realize how powerful architecture can be and how powerless it can make one feel. Residential housing in comparison was seen as an essential need that everybody should have and was used as an important tool for political propaganda. In order to produce as much living space as possible in the shortest possible time and inexpensively, the functional architecture represented a new way of life.⁵⁹ Architect Leonid Lavrov who designed several residential houses in 1970s Aktau reminisced in an interview that “a lot of nomads had to learn how to live in the cities. For a long time one could hear sounds of cockcrows from the apartments or saw a sheep which was held on

⁵⁶ Meuser, 2014. P. 53-60

⁵⁷ About housing in Kazakhstan. Link: https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/polovinyi-domov-kazhstane-postroenyi-pri-sssr-issledovanie-438349/ (retrieved 10.05.2022)

⁵⁸ Meuser, 2015. P. 21

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 163

a balcony.”⁶⁰ Soviet colonisation and architecture changed the whole society of Kazakhstan, on the one hand parts of the population became urbanized, had access to education and healthcare, on the other hand it led to negation of their own culture and division between people living in cities and *auls*.

Kystau - a place where nomads spent their winters and which possessed some stationary dwellings was turned into *aul* and inhabitants were expected to lead a sedentary lifestyle. *Aul* is similar to a village, planned either chaotically or resembling russian villages, where descendants of the same tribe live. People in *auls* continue to lead a more traditional way of living. A plot consisted of a house with 3-4 rooms. The structure was usually made out of adobe. The kitchen was outside and had an open fire. Outside, a toilet, a paddock for cattle and a garden were a mandatory infrastructure that each household had. Same as *shanyrak* in *kiyiz üy* was passed down to the youngest son in the family, the house of the father in *aul* is also passed down to the youngest son.⁶¹ One interviewer told me about the unfortunate effect of colonization, where Kazakhs who lead more traditional way of living and spoke Kazakh were perceived as “uncivilized” by urban citizens. This led to traditional rituals being viewed as “backward” and Kazakhs in the cities not wanting to be affiliated with Kazakhs in *auls*. This might be specifically observed mostly in Almaty as it was a capital of the country during the Soviet Union.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union a new phase in Kazakhstan’s history started where the nation-building process was used again, this time to create a decolonized identity for people of Kazakhstan.

60 *ibid.* P. 427

61 Glaudinov, 1987. P. 19



Die approbierte gedruckte Originalversion dieser Diplomarbeit ist an der TU Wien Bibliothek verfügbar
The approved original version of this thesis is available in print at TU Wien Bibliothek.

Creation of a new identity

Nation-building

According to Hippler, the term “nation-building” is used very imprecisely and often contradictorily these days. On the one hand, nation-building refers to socio-political processes that allow loosely connected entities to merge into nations. On the other hand, it refers to a method by which the organization of national systems are enforced to achieve certain political goals. Nation-building can be a peaceful or violent process. In Hippler’s view, nation-building contains the following three basic elements:

- (a) a common ideology which can be based on ethnic, religious or political reasons;
- (b) individual citizens must be persuaded to belong to a nation; and
- (c) the formation of a state.⁶²

Suny states that Kazakhstan has serious problems in building political as well as national identity due to being primarily binational state. After the fall of USSR Kazakhs were the minority in their own republic. When the country became an independent state many Kazakhs became more nationalistic while most in Kazakhstan living Russians felt fearful about their future. “In carving out a foreign policy for his new state, Nazarbayev has stressed repeatedly that Kazakhstan will be neither eastern nor western, neither Islamic nor Christian; rather the state should be a bridge between both.”⁶³ To unite the northern parts of Kazakhstan, mostly populated by Russians, with the rest Nazarbayev moved the capital in 1997 from Almaty in the southeast to Aqmola (later Astana, later Nur-Sultan) and spent huge sums of the country’s oil profits on a drastic expansion and reconstruction of Aqmola. The government hired renowned architects to design the plan for Astana’s new avenues and buildings. By doing this Nazarbayev hoped that more Kazakhs would migrate to the north and discourage Russian separatism.⁶⁴ Over time the Kazakhs in

⁶² Hippler, 2004. P. 3-5

⁶³ Suny in Provisional Stabilities: The Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia

⁶⁴ Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nur-Sultan>

Kazakhstan steadily grew larger. The ethnic weight of Kazakhs rose from 39.7 percent in 1989 to 46 percent in 1995 and 74 percent of the states administration in 1994 was made up by Kazakhs. Even though Kazakhstan's national identity shifted more the Kazakh way and Nazarbayev managed to build more unity Kazakhstan still remains a divided state with two identities as "Russian will remain the dominant language in this Central Asian state in the foreseeable future". Many structural, demographic and economic factors might still provide potential causes for future confrontation between the Kazakhs and the Russians but for now the governments' efforts to unite and build identity have proven to be successful to the degree that at least no serious violence is taking place between the inhabitants of Kazakhstan.⁶⁵

During my visit, I noticed emergence of a sense of nationalism in Kazakhstan and among Kazakhs. According to Tomlinson "national identity has been the most spectacularly successful modern mode of orchestrating belonging".⁶⁶

The desire to speak only Kazakh and feel yourself as the owner of your own culture can be misinterpreted as a negation of Russian. One interviewer from Almaty told me: "I think there is a postcolonial nationalism in Kazakhstan which is a natural phase of freeing itself from colonial mentality." It made me think if there is such a thing as healthy nationalism? I think nation building is a tool that you can use in many ways, but you don't have to. Like most tools, it can be used for "good" or "bad" things and more often than not it can be misused.

Urban planning and architecture have been used in postcolonial countries, especially its capitals, as a part of nation-building project and an attempt to construct a new national identity. This can be observed in following examples of capital cities: Brasilia, Abuja and Astana.

65 Suny in Provisional Stabilities: The Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia

66 Tomlinson in Herrle, 2008. P. 222

Designed capitals - Case of Brasilia and Abuja

In 1955 Juscelino Kubitschek was appointed a president of Brazil. As part of his campaign, Kubitschek pledged to build a new capital for the country. The building of the new capital was used by the government as a device to promote and instill a concept of national identity among the population. According to Alex Schoumatoff Kubitschek would be immortalized in five years (in Brazil presidents were permitted a single five-year term) as the founder of the new capital. Like many other advocates of new capital cities, Kubitschek hoped to modernize the country as well as change the mentality of the population.⁶⁷ Planning and execution of this project was a result of the collaboration between Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer who were both avid followers of Le Corbusier's modernist ideas. Niemeyer, having seen the failed sprawl in cities in Brazil, constructed without any regulatory planning, and inspired by Le Corbusier's vision of *Ville Radieuse*, wished to build an orderly and classless city.⁶⁸ The famous masterplan "*Plano Piloto*", which envisioned the city in the shape of a plane or a flying bird, was proposed by Costa and intended to be perceived as a symbol of progress.⁶⁹ (fig.13) The new masterplan consisted of strict division between a north-south monumental administration zones called Monumental Axis (fig.14) and east-west identical residential districts called Residential Axis. Monumental government buildings, residential blocks and vast amount of green space were designed around a system of wide highways designed for cars. Vision of a future for modernists went hand in hand with possessing a car.

As a result of his friendship with Kubitschek, Niemeyer was commissioned to build important administrative buildings. Capitol Complex named as Three

⁶⁷ Vale, 1992. P. 116

⁶⁸ Krohn in Andreas and Flagge, 2003. P. 38-39

⁶⁹ Lehmann, Steffen in 60 Years Ago, The Modernist City of Brasilia Was Built From Scratch by Waldek, Stefanie. Link: <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/60-years-ago-modernist-city-brasilia-built> (retrieved 18.05.2022)

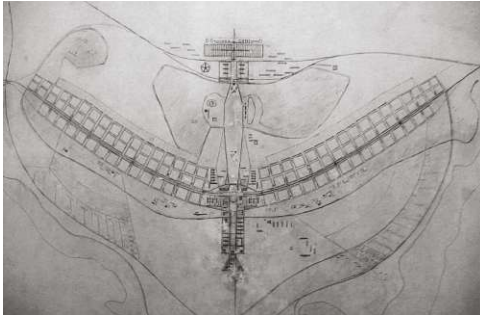


fig. 13
Plano Piloto

Powers Plaza houses the three branches of national government - the Congress, the Plateau Palace and the Supreme Court. The end of the Monumental Axis in Brasilia is not the Capitol Complex, as it is in Washington, Canberra or New Delhi. After passing the Capitol Complex one arrives at the final destination - a plaza for public gathering, similar to the one in Chandigarh. In front of the plaza is also a museum showcasing Brasilia's history. On the windowless facade of the building you can find a portrait bust of Kubitschek together with an engraving of text from his speech. The portrait bust is not facing the plaza designed for public, but his Presidential Palace. The hierarchy of the buildings is clearly defined in *Plano Piloto* by ensuring maximum visibility for the highest structures on the Monumental Axis.⁷⁰ Edifices designed by Niemeyer, such as the Cathedral or National Congress are one of the prominent examples of modernist architecture in the world. From an architectural perspective they possess a sculptural elegance and plasticity intended to evoke hope for a progressive society. From an urban planning perspective however they appear isolated, built more as landmarks or accents and missing human scale. Another unfortunate aspect of the plan were *superquadras* - residential blocks where it was intended that people of all levels of income and social statuses would reside and all residents would be treated equally, thereby removing any disparity between people based on income or social status. This inevitably led to tension between the various socioeconomic groups and

⁷⁰ Vale, 1992. P. 123

eventually the creation of satellite cities for lower socioeconomic groups. In effect, it simply became another classic example of “privileged center and impoverished periphery” where more than three quarters of the population of Brasilia’s Federal District were forced to live in poor satellite cities.⁷¹

The Building of a new capital was supposed to give identity to a nation. According to Lehmann in the 1940s and 50s Brazilian modernist architecture was met mostly with enthusiasm and was adopted as a national style. “If you speak with residents of Brasilia, they immediately will tell you how much they love their city and that they would never move to any other Brazilian city.”⁷² Vale states that “Brasília is Brazilian because it is in Brazil, was designed and built by Brazilians, is named for Brazil and because its overall plan emphasizes the connection of the city to the larger landscape of its place.”⁷³ It is, however, unfortunate that the identity which is provided to people is reserved for buildings in which governmental power resides, thereby isolating those that govern from the governed. It is self-evident the significant disparity between the value assigned to the “landmark” and the value assigned to the houses of the governed. Despite the modernist promises of egalitarian society “distancing the masses from the seat of courtly power”⁷⁴ is happening on two levels. First, by isolating the administrative center from the residential areas and second, by the creation of satellite cities which are distancing the underprivileged even further from those in power. This separation may also be indicative of a desire of those in power not to see the conditions of those less fortunate. Regardless of the intention, it is apparent that vastly different living conditions exist between the haves and the have nots, and that this inequality is only getting stronger.

71 Vale, 1992. P. 120

72 Lehmann, Steffen in 60 Years Ago, The Modernist City of Brasília Was Built From Scratch by Waldek, Stefanie. Link: <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/60-years-ago-modernist-city-brasilia-built> (retrieved 18.05.2022)

73 *ibid.* P. 126

74 *ibid.* P. 127



fig.14 (above)
Dominance of the system of highways
on the Monumental Axis of Brasilia,
Masterplan by Lucio Costa



fig.15 (below)
Interplay of forms between Seat of the
Senate and Chamber of the Deputies
Architect: Oscar Niemeyer

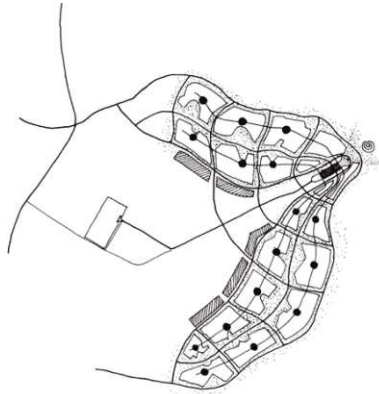
Another example of a designed capital of the 20th century is Abuja, which was proposed by the government of Nigeria in 1975 as an attempt to establish postcolonial mentality by rapid modernization. The military regime's agenda was to build a national identity as well as cultivate unity among the population, which was a difficult task due to the deep ethnic schisms within the country. At that time, the country already had an existing capital in Lagos and the move to a different capital might imply the desire to free itself from colonial past. The proposed location of the new capital was also significant, as it is located geographically close to the heart of Nigeria. It implies a recognition of national boundaries, a desire to develop the interior of the country as well as a desire to concentrate power in the center. Planning of the capital is credited to Kenzo Tange's office, who inspired metabolist architects. The masterplan of the city has similarities with that of Brasilia in particular the clear separation of residential and monumental axis. Capitol Complex consists of three separate buildings and is named Three Arms Zone, is also reminiscent of Costa's Plaza of the Three Powers. The difference however is that while Plaza in Brasilia was intended for public gatherings, Three Arms Zone was deliberately isolated, making it more difficult to establish a democratic relationship between the governing and the governed. The plan also aimed to create "identifiable units of organization" based on the traditional Nigerian cities, where this concept was misused, stating for example "in traditional Nigerian town planning, parks and gardens are in the private sector rather than the public sector".⁷⁵ Monumental buildings which would bring one "social status" were prioritized along with the possession of a car. Even though modernist ideas of creating an equal society were used, this apparent utopian dream once again endorsed rather than prevented domination, spatial exclusion and inequality.

75 Vale, 1992. P. 134-146



fig. 16 (above)
Another “bird” plan in hopes of an
egalitarian society

fig. 17 (below)
Model of proposed Central Area of
Abuja, Masterplan by Kenzo Tange



“New Capital - New State - New Society”⁷⁶

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union Kazakhstan proclaimed its independence in 1991 with Nursultan Nazarbayev being elected as the first president of the country. In 1997 Nazarbayev proposed to relocate the capital of the country from Almaty to what was then Aqmola. Meuser writes that it was an open secret that the move of the capital from the Kyrgyz and Chinese border to the harsh climatic conditions of the north was done to reinforce territorial claims over more “russified” part of the country.⁷⁷ The move is also connected to a modernist vision of social transformation and construction of a new national identity through building a new capital, or at least a part of it. Astana was founded by the troops of Nicholas I, Tsar of Russia in 1830, and was used as a Russian fortress, to protect southern Siberia from Kazakh tribes.⁷⁸ During the time of the Soviet Union old part of the city consisted of three zones: the green belt in front of the river, followed by the residential zone and an industrial zone at the end. According to Nazarbayev the city was missing a powerful layer of administrative zone which would be the main vector of development for a city with international status. The first competition for a new masterplan was announced in November 1995. Participants had one month to come up with proposals. However the proposals which were submitted did not meet the necessary criteria.⁷⁹ What those necessary criteria were was not elaborated upon. However some suspect that lack of international prestige was what led to all of the local proposals being rejected. It was then decided to hold an international competition where Kisho Kurokawa’s masterplan would be determined the winner. Kisho Kurokawa was notorious as a part of the metabolist architectural movement, which was influenced by Kenzo Tange, whose office planning already referenced in relation to the capital of Nigeria - Abuja. Metabolist movement saw architecture as

⁷⁶ From Nazarbayev’s speech in Bissenova, 2014, P. 6

⁷⁷ Meuser, 2015. P. 25

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Nazarbayev, 2020. P. 239



fig. 18 (above)
Astana in 1957, city is located at the
Right Bank, while the Left Bank is
empty



fig. 19 (below)
Kurokawa's initial plan presented for
the international competition in 1988
Future development is proposed on the
Right Bank



fig. 20 (above)
General Plan of Astana modified
by Kisho Kurokawa after consulta-
tion with Kazakh urban planners

fig.21 (below)
Kisho Kurokawa and Associates,
land use plan for the year 2020,
JICA master plan team, 2001

a symbiosis of megastructures and nature. The idea of recycling architecture can be seen in one of Kurokawa's prominent work - Nakagin Tower. Nakagin Tower was an office building in Tokyo, which also contained capsuled rooms for workers who stayed late and could spend a night there. The idea was that the capsules would be replaced through time. However it never came to pass and the building was disassembled in April 2022.⁸⁰

The concept of a Symbiotic City was Kurokawa's proposal for a new plan of Astana. It aimed to "preserve and redevelop the existing city and create a new city at the south and the east sides of the Ishim River, enabling the Symbiosis of the History and the Future." Kurokawa saw the new age as "a transition from the age of the machine to the age of life principle". In contrast to traditional plans of finalizing the ideal form, Kurokawa proposed to analyze and review the situation every five years, which would make a plan flexible and easy to modify. The proposal also included Linear Zoning System instead of Radius Pattern, new housing at both sides of the river, large-scale forest in the southern part of the city,⁸¹ as well as recycling systems and rainwater recycling. On the southern part of the river Business City as well as the Capitol (Government City) were to be located along with the city center in a triangular shape which would be in symbiosis with the forest.⁸² The future development of the city is aimed primarily on the right bank. (fig. 19) Capitol or Government City was planned as a megastructure and stands rather isolated on the Left Bank. For Governmental buildings the architecture of "Abstract Symbiosis" was proposed, where buildings would have "geometric forms simplified to their greatest extent, but at the same time, each form has all the significance of the Kazakhstan's historical symbols. This proposal aims to create the symbiosis of the Local and the Universal within the city and its

80 Demolition of Nakagin Tower. Link: <https://www.dezeen.com/2022/04/29/nakagin-capsule-tower-demolition-video-tokyo-japan/> (retrieved 19.05.2022)

81 Southern part of the city is now called Left Bank

82 Interational Competition for the Master Plan and Design of Astana, Kazakhstan. Link: <https://www.kisho.co.jp/page/222.html> (retrieved 19.05.2022)

architecture.”⁸³

Since then a lot of research has emerged which indicates that there was more going on behind the scenes. The initial plan submitted by Kurokawa’s office for the competition was modified several times (fig. 20, fig. 21) by adopting the monumental east-west axis, which resembles monumental axis of modernist capitals. According to the new plan future development of the city is now on the Left Bank⁸⁴ and all strategically important as well as landmark buildings are now located along the monumental axis. Since the Left Bank was planned on the principle of *tabula rasa*, it was ideal for the president’s dreams of attracting investors, monumentalizing surroundings and reinventing the society along the way. Since then, several modifications to the initial masterplan were made. Unfortunately, the creation of overdimensioned buildings and an absence of human scale were seen as a mistake only after the buildings were already erected. Regardless of the real author’s intention, it seems that in an attempt to justify the reasoning responsibility has been transferred from various parties with no one willing to accept their part in the failings.

The 2005 version of the masterplan included development “in a radial pattern around an identified core circle” which resembled Soviet urban-planning goals of a “limited city size”. However, the planners justified it not as a return to Soviet planning, but as a layout that operates in accordance with nature (Kurokawa’s symbiosis principle) and with the Kazakh historical tradition of settlement.⁸⁵ Despite the fact that a lot of ideas in Kurokawa’s masterplan were not executed, one of the the ideas the government decided to follow was the concept of abstract symbolim, since it resonated with their desire of constructing a national identity.

83 Interational Competition for the Master Plan and Design of Astana, Kazakhstan. Link: <https://www.kisho.co.jp/page/222.html> (retrieved 19.05.2022)

84 Astana is divided into two parts: Left Bank and Right Bank, located on either side of the Ishim river

85 Bissenova, 2012. P. 47-48

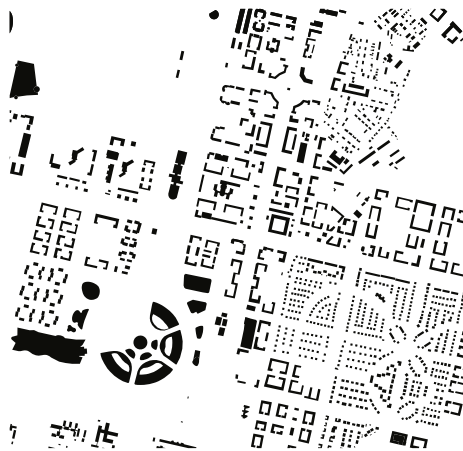


fig.22 (above)

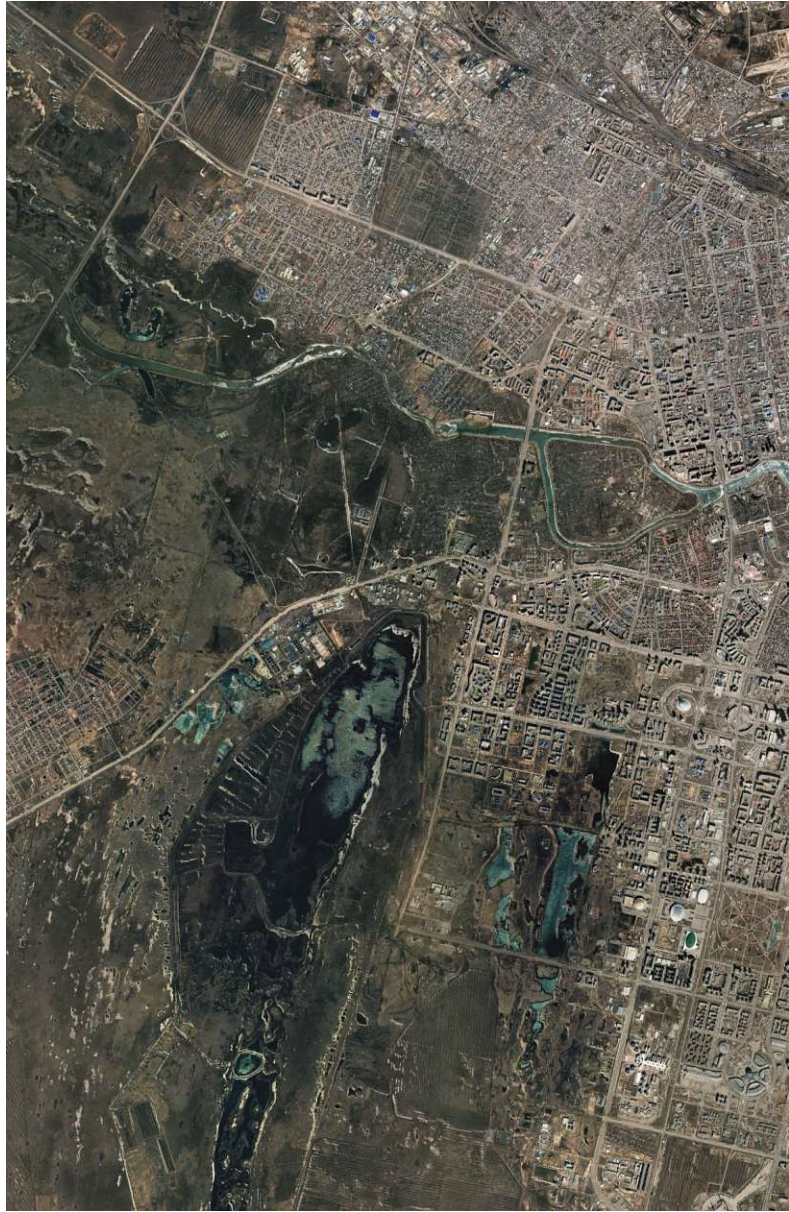
Urban fabric of the Right Bank



fig.23 (below)

Urban fabric of the Left Bank along the new
main axis

fig. 24
Aerial view
of Astana



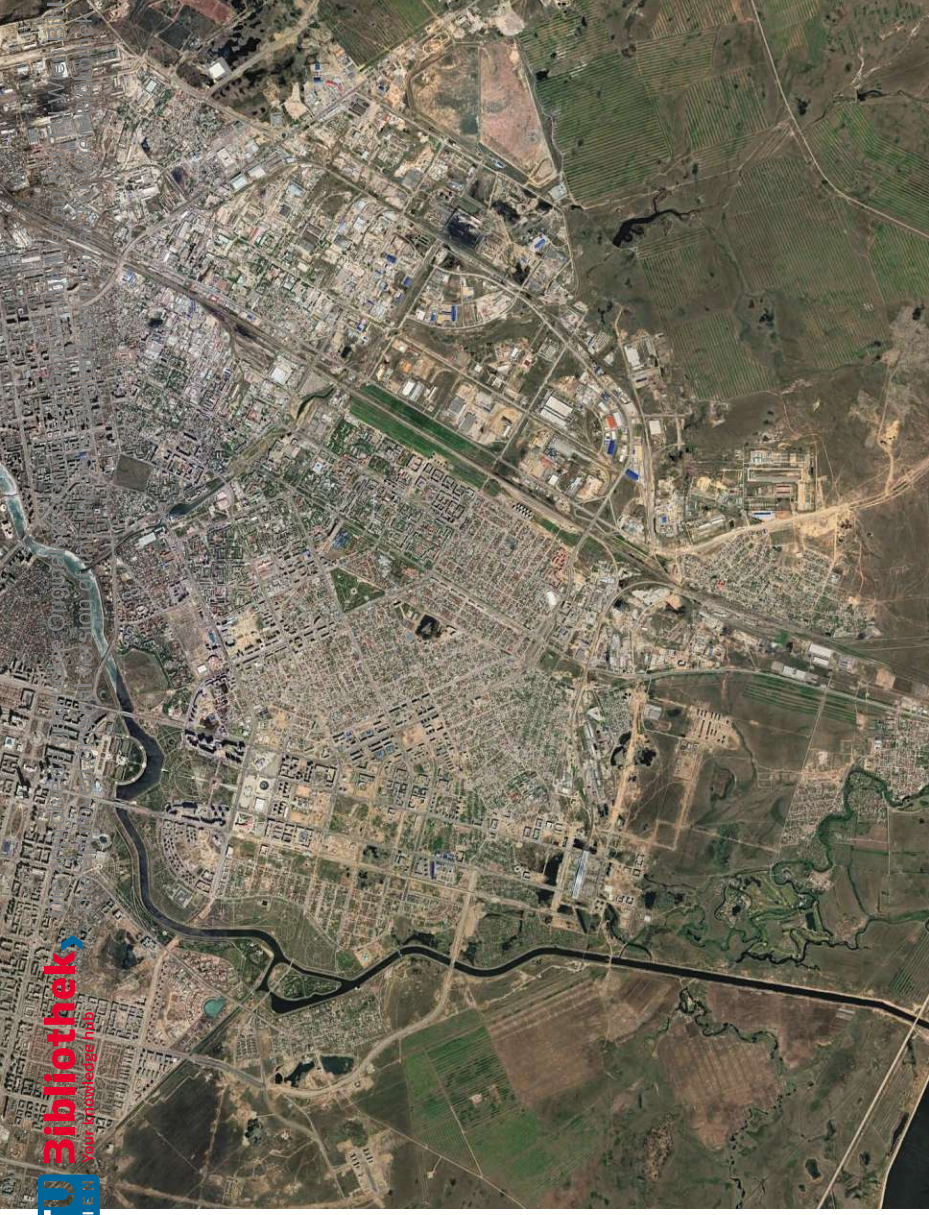




fig. 25 (above)
Proposed 3D Model of overdimensioned buildings based on the concept of abstract symbolism



fig. 26 (below)
Presidential Palace Ak Orda protected by two warrior's hats

Abstract Symbolism

Buildings in capitals, which house the government, communicate visually with the governed and are full of symbolism. Vale writes about how buildings housing principal public institutions can be perceived by people as “reinforcement of stable democratic government worthy of their trust while its monumentality can reinforce self-perceptions of government officials who identify this territory as their own.”⁸⁷ Since the dissolution of Soviet Union could be followed by a loss of identity invented traditions were used by Kazakhstan’s elite through constructing and deconstructing myths and the use of cultural symbols.⁸⁸ As already defined invented tradition is a set of practices, which seek to instill certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition and implies continuity with the past. The use of symbols is a powerful tool in that identity building process.

The word symbol derives from greek “*symbolon*” and means creed, token or mark. Losev states that “every symbol, firstly, is a living reflection of reality, secondly, it is subjected to one or another mental processing, and thirdly, it becomes the most powerful tool for remaking reality itself.”⁸⁹ Symbols are one of the most archaic tools that emerged in ancient cultures and they predate the use of language. Their importance however did not fade away with time. The popularity of Marvel movies and importance of logos today can be viewed as evidence of the influence symbols and archetypes have on the human’ mind.

In the proposed plan Kurokawa, understanding the importance of a young nation being able to identify itself, proposed to reflect this identity in architecture through simple forms such as spheres, triangles and cones. It comes

⁸⁷ Vale, 1992. P. 7-8

⁸⁸ Cummings, 1999. P. 218

⁸⁹ Losev, 1995. P. 7-8

from his interpretation of “visual universe” through simple forms,⁹⁰ which he conveniently associated with the culture of nomads. This idea was implemented and can be seen in a lot of landmark (iconic) buildings throughout Astana which literally took a shape of a musical instrument, a teapot or a cabbage and became known for locals as “*chainik*” (teapot), “*gorshok*” (bowl), *zajigalka* (lighter) and so on. Even though they took simple forms, the monumentality and extravagance are the things they possess in common. According to Geertz symbolic forms in capitals indicate that the elite are indeed governing and need to establish the presence of ruler over ruled.⁹¹

Nazarbayev writes in his book that “unique look to the city is provided by symbolic objects that carry a part of the people’s soul and national culture.” They are aimed at producing a “burst of emotions” and should evoke from the residents of cities a sense of taste, allowing them to feel and perceive the aesthetics of their own city. Without them the city would be monotonous.⁹² In order to implement this idea, the Left Bank of Astana was filled with multiple landmark buildings in record time. The effect new landmark buildings have on a national identity is undeniable since they possess “a high recognition value, decorate chocolate packaging or are the subject of children’s and school books.”⁹³

The governmental buildings in Astana are located along the main axis with capitol complex being the final destination before the river Ishim divides a city in half. Nazarbayev cites Kurokawa while accentuating on the importance of the river “that flows through the city like the Seine, the Thames, or the Moscow River” and four buildings which make up the centre should be main pillars for human perception of the city: “the President’s Residence,

90 Lecture of Kurokawa on abstract symbolism. Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iOJFuQuRdI> (retrieved 09.05.2022)

91 Geertz in Vale, 1992. P. 12

92 Kurokawa in Nazarbayev, 2020. P. 222

93 Meuser, 2014. P. 20



fig. 27

Buildings along the main axis

the administration building and the Parliament building (on the east side, embodying the “gates” of the center), Independence Square in a complex with a monument and a cultural and entertainment square with a circus building.”

⁹⁴ In order to achieve the desired results parts of the river were artificially widened. The President’s Residence Ak Orda is elevated, overlooking the main axis and surrounded by greenery. Symbolism of a flying bird, as we have seen in previous two capitals, was not missed here as well, even though it was not used as a structure for the whole new part of the city. House of Ministries which stand like gates in front of the Presidential Residence, have been built in a form resembling “outspread wings of an eagle.”⁹⁵ Symbolism of eagle when used by the government might represent authority and power, showing the dominance in strength and size before one approaches the President’s Residence. The total length of the wings is approximately one kilometer and it accommodates more than a dozen ministries and departments. Two golden towers on each side of the wings stand as a separate element and seem unconnected with the House of Ministries. The only thing they have in common is the “golden” color, which should reference the national symbol “Golden Man”. The conical shape of the tower is supposed to represent the headdress of the Sakian warrior (or the princess).⁹⁶ However, the reference was missed, as the locals titled it as “*chainik*” (teapot). Buildings of Supreme Court, Concert Hall and House of Ministries are located in front of Ak Orda following strict rules of symmetry while not hindering the view of the palace from the symbol of the city, the president’s own creation - Baiterek. On the other side of the river, the view from the Palace reaches the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation in shape of a Pyramid. It is another monumental building with symbolic meaning which stands isolated in the middle of the Presidential Park. From the road wide stairs lead to the Plaza in front of President’s Residence, however this access is guarded and only officials working there are permitted to approach it. The connection with the governed is hindered here

⁹⁴ *ibid.* P. 244

⁹⁵ Meuser, 2015. P. 114

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

once again, but since no promise of an egalitarian society was made from the very beginning and no direct references were made to modernist ideas, the governed are under no illusion of living in egalitarian society. Even though the President's Palace directly references the White House in Washington (but 8 times bigger), the democratic values for which it stands were not transported, only the appearance of it.

In an attempt to construct an identity often the search for “roots” can be observed. This is followed by using references from the past and either copying them, reinterpreting them or even misinterpreting them. The symbols that are used to construct a national identity in architecture are aimed mostly at ethnic Kazakh's cultural past with representation of *kiyiz üy*, dome and ornaments. This search for its “own” can also be seen as a reaction to differentiate oneself from others and have something unique to hold onto. To have a sense of “own” culture and be “proud” to have roots. Since its conception, the idea of abstract symbolism received much criticism. It was followed by the allowance of using eclectic styles in architecture and justifying it by a Eurasian style.⁹⁷

97 Bissenova, 2014. P. 137



Bibliothek >
Your knowledge hub

Die approbierte gedruckte Originalversion dieser Diplomarbeit ist an der TU Wien Bibliothek verfügbar
The approved original version of this thesis is available in print at TU Wien Bibliothek.

Identity markers

Global and iconic

The process of globalization continues to influence and shape the modern world. Its scale and influence, even though the process of it is not finished yet, is already visible even in remote parts of the world. We may assume that through this process false assumptions emerged that culture can be constructed and that it “merely requires corporate will and careful marketing.”⁹⁸ This further lead to culture being viewed as a product at disposal, which could be imported or exported and in turn serve as an economic generator, rather than representing the value of a particular group and enriching everyday experiences. It is worsened by the fact that nature and meaning of culture in the built environment is being reduced to simplified, digestible and multipliable visual products which addresses only one of our senses while suppressing others.

Herrle in his book describes the concept of “packages” and “carriers” where packages are cultural products which contain technology, symbols and icons mostly from countries in the Northern hemisphere. Carriers are the media and global communication networks. Through these carriers packages containing ideas about modernity, postmodernity and architectural and urban form are being spread worldwide, with architects, planners and investors being left to find from the overload of information whatever is useful for their own context. Receivers can then decide whether to unwrap the package, where in the process of unwrapping reinterpretations or misinterpretations may arise. When the borrowed notions and values are misinterpreted one can find in contemporary world many examples of “disharmonic” or “superficial” architecture “without any local reference”.⁹⁹ Through reinterpretation of different packages own identity may be constructed, which local people can identify themselves with. However, if it is misinterpreted or local reference is

⁹⁸ Temple, 2012. P. xix

⁹⁹ Herrle, 2008. P. 15

limited to a decoration, in my view it can provide only a non-durable identity and has a potential to become superficial. Accessibility of packages may lead to identities becoming more fragmented and resulting in a gap in understanding of one's identity.

As a result of globalization an interesting phenomenon called "iconic" architecture has emerged. This type of architecture is mainly focused on creating a certain image of prestige for a place where this architecture would be positioned. For countries that desire international recognition, it has become a tool to make the world aware of them. As an example Heydar Aliyev Centre in Baku from Zaha Hadid Architects has become a landmark with which the country can associate itself. The notion of being associated with iconic architecture adds value to the collective and cultural identity. Thus, architectural icon gives a special meaning that is symbolic for a culture and/or a time and this meaning is connected with aesthetic component. This unique combination of symbolism and aesthetic creates an icon. Sklair argues that "the point of the images of iconic architecture is to persuade people to buy the buildings and spaces and lifestyles, and in some cases, the architects they represent."¹⁰⁰ Architecture here has gained another meaning, apart from its functional purposes. The process of globalization has blown out of proportions the nature and scale of the icons and their representation.

The word "icon" is defined in Oxford English Dictionary as image, figure or representation. In architecture two types of icons have emerged. First when the building itself becomes an icon and second when the architect who designs said building becomes an icon. Sklair notes that iconicity in architecture can also be seen as an important resource that "transnational capitalist class mobilizes to facilitate general public into the culture ideology of consumerism."¹⁰¹

100 Sklair in Herrle, 2008. P. 211

101 term starchitect has also been used to define this type of architects

In the construction of a built environment in Astana, names of famous “starchitects” have been used, starting from Kisho Kurokawa and Norman Foster - a long-time friend of the president and author of several “iconic” buildings in Astana such as Khan Shatyr (Khan’s tent), The Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, Nazarbayev Centre, Abu Dhabi Plaza (which is purported to be the highest building in Central Asia). The list is followed by Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill, SOM (Skidmore, Owing & Merrill) and so on. Having a famous “starchitect” design a project has become a way to symbolize a prestige and build a new brand while the function and meaning of architecture is fading into the background. In Kazakhstan these buildings were supposed to necessarily reference Kazakh culture to ensure that Kazakh culture does not get lost and to create a feeling of one’s “own.”



fig. 28 (above)
Diversity of influences in contemporary
landscape of the capital

fig. 29 (below)
Astana Opera, Astana
“It is nice to live and realize that you
belong to something of a high culture.”

In search of one's "own"

The search of "one's own" in architecture can be seen as a reaction to different global influences which enter lives of people with unprecedented speed.

Globalization is a phenomenon that accelerates a constant identity renewal and through which the search for identity becomes a permanent condition.¹⁰² In case of Kazakhstan it can also be seen as an attempt to decolonize the population, trying to forget the painful past and return to times when nomads were free. This notion of taking reference from its "own" past, be it true or invented can be observed in references in architecture throughout the country, particularly in the capital where it has been used the most. These developments are happening mostly from top-down processes. However, the constant presence of created images leads to use of cultural elements in bottom-up processes as well. As a representation of the nation's "own", elements from nomadic culture mixed with Central Asian culture are being referenced. Portable nomadic dwelling *kiyiz üy*, as well as its parts - *shanyrak* and *kerege*, Central Asian dome and even folklore have been used widely, reinterpreted and even misinterpreted in this quest of finding belonging. Ornament is another element which has been used since the Soviet Union and in an attempt to re-identify it was deployed the most. The flag of Kazakhstan has Kazakh traditional ornaments in it. Every physical manifestation which is considered to be traditional, be it clothes or buildings is richly covered with ornaments, sometimes losing its meaning and turning into mere simulacra. Use of local elements is not foreign in architecture. The responsibility is to understand the meaning of the thing being referenced, the extent to which it is being appropriated and whether the appropriation is needed at all. The use of tradition is a strong tool which helps spread the desired ideology as well. One has to be careful not to turn it into a shell with an absent soul. The following are examples of identity markers which were used in architecture applying local as well as global references in an attempt to construct an identity.

102 Rieger - Jandl, 2008. P. 70



fig. 30 (above)
Form of *kiyiz üy* used as a
souvenir shop
Taraz, Kazakhstan



fig. 31 (below)
Reference to *kiyiz üy* in St. Regis
Astana

Kiyiz üy, shanyrak, kerege

The imagery of the *kiyiz üy* remains central to Kazakh ethnic identity, and provides national cultural symbolism deployed by the authorities of independent Kazakhstan. ¹⁰³ *Kiyiz üy* can be found not only in museums, it is also being widely used during any celebrations where a sense of national is needed. Ethnoparks are being opened throughout the country with *kiyiz üy* represented as integral part of Kazakh's past, while having a function of mere attraction for tourists as well as locals. *Kiyiz üy* is also being used as a café, temporary installation, souvenir shop and so on. The hotel St. Regis Astana in an attempt to add local touch, went so far as to make its entrance and restaurant in front of the hotel in the shape of glassed *kiyiz üy*. (fig. 31)

After successfully finishing the general plan of Astana, Kisho Kurokawa was given an opportunity, at the direct request of the president, to design an international airport in Astana. Kurokawa was given the uneasy task of designing a symbolic gateway into the capital as well as give it a “Kazakh appearance”. As Meuser notes, “apparently there are only two models of modern domed structures available to architects working in Kazakhstan: either the Timurid dome decorated with tiles or the curved roof of a Kazakh yurt”. Kurokawa chose the latter by covering it with geometrically ornamented tiles in “typically Kazakh” turquoise-blue color. ¹⁰⁴ (fig. 32) The inside of the airport opening was made referencing *shanyrak*. *Shanyrak* is a dome of *kiyiz üy* and it has apart from its functional aspect of bringing light inside, an important sacred meaning. It is one of the most respected parts of *kiyiz üy*, a symbol of family and procreation. A lot of cultural and historical motifs, concepts, symbols, sacred customs and rituals among the Kazakhs are associated with it. In anthropomorphized imagination it was seen as the head of the house, the most important part. Use of this sacred element in a non-place like airport can be

103 The Yurt. Link: http://eurasia.travel/kazakhstan/traditions/the_yurt/ (retrieved 05.05.2022)

104 Meuser, 2015. P. 167



fig. 32 (above)
Reference to *shanyrak* as a skylight
in Astana Airport
Architect: Kisho Kurokawa



fig. 33 (below)
Reference to *shanyrak* as a decoration
in Baiterek, Astana
Architect: A. Rustembekov

perceived as an attempt to symbolize an identity, where according to Marc Auge “neither identity nor history nor relation can be felt.”¹⁰⁵ Can one symbolize an identity in a space which is designed for a temporary coexistence of individuals? Is the sacred element providing a meaning among constant flow of passengers or is it losing its own? Here *shanyrak* has a functional aspect of bringing light in at least. In comparison in Baiterek tower, an image of *shanyrak* is used merely as decoration “under which sacred birds Samruk, made of Czech crystal, soar.”¹⁰⁶ Thus failing to provide any meaning. (fig.33)

Kerege are the walls of the yurt. It was a supporting structure which holds the whole system. In anthropomorphized imagination it was seen as legs of the house. In unrealised proposals it is used as the structure. The realised projects however have used *kerege* as a mere decorative element without its functional use.

In a proposal for a competition of National Memorial of Kazakhstan in Astana architecture office of Maciej Jakub Zawadzki has proposed to celebrate vernacular architecture of nomads and include it in the design of the new Memorial Complex. Thus, the external character of the building would be “both familiar, fresh and being firmly rooted in the heritage yet evolving into the future.” The proposal was an overdimensioned perimeter fence which resembles a “scaled structure of a yurt acting as a unifying element across the large footprint.”¹⁰⁷ (fig. 34) The monumentality of the project and huge distances between the parts of the proposed complex are justified by stating that Kazakh nomads were used to living in vast steppes, thus they prefer a lot of emptiness around.

Another proposed project which referenced traditional architecture in form

¹⁰⁵ Rieger-Jandl, 2008. P. 89

¹⁰⁶ About Baiterek. Link: <https://www.the-village-kz.com/village/business/wherework/2479-ya-rab-otayu-v-baytereki> (retrieved 05.05.2022)

¹⁰⁷ About The Memorial Complex Project in Astana, Kazakhstan. Link: <https://m-j-z.com/project/memorialkazakhstan> (retrieved 05.05.2022)



fig. 34 (above)

Kerege as a structure

Proposal for National Memorial, by
Maciej Jakub Zawadzki

fig. 35 (below)

Kerege as a decoration

Palace of Independence, Astana

of *kerege*, but this time as a mere silhouette of the building was proposal for Astana National Library by Bjarke Ingels Group. The architect explained the concept of the project as combining “four universal archetypes across space and time into a new national symbol: the circle, the rotunda, the arch and the yurt are merged into the form of a moebius strip. The clarity of the circle, the courtyard of the rotunda, the gateway of the arch and the soft silhouette of the yurt are combined to create a new national monument appearing local and universal, contemporary and timeless, unique and archetypal at the same time”¹⁰⁸ Combination of a fashionable architect as well as yet another monumental building were enough reasons to persuade the jury and award him the first prize. However, he withdrew from the project after building the foundations and the four elevator cores to be replaced by Foster, whose firm hastily redesigned the building by placing a structural ring over the four cores and covering it with a big glass dome.¹⁰⁹ It was now renamed to Nazarbayev Centre and access to the public was denied.

The Palace of Independence which is one of the relatively latest additions to the monumental axis, is located behind the pyramid. It was built in 2009 as a multifunctional building. It is a cuboid clad in blue glass with diagonal lateral edges. Reference to *kerege* is made out of white metal lattice, used purely as a decorative element. (fig. 35) The ground floor houses a congress hall with more than 3000 seats. On the upper floors exhibition halls are located.¹¹⁰

108 BIG: new national library in astana, kazakhstan. Link: <https://www.designboom.com/architecture/big-new-national-library-in-astana-kazakhstan/>

109 ‘Norman said the president wants a pyramid’: how starchitects built Astana. Link: <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/oct/17/norman-foster-president-pyramid-architects-built-astana>

110 Meuser, 2015. P. 141

“the surrounding reality is uniquely poeticized in a range of patterns. Utensils, dishes, weapons, clothes - everything is lovingly covered with ornaments”¹¹¹

111 Margulan, 2012. P. 142

Ornaments

The etymological meaning of the word ornament derives from latin *ornare* means “to embellish, decorate”. In ancient cultures however ornaments had a deep symbolic meaning as well. Ancestors of the Kazakhs believed in their magical protective power of and ability to bring luck. This belief is derived from findings of bronze and silver talismans with solar circles carved into them which symbolized sun, moon and sky as the deity they believed in. According to Margulan range of Russian and Soviet scholars have researched about Kazakh ornaments and came to the conclusion that it seemed as if Kazakhs “lived in a world of ornaments” with each pattern having its own meaning.¹¹²

In Kazakh culture zoomorphic ornaments are prevalent with “*koshkar muiz*” translated as ram’s horn being the most prominent one. It could be explained by several factors such as animals being valued highly in nomadic culture, especially horses and rams, prohibition of Islam to draw people and archetypal images that unite the consciousness of pagan tribes and their cultures.¹¹³ “In Scythian and Turkic mythology, horned animals - argali and ram, along with the horse, were associated with a heavenly miracle, personifying the upper division of the universe. Thus, the horns of animals could personify the divine higher principle. In animals, the presence of horns of arched and spiral shapes was perceived as another confirmation of the divine mark of their

112 Margulan, 2012. P. 142

113 About kazakh ornaments. Link: <https://www.caa-network.org/archives/15372> (retrieved 04.05.2022)

fig. 36
Kazakh
traditional
ornaments
in Kasteev
museum



chosenness as peace-loving animals sent by heaven to serve man.”¹¹⁴ Ancient nomads also believed that ornaments had protective powers. That’s why rugs and pillows, that had contact with earth, were richly ornamented. They even had ornaments on the soles of their shoes. They believed that this would protect them from stepping on to the earth.¹¹⁵ One example of importance of ornaments according to Tazhenova is the existence of a tradition where newly married bride sent, short time after the wedding presents to her relatives. This present consisted of embroidered ornaments which gave clue to her parents about how she was living. If the ornament contained a figure of someone tall and thin with someone small and full standing nearby it meant that the bride lived poorly. If however the beak of a bird was depicted it meant that she was living like a free bird.¹¹⁶ Nowadays with a raising need for self-identification the Kazakhs more and more started to turn back to their past. In doing so ornaments are seen as physical representations of traditional culture and being copied as stamps on various items of art objects, architecture, clothes, utensils and so on. In this process ornaments are losing their original meaning and turning into simulacra. This issue is being raised by contemporary artists in Kazakhstan. For example Elena and Victor Vorobyov in the mini-labyrinth object “Ornamentalizer” are ironic about the general desire of the young state to fill everything with popular Kazakh ornament “*koshkar muiz*”. (fig. 37) Another creative approach has taken Kuanysh Bazargaliyev in the series of conceptual flags, where he plays with ornamental and ideological symbols. It conveys the position Kazakhstan found itself in a contemporary world, uneasily squeezed in-between two political ideologies.¹¹⁷ (fig. 38)

114 About zoomorphic ornaments. Link: <http://tourkg.com/2014/03/ornamenty-kyrgyzskogo-naroda-3.html/> (retrieved 04.05.2022)

115 Naurzbaeva, 2020. P. 86

116 About kazakh ornaments. Link: <https://www.caa-network.org/archives/15372> (retrieved 04.05.2022)

117 *ibid.*



fig. 37 (above)

People are passing through their bodies
the popular ornament “*koshkar muiz*”
Elena and Victor Vorobyov,
object “Ornamentalizer”

fig. 38 (below)

Kuanysh Bazargaliev. “Between the bear
and the dragon, between the hammer
and the anvil, between the red Ivan and
the black Wan, between”

Ornaments in architecture

The mausoleums of Aisha Bibi and Babadji Khatun are located near the ancient city of Taraz and were built between the X-XIth centuries of Karakhanid period. There are 28 different legends surrounding these mausoleums. According to one of them it is a tragic love story of a young girl who died, from a snake's bite, on her way to meet her lover, the ruler of Taraz, Karakhan. In a memory of her and in an attempt to monumentalize her beauty, Karakhan ordered 62 masters of the East, to build a mausoleum of unprecedented beauty. For the descendants, he left a Persian inscription on four corner columns of the mausoleum, but only one survived which states: "Autumn, rain, clouds, the earth is beautiful..." Aisha-Bibi's nanny Babaji-Khatun became the guardian of the mausoleum and after her death was buried 20 steps away from Aisha-Bibi in the mausoleum of Babaji-Khatun. Her mausoleum in the complex with the mausoleum of Aisha Bibi is still a symbol of devotion and it became a pilgrimage site among the locals, especially women, as it was believed to possess a sacred power and help to procreate. ¹¹⁸

Both mausoleums are single chambered. The mausoleum of Babaji Khatun, is distinguished by its simplicity, has a cubic base which is crowned by a conical dome. The facades are decorated with niches and rosettes. The mausoleum of Aisha Bibi also has a cubic base, crowned by a dome. The original dome has been destroyed and the new one is a result of restoration. Massive columns rise at the four corners of the building. A system of small niches, small columns, vaults, pointed arches and richly ornamented terracotta tiles give a facade distinct appearance. Terracotta patterns include geometric, zoomorphic and solar motifs which are rooted in the art of the Andronovo and Saka tribes of the 2nd-1st millennium BC. ¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Aukhadiyeva et.al, 2021

¹¹⁹ About mausoleums. Link: http://old.unesco.kz/heritagenet/kz/content/history/monument/history_arcitec.htm (retrieved 04.05.2022)



fig. 40 (below)

Solar ornament on the facade of Babad-
ji Khatun Mausoleum

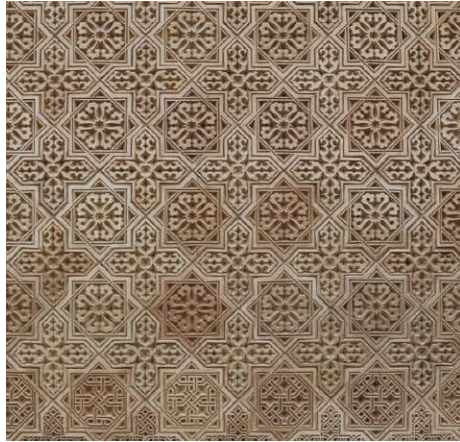


fig. 39 (above)

Combination of ornaments *tórt qulak*
and *juldyz* on the facade of Aisha Bibi
Mausoleum

Various Russian and Kazakh scholars have written about the mausoleum of Aisha Bibi and highly valued the decorated terracotta tiles, which show high craft(wo)manship abilities of masters of that time. These ornaments are now being used in modern buildings to show affiliation with ethnic identity of the Kazakhs.¹²⁰

A design for the Palace of Schoolchildren in Astana was made by a team of Russian architects at Studio 44 in 2011. In this project two different references - “suprematist composition” and “local traditions of dwelling” were used, which can be noted in their slogan “Khan Shangyrak. Shelter for the youth”. As an inspiration they took several identity markers, that of *kiyiz üy* in general, separated *shanyrak* and *kerege*, and added a must-have element - traditional ornaments. “In our project, this sacral element of a Kazakh traditional dwelling is reinterpreted as a cylinder 8 m in height and 156 m in diameter. The giant disc has openings and skylights providing natural light inside the building, into a central atrium space. It covers stepped compositions of rectangular “boxes” each containing a functional element – skating rink, museum, shooting gallery, theater, etc.”¹²¹ Here functional aspect of *kiyiz üy* is reinterpreted into multifunctional school for children with a mixture of local and global influences. The image of *Shanyrak* is reinterpreted, as it does not only let light in, its importance is now enhanced by its dimension and incorporation of stairs.

“Embellished with national ornaments, the “boxes” are placed on each other, reminding the viewer of felt suitcases (*shabadan*) – a feature of a nomadic lifestyle and traditional decorations of yurt interiors. The space of the disc accommodates various hobby groups and departments of the youth centre, while the flat green roof of the building is interpreted as a walking and panoramic-view platform, simulating steppe landscape in the centre of a

¹²⁰ Aukhadiyeva, 2021

¹²¹ Palace of Schoolchildren. Link: https://www.archdaily.com/488674/palace-of-schoolchildren-studio-44-architects?ad_medium=gallery (retrieved 04.05.2022)



fig. 41 (above)
Shanyrak above the main hall of
Palace of schoolchildren
by Studio 44 Architects

fig. 42 (below)
Abundance of local references on the
facade of the Palace of schoolchildren
by Studio 44 Architects

high-rise city.”¹²² For the decoration on the facade *kerege* as well as different ornamentations were used, among which the reference to the ornaments on the facade of Aisha Bibi with *tórt qulak* and *juldyz* can be seen. In general in an attempt to “localize” the project, overuse of references can be noted, where the meaning of separate elements can be lost. As is every newly built public building in Astana, this project has also monumental size of 18,700 m².

The National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan has used white Kazakh ornamented natural stone for the large part of its facade combined with blue glass and forming a building in a shape of an iceberg. Nazarbayev said in his speech for its opening: “This is the architectural embodiment of the nation’s values.”¹²³

122 Palace of Schoolchildren. Link: https://www.archdaily.com/488674/palace-of-schoolchildren-studio-44-architects?ad_medium=gallery (retrieved 04.05.2022)

123 National Museum of Kazakhstan. Link: <https://astanatimes.com/2014/07/national-museum-kazakhstan-opens-presidential-speech-international-visitors/> (retrieved 05.05.2022)



fig. 43 (above)
National Museum of Kazakhstan
Architects: V. Laptev, A. Maximov, V.
Svetashov, 2014



fig. 44 (below)
“This is the architectural embodiment
of the nation’s values.”
inside of the National Museum of
Kazakhstan

Kazakh folklore

Ever since the invention of language or speech people started telling stories in order to inform others about important events that took place and probably to try to explain things that were beyond their understanding. Through time tales were passed down to next generations as an evidence of experience that was shared between humans. Through process of retelling some tales survived till today and can be perceived as a window which enables modern people to take a glance into the world of ancient people. This in turn serves as a tool that helps one to understand more about a specific culture and their worldview.

Before establishing the first Kazakh Khanate, the different tribes and clans which make up the roots of ethnic Kazakhs were a part of other turkic conglomerations. Therefore the history of Kazakh literature before XVth century is inseparable from the literature of other turkic nomads. In the history of world literature there is a tendency of transition from oral form of storytelling to written. In the history of Kazakh literature a peculiar feature is observed where written monuments were present in ancient times, then medieval times are characterized by the presense of an oral form of storytelling which transitioned to written form again starting from the beginning of XIXth century.¹²⁴

Kazakh myths give us an insight into the minds of ancient Kazakhs. Their imagination, worldview and specific way of thinking can be found in ancient myths. As a result of researches about Kazakh myths most ancient and simple ones were myths about celestial bodies.¹²⁵ According to the imagination of ancient nomads the sun, moon and stars were initially born as people and somehow turned into celestial bodies. In one myth the sun and moon were

124 Ot folkloristiki do tyurkologii. Ibrayev Sh. I. Kokshetau 2010. page 6-7

125 Ot folkloristiki do tyurkologii. Ibrayev Sh. I. Kokshetau 2010. page 94

two girls who were very close friends and were both strikingly beautiful. However, as a result of jealousy over their beauty, they decided to never see each other again. We can see the influence of this worldview in Kazakh female names. There are a lot of Kazakh names that start with *ai* (moon) and *kun* (sun). *Juldyz* (star) is used as a separate name as well.

According to Mircea Eliade, myths are not viewed as a fairy tale, unrealistic and made up things anymore. Instead myths are viewed as were perceived by ancient primitive tribes originally. As something authentic, that really took place and more importantly something sacred, something to look up to.¹²⁶ At the beginning every culture believed myth to be a truth that explained metaphysics of things, however since the understanding of *logos* came to be, *mythos* became its opposite, meaning something that does not exist in reality. So now myth means two opposite things, on the one hand something made up and on the other hand for some cultures it means something that really happened.

Legends in Kazakh culture are usually events that really took place in the past and told with some exaggerations. Some legends are so exaggerated that the difference between reality and fiction is blurred. One example of such legend is about the division of Kazakhs into *Juz*. Ethnic Kazakhs are divided in three *juz* (horde) and inside of each *juz* they are divided in tribes (*ru*). There are at least two different versions of this legend written and provided by the famous Kazakh scholar of the XIXth century Shokan Ualikhanov. Legends surround ancient monuments and mausoleums found in the Great Steppe as well. The mausoleums were erected for famous people, who did good deeds and were considered to be saints. However, due to the lack of written evidence legends arose which tell probable story of its creation and meaning. Since worshipping ancestors is common in Kazakh culture, this mausoleums have a special meaning and are widely visited.

126 *Aspekty mifa. Mircha Eliade. Moscow 1994, page 11*

A legend about the invention of the Kazakh traditional instrument dombra : “The local khan’s son died hunting from the fangs of a boar, and the servants, fearing the wrath of the khan, who threatened to fill the throat with boiling lead to anyone who would tell him that something unkind had happened to his son, went to the old master Ali for advice. He made a musical instrument, which he called dombra and appeared in front of the khan and played it. The strings groaned, wept, as if the mournful noise of the forest swept under the silk tent of the khan’s tent. The sharp whistle of the wind mingled with the howl of a wild beast. The strings cried out loudly, like a human voice, asking for help, so the dombra told the khan about the death of his son. Filled with anger, the khan ordered hot lead to be thrown into the round hole of the dombra.”¹²⁷

127 Legend about dombira. Link: <https://zen.yandex.ru/media/id/5e53a78470d2aa13e1bfb01e/legendy-sozdaniia-dombry-narodnyi-instrument-kazahov-5e58a7c1ab3f5c1a51912dc5> (retrieved 04.05.2022)



fig. 45

Old man playing Kazakh traditional
instrument - dombra

Creation of a myth

Myths about the tree of life are present in a lot of cultures throughout the world. Ancient turks had also their version of this myth. In one of them the origin of kipchaks, tribe which is believed to be ancestors of ethnic Kazakhs, is explained. According to a myth presented by Rashid ad-Din and Abu-l-Gazi during one of the campaigns of a mythical Oguz-Khan a woman whose husband died, had to give birth to a child. So she entered a hollow tree and gave birth to a boy who had been given the name of Kipchak.¹²⁸ The tree can be a representation in this story of something that gives a new life, a new beginning and has a sacred meaning for Kazakh culture.

Since the presence of folklore was very important for the culture of ethnic Kazakhs, Nazarbayev came up with an idea of creating a new symbol for a new capital which would have to become a symbol of the country similar to the Eiffel Tower in Paris. According to Nazarbayev several foreign architecture firms have presented their ideas for a monument. However he knew that Astana needed something different. So one night he came up with an idea of Baiterek - a tree of life from ancient Kazakh mythical fairy-tale - *Er-Tostik*. The main character of the fairy-tale “having overcome all conceivable and inconceivable obstacles, got into the underworld and found himself in front of a huge tree, symbolizing the beginning of life. According to Turkic legends, it was on the top of this tree that the mythical blue bird *Samruk* brought one golden egg that gives life to everything and symbolizes life itself.”¹²⁹ The building is supposed to represent a new bright future that Astana and Kazakhstan wants for itself.

The building was made of iron, glass, and concrete. Narrative of this tower is filled with symbolic meaning and references to the fairy-tale. The function of

128 Zuev, 2002. P. 72

129 Nazarbayev, 2020. P. 257

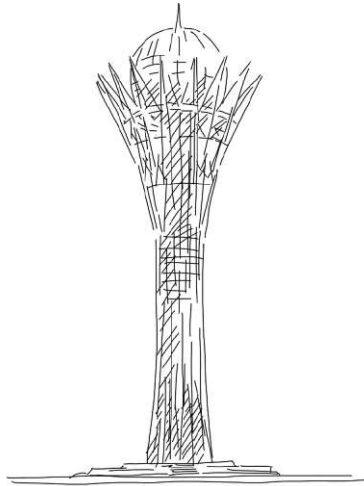


fig. 46
Baiterek, Astana

the tree in *Er-Tostik* was to unite three levels of the universe: underground, earthly and heavenly. This was reflected in the vertical division of the tower, where each floor represents each of the worlds. The foyer is an underground world, and two levels inside the “egg” are divided into earthly and heavenly. On the heavenly level the observation deck is located and the height of it is around 97 meters from the ground level, which is supposed to represent the relocation of the capital from Almaty to Astana in 1997. Together with the sphere, the height of Baiterek is 105 meters. There are two symbolic elements on the observation deck - “*Ayaly Alakan*” with an imprint of the Nazarbayev’s right palm and “*Bata*” with words of blessing from the leaders of seventeen world religious denominations who visited Astana in 2003. “The composition “*Ayaly Alakan*” is decorated with Kazakh national and ancient Saka ornaments.”¹³⁰ The imprint of a president is supposed to serve as a lucky charm, but the tower itself failed to transfer the initial thought, as it became known among locals as “Chupa-Chups”, a reference to a western brand of lollipop, well-known among Kazakh children.¹³¹

I have seen copies of Baiterek in smaller scale in different cities throughout the country. Vague resemblance and poor choice of materials made me question the validity of building a copy in the first place. In the Soviet Union several copies of monuments of famous figures like Lenin have been present in a lot of cities throughout the USSR. Is placing copies of Baiterek a continuation of this idea in contemporary Kazakhstan? Reinforcement of state propaganda? One is clear, the image of Baiterek became not only the symbol of a capital, it became a symbol of a new Kazakhstan with the physical version of which even people in remote areas of the country should be able to identify themselves.

130 Baiterek Tower. Link: <https://www.the-village-kz.com/village/business/wherework/2479-ya-rab-otayu-v-baytereke> (retrieved 05.05.2022)

131 Meuser, 2015. P. 107

Türkistan - contemporary myth

We live in a world of images. In Kazakhstan these images are being shaped by the government and presented to common folk. The important myth here is that these images are being presented and perceived as truth. In an attempt to re-identify, one has to be careful not to romanticize or idealize things. I think it is important to demystify the images that are being presented, otherwise it will be consumed on a superficial level and assumed to be true when it is not. Then it will be easy to control people who take things as they are and believe without questioning. It might further enable the government to create even more myths and give it out as truth, while turning authenticity into imitation. I witnessed an example of this in Türkistan. Türkistan is an old city with rich history and cultural heritage. After the decree of the president to revive the city, new part of the city has been built where buildings have been turned into “imitations” without prioritizing such aspects as heritage, sustainability or durability. However, local residents liked visiting that place and it provided them a sense of “belonging” as well as hopes for tourism influx which is connected with investments and new jobs.

My impression of the city was that it seemed like a “Disneyland” project, which has been implemented in recent years in other parts of the world. In the city I asked locals what they thought about the poor execution and one resident answered me by the proverb: “*biz kazaktar jamandy jasyramiz, jaksyny arttyramiz*” which means: “we Kazakh people hide something that is bad and exaggerate something that is good,” while two others nearby nodded. I did not know what to make of it and it seemed like a proverb from the Soviet times when people were told to hide everything bad that is happening and instead make an illusion that everything is working well on the surface. Certainly one person can not be representative of the way all people think, however the fact that local resident tried to justify the poor quality by reasoning that this is how it is supposed to be is alarming.



fig. 47 (above)
Ethnoaul in Türkistan



fig. 48 (below)
Private houses on the outskirts of
Türkistan

fig. 49
outskirts of Türkistan





The Circle

The symbolism of circle is filled with different interpretations in each culture. “Solar deities were worshipped in prehistoric and ancient times, across different parts of the world and in different ways - under a ubiquitous symbol - the circle. The circle is present in all cultures, religions and belief systems as a magical and symbolic sign. For example, the Buddhist Mandala, where the circle symbolizes the sky, transcendence and infinity, and the square represents the inner self, that which is associated with man and earth. The Chinese JinYang from the Book of Changes symbolizes the interplay of opposites of the same, the Indian swastika (circular, different from the one commonly known), is a symbol which refers to the cult of the sun; it means life, fertility and good fortune.”¹³² According to Jaffe the symbol of the circle, regardless of its cultural context, ultimately represents a vital aspect of life - its wholeness.¹³³ Circles might also represent inclusion if we think about terms such as circle of friends and circle of life.

In nomadic culture the circle was an important symbol which was present in everyday life. Their life was marked by eternal circles - “the circle of the sun, the open steppe, the circumference of the yurt, the horned circular scroll of ornaments, the life cycle of the müshels (twelve-year animal cycle).” When one circle ended the next one began and the transition from one circle to the next was marked by rituals, customs and holidays.¹³⁴

Teresa Bardzinska-Bonenberg shows in her research the use and development of circular form in architecture and urban planning. In ancient times, when the defense was prioritized, the circular form was used in form of ring walls, circular rampart or a round tower. Circle was appreciated by the people of

¹³² Bardzinska-Bonenberg, Ring-and-circle, symbolical and practical meaning of the form in town planning and architecture

¹³³ Jaffe, 1964. P. 237

¹³⁴ Kunanbay in Nomads



fig. 50 (above)
Eagle trying to fly away from the
Sphere in front of the high-rise residen-
tial complex.



fig. 51 (below)
Astana Airport by Kisho Kurokawa

power of all times up to now, as the most perfect shape. If historically the circle was used more for practical reasons, recent decades have shown that with technical problems being solved, circular structures are being erected more as a status symbol of the owner. While in urban planning it still has a functional role, in architecture the purpose of the building shifted towards aesthetically pleasing and socially beneficial uses.¹³⁵

The unusual dominance of round or spherical buildings in Kazakhstan, especially in Astana, can be explained through the instrumentalized sacralization of the notion of a “nomadic past”. For example the dome of the Astana Airport by Kurokawa references a form of *kiyiz üy* (fig. 51) and the flag of Kazakhstan has a symbol of sun in the middle.

In November 2012 Astana was given an opportunity to hold Expo in 2017 with the theme “Future Energy”. Renowned architectural firms have turned in their proposals for the competition of development of Expo City which was launched right afterwards. The winner was chosen to be the Chicago-based firm Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill in cooperation with structural engineering firm Werner Sobek. The proposal was to make the Expo project in two phases: Expo Mode where the buildings would be used as exhibition pavilions for the duration of the Expo and Legacy Mode where they would be used for other purposes after the exhibition was finished. The concept for the project was inspired by Jeremy Rifkin’s idea of the Third Industrial Revolution where “all energy comes from renewable sources and is stored and controlled in smart grids, as well as the buildings themselves, constituting an energy source.” The main element of the new project was however the pavilion of Kazakhstan located right in the middle of the Expo City. This new project was supposed to be yet another monumental structure that would become a new symbol and created a new axis between Astana’s old symbol Baiterek and

135 Bardzinska-Bonenberg, Ring-and-circle, symbolical and practical meaning of the form in town planning and architecture



fig. 52
EXPO City 2017 by Adrian Smith +
Gordon Gill



fig. 53
Kazakhstan's Pavilion for EXPO 2017
by Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill

the new symbol Expo building. When asked how this new structure should look like, the government did not hesitate to use the circle once again, so that the initial proposal of the winning team for main building in form of a streamlined dome was changed to that of a sphere in 2013. Giant sphere with a diameter of eighty metres and 24000 square metres of usable space would be the largest spherical structure in the world.¹³⁶ Sustainability rhetoric for the whole project was widely used, but during the actual Expo the implementation of it was lacking. After the end of the exhibition the site was reconstructed and hosts now several companies including a number of commercial pavilions, International Center for Green Technologies, Astana International IT University, business center, Digital Government Office, AIFC building, Astana Hub, Congress Center and EXPO International Exhibition Center.¹³⁷

World Expo stood since its inception in 1851 to show the technical progress and human creativity. Before the development of internet it provided a chance for people to see the whole world in one exhibition. It was a chance to get to know other cultures. Nowadays the focus of World exhibitions has changed. Rieger- Jandl states that since the World Exhibition in Osaka in 1970, where the theme was “Progress and Harmony for Mankind”, the focus was shifted from prioritizing technological progress to prioritizing people in their natural environment again.¹³⁸ For a young country like Kazakhstan it was a way to establish itself in a world stage, attract tourists and investors and maybe also boast a national identity.

When I asked locals about their opinion, one interviewer told me: “Expo building is meaningless, I don’t understand its shape or function.” Some residents see it as a very expensive project which was unnecessary to build in the first place. Others seem to like the notion of development connected with it.

¹³⁶ Dalbay in Meuser, 2015. P. 181-182

¹³⁷ Transformation of Expo. Link: https://www.inform.kz/ru/delovoy-centr-nur-sultana-kak-transformirovalas-territoriya-expo_a3805337 (retrieved 05.05.2022)

¹³⁸ Rieger-Jandl, 2008. P. 64

Symbol of unity - Palace of Peace and Reconciliation and Presidential Park

If pyramids in ancient civilizations were erected as a temple or a tomb, in contemporary architecture the form is being used to show greatness and prestige. Kazakhstan's own pyramid - The Palace of Peace and Reconciliation is credited to the famous british architect Norman Foster. However, in an article from The Guardian titled "Norman said the president wants a pyramid': how starchitects built Astana"¹³⁹ architects from Foster's office tell the backstory of the creation of yet another monumental structure that has become a symbol of the capital. The Palace in shape of a pyramid is 62 metres high, the base is also 62 x 62 metres. The frame is made out of steel and concrete was used for the lower levels. A huge circular hall in the middle was designed primarily to house the triennial Congress where 200 religious world leaders would meet every three years and discuss the state of the world.¹⁴⁰ The building itself was completed in record time, so that it would be ready to host the first gathering in 2006. When the Congress is not being held, the main function is transformed into a museum, where presents from other World religions are exhibited. In addition to that the building houses a 1500-seat opera house, educational facilities and a national centre for different ethnic and geographical groups. The facade is clad in stone with glazed inserts.¹⁴¹ The pyramid has an apex with images of 130 doves on a stained glass made by British artist Brian Clarke. The image of 130 doves is also symbolic, as it represents the number of nationalities living in peace together in Kazakhstan. The importance of the building has been enhanced by creating a Presidential Park around it in 2008. The design was made by japanese landscape architects led

139 'Norman said the president wants a pyramid': how starchitects built Astana. Link: <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/oct/17/norman-foster-president-pyramid-architects-built-astana> (retrieved 07.04.2022)

140 Palace of Peace and Reconciliation. Link: <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34001345> (retrieved 07.05.2022)

141 Palace of Peace and Reconciliation. Link: <https://www.fosterandpartners.com/projects/palace-of-peace-and-reconciliation/> (retrieved 07.05.2022)

by Takashi Tsubokura.¹⁴² In the narrative the mythical bird Samruk is present again, this time taking a literal shape of water and should plant seeds of prosperity, on the opposite side from Presidential Palace. The lavish design of the park combined with a presence of a pyramid looks like a fairy-tale dream when seen from above. However as Meuser notes, “from the perspective of mere mortals it looks less impressive, let alone, magical.”¹⁴³

During my visit to a museum I had a sense that the building was unnecessarily big for the amount of people visiting it. It has become yet another symbolic building which does not provide any other meaning except to just stand there as an image, as one interviewer told me “they stand there for beauty” (*oni stoyat dlya krasoty*).

142 Meuser, 2015. P. 126

143 *ibid.*

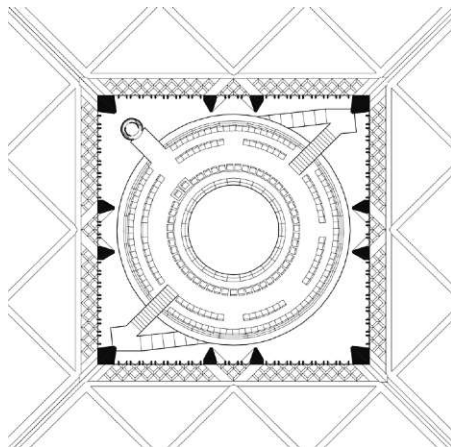


fig. 54 (above)
Floor Plan, Palace of Peace and Recon-
ciliation, Astana
Architect: Norman Foster

fig. 55 (below)
Front view of Palace of Peace and
Reconciliation, Astana
Architect: Norman Foster

Shell and Core

Residential housing in post-Soviet Kazakhstan has been turned into a commodity of poor quality with the development of free market. A practicing architect from Almaty told me: “Here the developer has a final say, we only do what they want from us, in that sense there is a feeling that we aren’t really architects anymore.” When it comes to housing typology she told me: “There are four types of residential complexes: economy, comfort, business and premium. The height of normal apartments are minimum 2,8-2,9 m, usually it is 3m”

There is an emergence of another housing typology as well, which references Le Corbusier’s *Plan Libre* and is based on the concept of free planning, where apartments are sold with having only external walls and providing therefore a room for individuality. Each resident can decide how the rooms would be divided and needs to hire an interior designer for planning the internal layout of the apartment. On the use of free planning the architect told me that: “It is spreading more and more every day, because construction companies are saving on building materials, and are trying to present free planning as a distinct feature. Some people prefer free planning because it is presented to them as an opportunity to make any layout to their liking. But in fact, due to the location of the windows and engineering shafts, which cannot be changed, you can’t really do much. And only a good specialist can offer the best division of space. But since the level of good specialists is low in Kazakhstan, especially in a short time, it is possible that it is better to do the layout yourself slowly. On the other hand, an open layout is good for designers, I guess. As for financial considerations, such apartments are still very expensive, despite the fact that the company did not spend money on internal partitions and doors.”

There is also another type, where apartments are being sold in “draft” version, similar to free planning, but without any installations as well. The buyers can

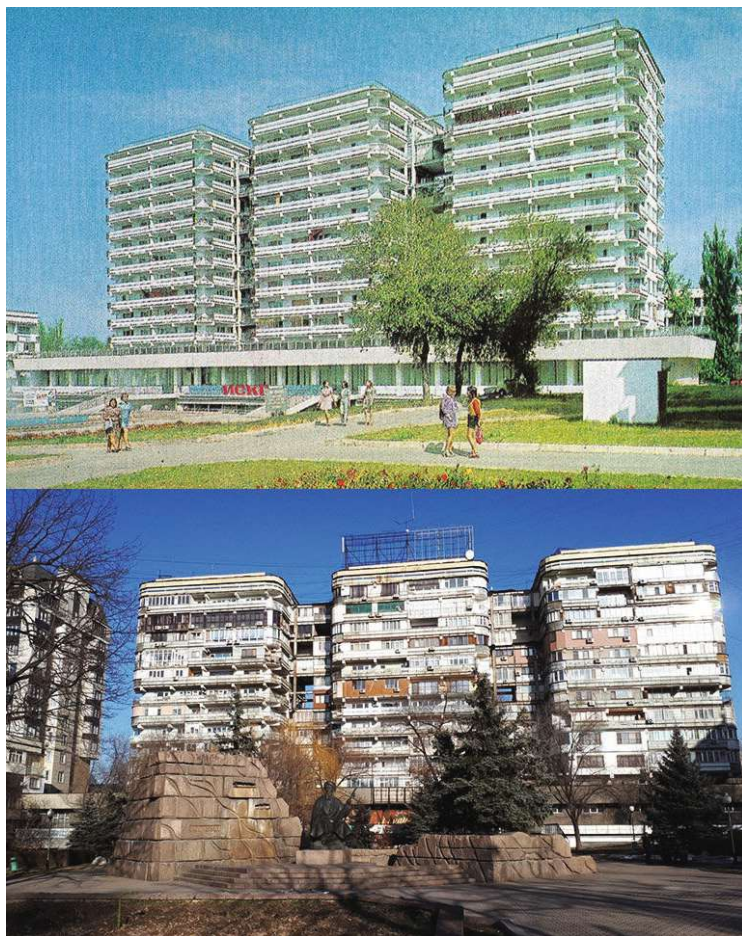


fig. 56

12 stories high residential housing “*Tri bogatyrya*” was built as an open terraced house, however the concept did not fit with the way of living of its residents and it acquired a chaotic appearance

choose for themselves if they want a “draft” or a “clean” version. One designer told me that people prefer the “draft” version because in the clean version the finishing is of poor quality anyways. A resident who recently bought a new apartment in “draft” version told me that it was cheaper to buy it this way. Another interviewer said that “Apartments are being sold in draft version because developers want to get rid of it faster.”

The planning of residential housing which exists in contemporary Kazakhstan is an amalgamation of different influences, strongest of which is Soviet architecture. An interesting opinion provides Medeuova where she states that characteristics of European public spaces with multitude of cafes and restaurants is rather foreign to a Kazakh way of living, especially for older generations. When they come from *aul* into the noisy and dense city, it is hard for them to adapt. She writes about how Kazakhs like visiting each other, often in bigger groups. Urban society feels discomfort to some degree of traditional way of communication.¹⁴⁴ This made me think that in general Kazakh's have adapted their way of living into imported ideas of the “civilized” world. The relevance of traditions or traditional way of living is undeniable, since about 40% of people live in *auls* and even people living in the cities continue to lead more of a traditional lifestyle. Undoubtedly they are adapted into modern times, however continuation of existence of customs like “*sogym*”, “*tusaukeser*”, “*shildekhana*” and so on proves that even people living in big cities did not abolish this traditions. In current society traditions can be seen as outdated to some. One could shape its own way where culture and its traditions would be celebrated and adopted to contemporary way of living as well.

I also noticed that Soviet and contemporary multi-storey apartments possess balconies, while Kazakh people are not familiar with the concept of it. So in most cases people cover them with “siding” or glazing and use it as a storage room. Adil Nurmakov told me that “Balconies are being glazed because it is

144 Medeuova, 2009. P. 112.

allowed. It was inherited like that. People glaze balconies because it is warmer that way, they store things there and it gives an illusion of an additional space. It is not being used for the designed purpose.” However apartments continue to be built with balconies because, as one architect told me: “We are still using Soviet regulations (SNiP) in architecture, which are outdated, since then only cosmetic alterations have been made.” To the question if she thinks balconies are needed at all, the reply was: “I think it is individual. I think most Kazakh buyers love balconies, they simply use them for other purposes. On the other hand if you design storage rooms inside an apartment, then in the future residents will still remove them in order to expand the room, and things will be put into balconies anyway. They will make a closet at the end of the balcony, a classic. So balconies are needed for Kazakh wives I would say.” The necessity of building an architectural element that is not used for intended purpose is undoubtedly questionable. It seems as if people in Kazakhstan have adapted their way of living to modern housing typologies. Architecture should be adapted according to the need of its users and not the other way around.

Kazakhstan for the last 30 years was trying to construct a new identity for the country as well as its population. As seen from the example of the relocation and building a new part of the capital, architecture has played a significant role in this process. The last part of this work is dedicated to empirical observations made from the trip to Kazakhstan. It is followed by taking a look from the perspective of its inhabitants and finding out if they are able to identify themselves with new architecture or if they are able to identify themselves with any architecture at all. Also the topics of the role of architecture and nature are discussed since I felt that the understanding of this topics has been altered in contemporary Kazakhstan. At the end is my understanding of architecture from Kazakhstan with which I can identify myself most.



Die approbierte gedruckte Originalversion dieser Diplomarbeit ist an der TU Wien Bibliothek verfügbar
The approved original version of this thesis is available in print at TU Wien Bibliothek.

Other perspectives

The story of three worlds

Every time I visited Astana this city fascinated me. The presence of such ambition in architecture and the structure of built space in contrast to the inner world of its inhabitants and their way of living was always interesting to me. Astana for me was like a mirage, something that seems beautiful from far away, gives false promises, hopes and fake first impression. Like a sandcastle that falls apart as soon as you try to take a grip of it, the feeling of beauty disappeared as soon as you approached it. It represents the hypocrisy of the current regime for me.

In Astana I saw and experienced three worlds, which can also be seen in a geographical map and the division of the city. The first world is left bank, a new part of the city which was created after capital of Kazakhstan was relocated there. This is the world that is projected to TV and billboards for the whole nation. It is filled with iconic buildings which should represent the new identity of Kazakhstan. “Picture perfect”, example of Eurasian architecture (which consists of imported ideas of foreign architects) that they want to present to foreigners. This world left mixed feelings for me. In one hand you had modern coffeeshops that already became so familiar, huge shopping malls and lots of high-rise buildings. However, this modern world was also built exclusively for cars while pedestrian roads were absent in some parts. Buildings are located far from each other which does not protect pedestrians from the wind, it makes the opposite. So unless you have a car and move from one parking garage to another, this part of the city, this world is not for you. On another hand this part made me fear. Occasional encounters of armed men near governmental buildings, made me feel scared even though I did nothing wrong.

The second world is right bank, the old part of the city which existed before the capital's relocation and was its centre. It was planned and built by Soviet



fig. 57
Map of Astana

architects. Houses here had mostly five stories and were located close to each other. The presence of trees and small distances between buildings made walking there comfortable, protected from severe winds of the steppe. This world seemed to be built more for people than cars.

The third world are neighbourhoods located on the outskirts of the city. One such example is “Lesozavod”. I heard about this district for the first time in a joke from a local comedian as a part of his standup routine. On the next day I encountered someone from that district and started asking questions. This world was perceived to be criminal, dangerous and poor. He told me that in some parts it was true. However people who used to live there reminisce with nostalgia about their childhood spent in that district, even though basic infrastructure as water and canalization are missing there.¹⁴⁵

This three worlds are each creating kind of a “bubble” where Left Bank became an image for the residents of the Right Bank and Right Bank became a place of nostalgia for residents of the Left Bank. After talking to residents of this city I gathered some impressions. First of all this division between left and right was essential, because depending on where one lived (s)he would think differently and have a different picture and experience of the city. One resident told me: “People who live on the Right Bank work on the Left Bank and people living on the Left Bank work on the right Bank”. Another resident told me: “If you have money and want a good service, then you will go to the Left Bank.” For a resident of Lesozavod Left Bank was associated with beautiful buildings, like a picture, which you would see from the window of a driving car. However he was aware of the fact that this was just a picture, as the lack of human scale and inconvenient location of social infrastructure was visible with naked eye.

145 About Lesozavod. Link: <https://tengrinews.kz/fotoarchive/ranshe-syuda-taksistyi-boya-lis-ehat-jivut-astanchane-rayone-943/> (retrieved 03.04.2022)

Victor Buchli wrote about the feeling of uneasiness when someone from Kazakhstan asked him if the buildings in Astana “looked right”. “He wanted to know what I made of these structures that were supposed to be Western and modern. He simply had no experience with these new forms” wrote Buchli. This observation lead him to the assumption that certain “cultural capital” needs to be accumulated in order to be certain of one’s own capacity to be “modern”.¹⁴⁶ I think this “mindless borrowing” along with the existence of traditional rituals leads to emergence of “identity crisis” among population.

Some people describe the new capital as a dream of utopia. I personally don’t see it that way, but at least it reminds me of a failed utopia. It looks like a desire to show off. Every building is trying to make a statement for itself and not caring about the context. Another example of this desire to show off can be seen in the now famous project LRT. Despite specialists’ advice of constructing a new connection between the airport and railway station on the ground level, the government has decided to build it above the ground, “like in Dubai”. This project became scandalous because \$258 million of the \$313 million funding from China Development Bank was not spent on the project and now the capital has the physical representation of a “monument for corruption”.¹⁴⁷ (fig.60)

Nowadays Left Bank is still shaping itself with incessant construction and further development to the south, east and west. Parts of the lake Taldykol in the western side of the city is planned to be dried, filled with sand and to build a new elite residential complex on its place, despite the complaints of residents and activists about the ecological consequences it might cause.¹⁴⁸ The exclusion, absence of human scale and prioritization of cars over pedestrians is still an unresolved issue with the spread of new elite housing districts

¹⁴⁶ Bissenova 2014: 139

¹⁴⁷ About LRT. Link: <https://thediplomat.com/2021/10/kazakhstans-light-rail-corruption-case-dragson/> (retrieved 03.04.2022)

¹⁴⁸ About Taldykol. Link: <https://mediazona.ca/article/2021/10/08/taldykol> (retrieved 19.05.2022)

and proposals to widen already too wide car streets. However, new urban planning offices are also emerging with interesting ideas on future development, attempts to make the city pedestrian friendly and creating recreational spaces. New Atyrau bridge (present from oil rich city Atyrau) for pedestrians and cyclists, with bold parametric design is a unicorn in the capital and makes a way for a hopeful future. (fig. 59) Its architect Askhat Saduov told in an interview to the Guardian “The capital has always been planned from the top-down and, as you can see, it doesn’t really work, we want to make it more pedestrian-friendly, with a focus on human-scale public spaces and a city without suburbs. The mayor thinks the era of ‘starchitects’ and tall buildings is over; he wants creative young architects rather than expensive stars”¹⁴⁹

Meuser said in one interview that architecture used to have political motivations and asked what drives people today? He thinks that people today think less about politics and even real world, because they spend more of their time in digital world rather than the real one. From my empirical observations there is still interest in politics. As evidenced by demonstrations in January there are a lot of people in Kazakhstan who want changes, there are only few that resist, unfortunately this few have gained so much power that they can silence the voices of the majority.

During my visit I also saw the rays of hope and it came from the younger generation, who were inspired and motivated. As one interviewer told me: “The architecture in Kazakhstan is developing, specifically our architects and specialists are developing. I hope a bright future awaits it.” I hope so too.

149 Norman said the president wants a pyramid: how starchitects built Astana. Link: <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/oct/17/norman-foster-president-pyramid-architects-built-astana> (retrieved 03.05.2022)



fig. 58
Residential housing in
the Right Bank, Astana

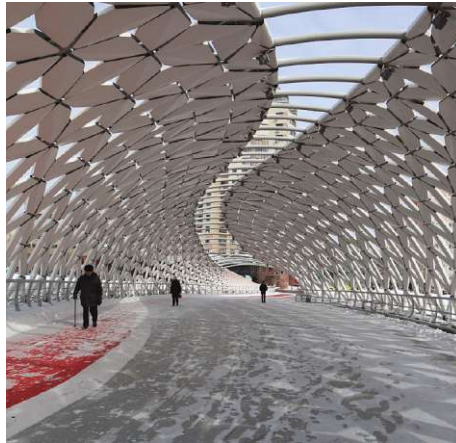


fig. 59
Atyrau Bridge, Astana
Architect: Askhat Saduov

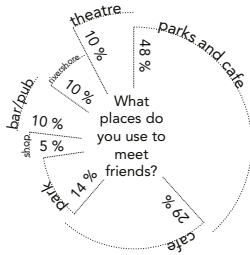
fig. 60
Monument for corruption





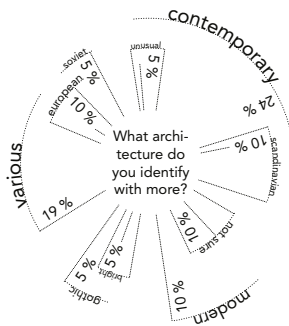
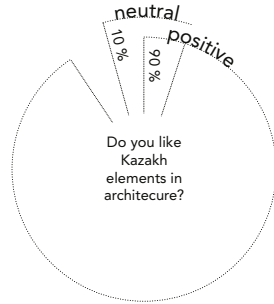
Survey

In an attempt to get further perspectives an online survey was made with 21 participants answering 9 open questions.

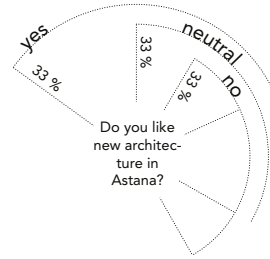


“We are in general a nationality who lost an identity”

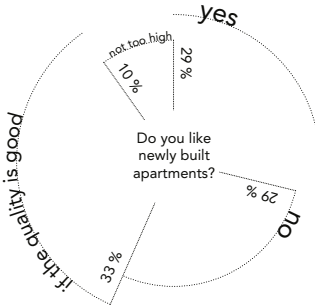
“I think it is very good, we should support it, because it is a part of our culture and incorporation of traditional things in a contemporary architecture will look very cool”



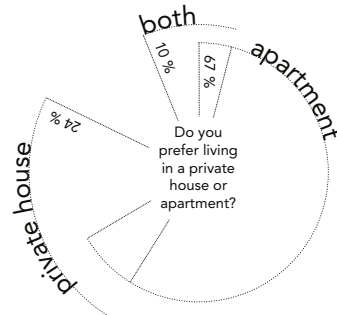
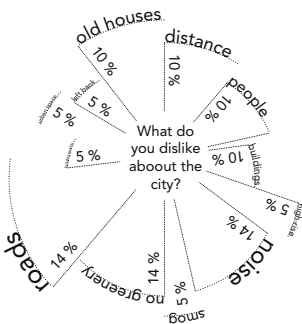
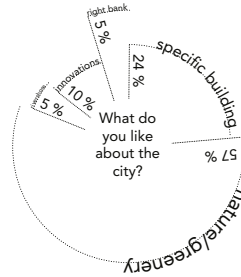
“Architecture in Astana also disappointed me, despite the fact that all the resources were spent on that city. A lot of new and “beautiful”, but it is noticeable that everything is built to show off. In models and pictures it looks beautiful, but in reality not convenient for people. There is not a desire to walk around the city, because the distances between buildings are very big and you get tired, it is not protected against the wind, in general the city looks soulless and cold.”



“A lot of green spaces. A lot of space in Astana to build from scratch and opportunities for contemporary planning.”



“Too much empty space around the buildings and inside the buildings”



To the question if they liked a new architecture in Astana an equal percentage of people answered positively, negatively and neutral, while the use of Kazakh elements in architecture was mostly welcomed adding by: “if used appropriately.” The Soviet architecture was not viewed by most as something negative, while the architecture with which they identify themselves had various different answers. To the question of what they like most in the city, the majority replied nature and greenery and to what they disliked the majority wrote roads, noise and distance between the buildings.

To the question if they liked newly built apartments, the majority replied yes, “if they have a good quality.” Respondents of the survey mentioned “*muraveiniki*” or “*cheloveiniki*” which was mentioned by some interviewees as well. It is a type of newly built high/rise apartment complex of poor quality which looks like a box for people, designed without prioritizing the needs of inhabitants. Through these types of buildings new ghettos are emerging. As Adil Nurmakov noted: “Social housing in Kazakhstan is leading to the emergence of new ghettos. For example behind Khan Shatyr there is a new ghetto called Jagalau-3. It can happen that 2-3 families live in one apartment. Social housing Algabass looks similar. For inhabitants it is seen as the most valuable thing, even though transportation mode is absent.”

To the question where they meet up with friends the popular answers were parks and cafes and most residents of the capital preferred to live in an apartment.

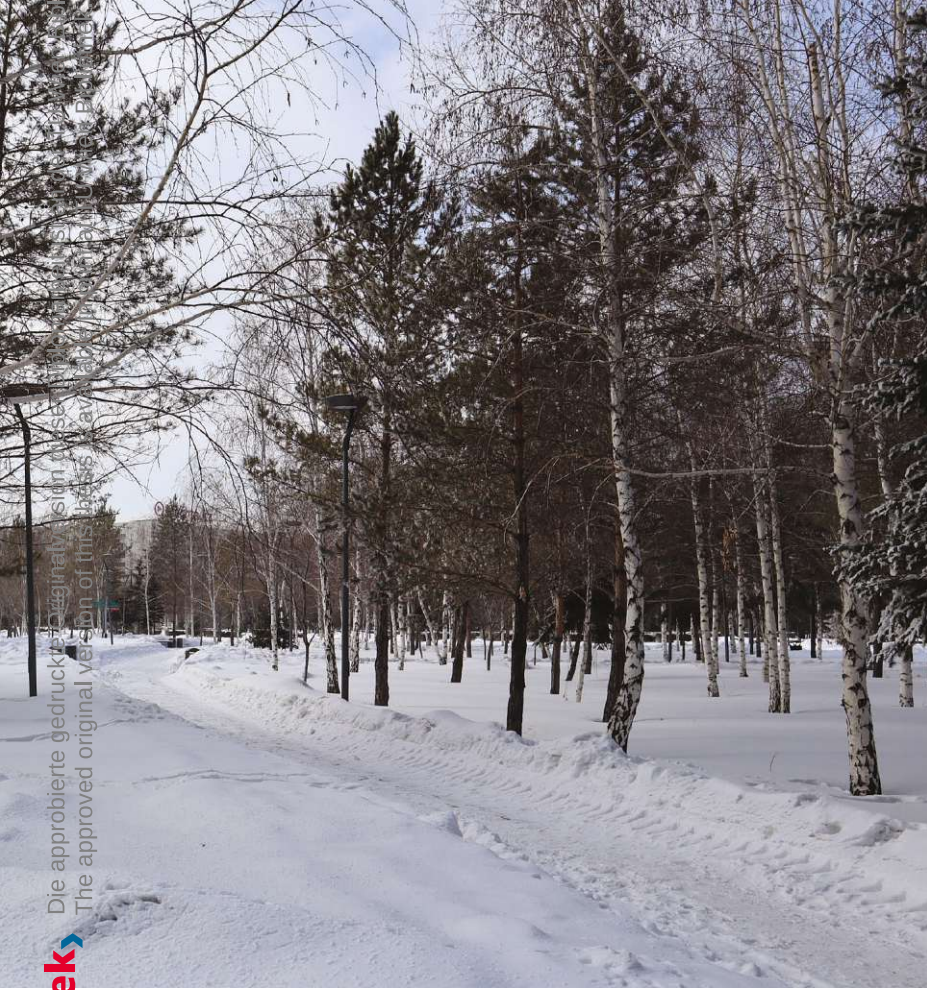
Based on the information gathered from the interviews and the survey the consensus to see Kazakh cultural elements in architecture is evident of the desire to belong to something and have a distinguished cultural identity. This would be consequently validated through cultural elements. The architecture with which they can identify themselves varied and we can assume that an identity construction through architecture (or actually images and land-

marks) in case of Kazakhstan was not an effective tool. Also some interviewees did not know the meaning of buildings or what they are supposed to represent. Thus identity construction by using and overusing images does not provide a lasting cultural enrichment.

Another observation is that there is a general desire among residents for elements of nature and greenery as well as architecture of good quality. The understanding of these two things has been distorted in a country running for the last 30 years after the rapid modernization. In Kazakh culture nature and architecture had a special role and it would be important to revisit and rethink these values.

fig. 61
Birch trees in Astana





Nature

Heidegger wrote in his work titled “The Question Concerning Technology” about how our understanding of being of things (Dasein) has become wrong or detached. With development of technology human beings started to perceive things only in relation to their own profit. The natural environment is valuable only as much as it is valuable for human beings and it is seen as a resource at the disposal.¹⁵⁰ Ancient ideas of nomads treating nature with care and respect have unfortunately been lost. In a quest to find ourselves quickly and fit into this rapidly changing world we have forgotten to think about our needs first. According to Zira Naurzbaeva ancient nomads believed that the Earth was sacred and saw it as a woman, mother. There is a word in Kazakh for earth - *Jer-Ana* which means Mother Earth.¹⁵¹ The notion of careful treatment of nature can also be observed in their traditional dwelling *kiyiz üy*, which was constructed as a sustainable and reusable dwelling and did not leave any footprint. Architecture was always in connection with nature.¹⁵²

Even though industrialization led to drastic changes in the world, careful treatment of the natural environment surrounding us should not be forgotten. Architecture is a created extension of a natural environment, thus it should also be sustainable. Incorporation of natural materials into the living habitat is a sign of architecture which provides not only the appreciation for the eyes, but for all other senses and consequently for the soul. “Natural materials express their age and history, as well as the story of their origins and their history of human use.”¹⁵³ Due to the territory of Kazakhstan, examples of sustainable solutions should be provided taking into account specifics of each region. In western regions of Kazakhstan soil is salty which makes the growth of trees harder. However due to its proximity to the sea, the use of lo-

150 Heidegger in Blok, 2014. P. 312

151 Naurzbaeva, 2020. P. 86

152 Pallasmaa, 2005. P. 41

153 Pallasmaa, 2005. P. 31

cal building material as shell rock exists. Shell rock is a stone that was formed naturally from the remains of mollusk shells. Here the main component is limestone. In the process of crushing and pressing the shells, a solid mass is naturally formed. This stone is mined in quarries. To make it ready for construction, it is enough to cut it into blocks. Due to the relatively small bearing capacity, the shell rock is used in low-rise construction. In this case, the house can be completely built from this natural stone. In high-rise buildings, it is mainly used for the construction of non-load-bearing building elements, partitions, and enclosing structures. Due to its porous structure, it provides good thermal and sound insulation as well as moisture permeability.¹⁵⁴

For northern regions Soviet architects in 1985 have proposed using reed for insulation. This region possesses large amount of reed which is annually renewable. The proposal by architects in order to avoid condensation was to hang reed slabs on the inner lining, so that a gap of several centimeters remains between the reed and outer lining. With this solution, the reeds do not touch the inner edge of the outer cladding and thus are not exposed to moisture or decay. In addition, the air gap increases the thermal protection of the wall.¹⁵⁵

Adobe is the most widespread building material in Central Asia. Whole cities and fortresses were built in medieval times out of this material and it is still being used for individual construction. However, it does not officially exist in Kazakhstan. Current regulations allow the use of adobe only for the walls of buildings with an expected life service of not more than 25 years. According to architect B. Ashirbaev roughly around 90 % of houses in Türkistan and 60 % in Shymkent are built using adobe. Adobe has numerous advantages such as good thermal- and sound insulation, fire resistance, stabilization of indoor humidity due to the enormous hygroscopicity of clay, environmental friendli-

154 About shell rock. Link: <https://dom.ria.com/articles/dom-iz-rakushechnika-osobennosti-stroitelstva-preimuschestva-i-nedos-241138.html> (retrieved 10.05.2022)

155 Svetlichnyi, 1985. P. 62-63

ness and low cost. The walls of this material “breathe”, creating a comfortable microclimate in the room. Attempts to promote adobe were made back in the mid-70s says Ashirbaev, but construction research institutes replied with: “What kind of adobe, dear? The twentieth century is in the yard, precast concrete is striding across the expanses of the country, and you are talking about raw clay! Is this what you propose to settle in the huts of the Soviet workers?” Even though times of the Soviet Union have passed, nothing changed in the perception of this simple material. As Lunin states: “Well, how much can you “wash” on such a budget construction? It is much more profitable to stamp concrete towers.”¹⁵⁶

156 Igor Lunin about adobe. Link: <https://yujanka.kz/staryj-dobryj-saman/> (retrieved 10.05.2022)

To the question of architecture

Architecture in Kazakhstan, which was built in the last 30 years, has become as most of the locals noted “of poor quality”. This is an observation I also made, every time I visited cities and saw incessant construction works. It has become something to boast about, when buildings are built in record time, as if the notion of less amount of time spent was a representative of its “good” quality. Reminiscing about the creation of a capital, Nazarbayev writes how he and his colleagues were rushing in order to finish erecting buildings in a very short amount of time, so that they would be ready for an official opening ceremony of the city, where delegates from different countries were expected to come and which was planned for 10th of June, 1999. “In total 57 buildings were built and ready for an opening in a short amount of time and gigantic effort of everyone involved.”¹⁵⁷ This is further worsened with the planning of residential housing split into two professions, shells made by architects and cores by interior designers, where architects are becoming a mere decorators of facades and no prior interactions are taking place between these two fields. This made me question the understanding of architecture in general and in Kazakhstan specifically.

Buildings which are being built in recent years are aimed at attracting only one sense: vision. Pallasmaa writes about the importance of a haptic quality of an object for human perception stating that “all the senses, including vision, are extensions of the tactile sense”. Thus hapticity is the most important quality while interacting with something. Good architecture has to address all senses simultaneously. Instead of creating mere images, architecture “relates, mediates and projects meanings”.¹⁵⁸ What kind of meaning does architecture provide? There is a meaning that the one who creates this architecture puts into the building. Then there is a meaning that architecture presents in the

157 Nazarbayev, 2020. P. 195; 205

158 Pallasmaa, 2005. P. 10

given realm as an independent object. Then there is a meaning that the user puts into said building. “The ultimate meaning of any building is beyond architecture; it directs our consciousness back to the world and towards our sense of self and being”. Pallasmaa further notes that the reason why people feel themselves alienated in settings filled with contemporary architectural objects and feel included in natural and historical settings is the fact that first setting is poor in the field of peripheral vision. Settings aimed purely on focused vision push people out of the space turning them into mere spectators.¹⁵⁹ The goal of architecture and urbanism should be to create a world where we are not mere spectators, but to which we ultimately belong. “The art of the eye has certainly produced imposing and thought-provoking structures, but it has not facilitated human rootedness in the world.”¹⁶⁰

To what extent is rootedness defined by the use of cultural elements in architecture? Jean Nouvel talks about the use and appropriation of cultural elements in architecture stating that “we can evaluate completely random elements and declare that we are dealing with geography: “It’s beautiful. I am going to reveal it to you...” To him it is an aesthetics of revelation, as if taking a piece of the world, appropriating it and giving it back to you “for your own appreciation in a different way.” Baudrillard is opposed to culture in the sense of aesthetization because it involves the loss of the object, he refers to it as a loss of a secret,¹⁶¹ but I think we can also say a loss of a meaning or essence as well.

As evident from the respondents, cultural elements are perceived as something positive, thus providing a sense of belonging, which also provides a certain meaning. The question is then of the quality of such meaning. To what extent is it used as an imitation, thus losing its original meaning and turning a person into a mere spectator?

159 Pallasmaa, 2005. P. 12-13

160 *ibid.* P. 19

161 Baudrillard and Nouvel, 2002. P. 18-19

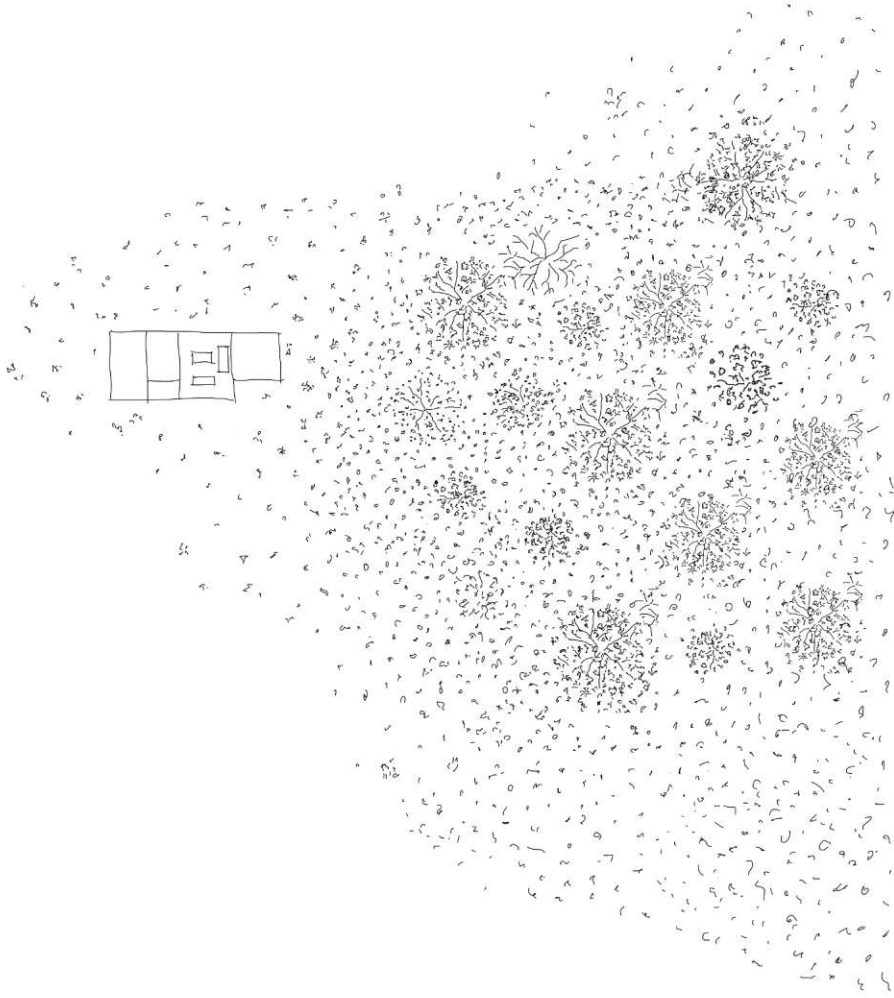
The meaning with which people can identify themselves in contemporary iconic architecture is a prestige. This type of buildings give out a certain image with which people want to be associated. Usually a western lifestyle or as one interviewer noted a “high culture”. Thus appreciating other cultures, but not fully understanding its actual meaning and not trying to understand your own culture (and its meaning) leads to a superficial use, overuse and misuse of these elements which then fail to provide a meaning themselves.

House of my memories

“To at least some extent every place can be remembered, partly because it is unique, but partly because it has affected our bodies and generated enough associations to hold it in our personal worlds.”¹⁶²

When I thought about architecture, memories from my grandparent’s house in *aul* came to my mind. I remember the fragrant smell of a garden outside the house and taste of sweet apples from a tree. Colorful geometric and floral patterns on *klems* hanging on the walls, consisted of animals, flowers and plants. Together they created a colorful world of their own. Years and names were embroidered on the sides, leaving the traces of those who created this world. Later, my father told me that it was all handmade by my aunts, it took about 1-2 months to sew one piece, and for this they freed up an entire room. They had special notebooks on which all the patterns were drawn in advance. When it was necessary to process the wool, the neighbors came to *asar*. This is a collective process when the whole village helps while drinking warm tea in between. I remember the smell of *korpe*, it reminds me of my grandmothers soft hands. I remember the taste of hot *baursaks* cooked in abundant oil. I remember my hand touching the faded wooden door and entering the cool corridor. My bare feet touching the cool wooden floor and entering the main room. I remember stepping on the slightly hard carpet. I remember touching curved cracks on limestone walls. Rays of sun penetrating through a small window as we sit on a *korpe* eating freshly baked bread with jam. We drink hot tea on a hot summer day. I remember the warmth of a fire on my face on a cool evening, dinner is being prepared in *oshak*. I remember sleeping on the floor covered with *korpe* while hugging our grandmother. These memories are felt with warmth of my grandmother and wisdom of my grandfather. I felt this architecture as genuine, innocent and true. It gave me a sense of belonging.

162 Kent C. Bloomer and Charles W. Moore in Pallasmaa, 2005. P. 41



Conclusio

When looking at the architecture of Kazakhstan I couldn't understand why it was hard to find a "meaning", "logic". After visiting Kazakhstan I came to conclusion that this "meaning" was still being created.

Precolonial architecture in Kazakhstan was born out of necessity, adapted to the surroundings and reflected their inhabitants worldview and values. Colonial architecture was mainly influenced by negation of way of living, political agenda and industrialization. Emerging architecture seems to be trying to shift responsibilities onto external ideas of a "modern" world by borrowing them without processing. Architecture in Kazakhstan is making the quest or attempt for (re)identification transparent. On the one hand public buildings have been turned into "identity markers", the built quality of which is however questionable and as part of a material culture begs a question what kind of culture is it creating? On the other hand housing industry reflects the feeling of "lost identity" of its inhabitants with the concept of free planning. Identity is an always changing process, which does not stand still.

Formation of identity is an important process. According to Cummings AL. Epstein distinguished between positive identities, resting on "self-esteem, a sense of the worthiness of one's own group's ways and values," and negative identities, based on "the internalised evaluation of others," with "much of one's behaviour. . . prompted by the desire to avoid their anticipated slights or censure" Apart from the fact that the elite in Kazakhstan is a "Soviet creation" Cummings sees three major explanations for its display of "negative identity": Certain embarrassment of its nomadic past, Kazakh's susceptibility to ideology and propaganda and a divisive rather than a unifying history.¹⁶³ From my observation the embarrassment phase is becoming a thing of a past. Susceptibility to ideology and propaganda however is very strong and alarming as the

163 Cummings, 1999. P. 222

Russian propaganda still exists among the Kazakh population and divides a nation rather than unify in the realm of ongoing physical and informational wars.

I started my diploma project because I wanted to understand the architecture of Kazakhstan better. I saw that newly built buildings, especially in the capital were supposed to mean something. I didn't understand why certain shapes like spheres were favored. I remember a joke my design teacher told me in early 2010, she said that if one wants to win in a competition, (s)he has to make it in circular shape and say that it means *shanyrak* or *kiyiz üy*. After doing research I understand that it was part of building a national identity from top-down, where people themselves rarely feel affiliation with said objects. The government decided that public buildings should convey a certain meaning and connected it with ethnic Kazakh's nomadic past, where the circle was dominant. It was a form of their dwelling and a form of an opening, but it also was a sacred element and symbolized important values like family and procreation. The nomadic life consisted of circular movements. However between nomadic past and modern Kazakhstan are generations of colonization and often times people lost touch with their nomadic past. Traditions for them mean mostly rituals that are being held. *Kiyiz üy* is being used as a cafe, museum piece or a tourist attraction. To what extent is a profanation of a sacred element is allowed? Is it right to impose an identity which people can not identify themselves with? For some people Soviet buildings mean more than newly built ones, because they see it as a legacy of their recent past. Tools for building national identity were mostly connected with ethnic identity where religion, language and symbols played an important role, but addressed only Kazakhs, while excluding others. Global identities in form of iconic or landmark architecture have also been used as a tool in this identity creation process. These buildings symbolise a certain image of a culture or a lifestyle with which people want to be associated. There are people in Kazakhstan who divide people into "us" and "them". I think it is happening

unconsciously, simply by the fact of living in a homogenised society and not encountering other cultures in the physical world. This hinders the understanding of other cultures in general. As a result the meaning which other culture implied when creating a certain object, in our case architecture, is easily misunderstood.

A survey showed that there was a consensus in general to see Kazakh cultural elements represented in architecture, if it is done appropriately. It is an evidence of the desire to belong to something and have a distinguished cultural identity. In general the understanding of architecture in Kazakhstan has been distorted and cultural values of architecture created with respect to the nature have been lost. As one architect told me: “We still have a mindset from the Soviet Union, we are building for profit and not for spiritual enrichment.” In that sense I think the understanding and value of architecture in Kazakhstan needs to be rethought and awareness raised about the meaning and value of a habitat and material culture it is creating. As Rieger-Jandl notes “Precisely in these awareness-raising processes lies the potential to develop new forms of identity or simply to invent them. This is exactly where the way out of the horror scenarios of the worldwide homogenization of building culture that are painted on the wall in large areas lies. Here lies the hope for an architectural future in which new forming identities can always produce creative forms with which people and cultures create an identifiable and thus livable environment.”¹⁶⁴

164 Rieger-Jandl, 2009. P. 14



Die approbierte gedruckte Originalversion dieser Diplomarbeit ist an der TU Wien Bibliothek verfügbar
The approved original version of this thesis is available in print at TU Wien Bibliothek.

Epilogue

Kazakhstan is a beautiful country. You can find here everything from big blue lakes, green forests, snowy mountains to sea access, the steppe, wide grasslands and huge red sandstone canyons. It is rich in natural resources from copper, coal iron and gold all the way to uranium, petroleum, natural gas and diamonds. Even though it is, with an area of 2,700,000 square kilometres, as big as Western Europe the population is estimated at only 19,000,000 people. Through thousands of years many different cultures lived, conquered or traded throughout the area of Kazakhstan and most of them left a piece of them within. So what I am trying to get across is: Kazakhstan is a beautiful country. Rich in natural resources, culture and full of beautiful landscapes.

But if you look closer you'll see other things happen here as well. A country with that much potential also has a potential for corruption.

Kazakhstan, even though officially a democracy, is ranked as an authoritarian regime by the EIU Democracy Index. Growing up there I believe this to be true. Many human rights like free speech or peaceful assembly are not treated with the respect I think everyone should and you need to be careful about what you say or who you meet with. The corruption and social injustice in Kazakhstan are two of the main reasons why I am writing this. It frightens me how many people in crucial positions don't make decisions based on moral justice but exploit their positions for short-term and personal profit.

We can also see this in the architecture of Kazakhstan. Apartments are being built out of low quality materials and endangering the lives of people. The construction and development firms proudly boast the quantity of apartments and speed with which the buildings are built in but forget to think about the quality of life of their inhabitants. The lives of the people shouldn't be about numbers and I do think that we need to take responsibility.

Glossar

kiyiz üy - felt house, yurt

kiyiz - felt

shanyrak - dome of a yurt

kerege - lattice walls of a yurt

uik - rafters of a yurt

aul - village

juz - horde

aje - grandmother

ata - grandfather

klem - carpet

korpe - thick blanket

oshaq - hearth

Literature

Andreas, Paul and Flagge, Ingeborg. 2003. Oscar Niemeyer Eine Legende der Moderne / A Legend of Modernism. Deutsches Architektur Museum. Frankfurt am Main. Birkhäuser - Publishers for Architecture

Aukhadiyeva, L.M. Abdrassilova, G. S. 2021. Medieval ornamentation of the mausoleum of Aisha Bibi is the identity key of the regional architecture of Kazakhstan in the 21st century. Link: <https://doi.org/10.51488/1680-080X/2021.2-20> (retrieved 10.04.2022)

Baitenov, E. Tuyakayeva, A. Abdrassilova, G. 2017. Medieval mausoleums of Kazakhstan: Genesis, architectural features, major centres. Architecture Department, Kazakh Leading Academy of Architecture and Civil Engineering (KazGASA)

Bardzinska-Bonenberg, Teresa. Ring-and-circle, symbolical and practical meaning of the form in town planning and architecture. Link: <https://upcommons.upc.edu/bitstream/handle/2117/90353/CH%2001%20Bardzinska-Bonenberg%20Teresa.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (retrieved 04.05.2022)

Bissenova, Alima. 2014. The Master Plan of Astana in Ethnographies of the State in Central Asia. Indiana University Press

Blok, Vincent. 2014. Reconnecting with Nature in the Age of Technology. The Heidegger and Radical Environmentalism. Debate Revisited. Link: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/269792835_Reconnecting_with_Nature_in_the_Age_of_Technology_The_Heidegger_and_Radical_Environmentalism_Debate_Revisited

Castells, Manuel. 2004. The Power of Identity. Blackwell Publishing Ltd

Cummings, Sally Nikoline. 1999. The Political Elite in Kazakhstan Since Independence (1991-1998): Origins, Structure and Policies. University of London

Egenter, Nold. 1980. Bauform als Zeichen und Symbol. Nichtdomestikales bauen im japanischen Volkskunst. ETH Zürich

Eliade, M. 1994. Aspekty mifa. Moskva

Fairchild, Henry Pratt. 1967. Dictionary of Sociology and Related Sciences. Ottawa, NY: Littlefield, Adams & Co.

Findley, Lisa. 2005. Building Change. Architecture, Politics and Cultural agency. New York. Routledge

Gingrich, Andre. 2005. *Kulturelle Identitäten zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts: Sozialanthropologische Begriffsbestimmungen und ihre Implikationen Für Europa*. In: Riegler Johanna (Ed.) *Kulturelle Dynamik der Globalisierung Ost- und Westeuropäische Transformationsprozesse aus sozialanthropologischer Perspektive*. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. 1. Auflage

Glaudinov, B.A. Seidalin M.G. Karpykov A.S. 1987. *Arhitektura sovetского Kazahstana*. Moskva. Stroizdat

Gumilyov, L. N. 1964. *Drevnie tyurki*. Moskva

Hippler, Jochen. *Gewaltkonflikte, Konfliktprävention und Nationenbildung - Hintergründe eines politischen Konzepts*. Link: <https://homepage.univie.ac.at/vedran.dzihic/Jochen%20Hippler%20-%20Text.pdf> (retrieved 20.05.2022)

Hobsbawm, Eric. Ranger, Terence. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition. The Edinburgh Building*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press

Ibraev, Sh. I. 2010. *Ot folkloristiki do tyurkologii*. Kokshetau

Jaffe, Aniela. 1964. In: *Man and his Symbols* conceived and edited by Carl G. Jung. Anchor Press. J.G. Ferguson Publishing

Janibekov Uzbekali. *Kazhskaya tradionnaya kultura v sobraniyah kunstkamery*. Almaty 2008. Link: <https://silkad.v.com/en/content/kochevoy-byt-kazahov-0> (retrieved 09.05.2022)

Karakozova, Zh. K. Khasanov M. Sh. 2011. *Kosmos kazahskoi kultury*. Almaty. Evero

Kondybai, Serikbol. 2008. *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy. Kazahskaya Mifologiya*. Almaty

Kunanbay, Alma. *Nomads*. Link: <https://festival.si.edu/2002/the-silk-road/nomads-by-alma-kunanbay/smithsonian> (retrieved 04.05.2022)

Laszczkowski, Mateusz. 2016. *“City of the Future”, Built Space, Modernity and Urban Change in Astana*. Berghahn Books

Losev, A. F. 1995. *Problema simvola i realisticheskoe iskusstvo*. Link: https://platona.net/load/knigi_po_filosofii/istorija_russkaja/losev_problema_simvola_i_realisticheskoe_iskusstvo_2_izdanie/15-1-0-485 (retrieved 04.05.2022)

Lehmann, Steffen in *60 Years Ago, The Modernist City of Brasilia Was Built From Scratch* by Waldeck, Stefanie. Link: <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/60-years-ago-modernist-city-brasilia-built>

(retrieved 18.05.2022)

Margulan, A. Kh. 2012. Sochineniya. Odinnadcatyi tom. Almaty Alatau

Medeuova, K. A. 2009. in *Astananyn madeni matini*. Astana

Meuser, Philipp. 2014. Architekturführer Kasachstan. Berlin. Dom publishers

Meuser, Philipp. 2015. Die Ästhetik der Platte. Wohnungsbau in der Sowjetunion zwischen Stalin und Glasnost. Berlin. Dom publishers

Meuser, Philipp. 2015. Architectural Guide. Astana. Berlin. Dom publishers

Mukanov, M.S. 1981. Kazakhskaya yurta. Alma-Ata. Kainar

Naurzbaeva, Zira. 2020. Vechnoe nebo kazahov. Almaty. Kazheritage

Nazarbayev, N. A. 2020. V serdce Evrazii. Almaty. ID Zhibek Zholy

Nazarbekuli, Sayin. 2005. Kazaktin Kiyiz Ui. Astana. Elorda

Nikolenko, N.N. Mikhaylova N. A. Sultanova M. E. 2012. Ornament v sovremenom iskusstve Kazakhstana: kommunikaciya i revalorizaciya v epohu postmodernizma. Innovacii v nauke, (10-2)

Pallasmaa, Juhani. 2005. The Eyes of the Skin. Architecture and the Senses. Great Britain. Wiley-Academy, a division of John Wiley and Sons Ltd

Rieger-Jandl, Andrea. 2009. Archietktur und Identität. Wien. IVA-Verlag

Svetlichnyi V.I. 1985. in Arhitektura, planirovka, blagoustroistvo i stroitelstvo sel. Ministertsvo seskogo hozyaistva SSSR. Tselinograd

Shaimuratova, Akbota J. 2022. Lekciya 7. Proektirovanie energoeffektivnyh zdaniy. Almaty

Suny in Provisional Stabilities: The Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia. Link: https://www.dartmouth.edu/~crn/crn_papers/Suny.pdf (retrieved 10.05.2022)

Temple, Nicholas, 2012. In: The Cultural Role of Architecture. Contemporary and Historical Perspectives. Edited by Emmons, Paul. Hendrix, John and Lomholt, Jane. Routledge

Vale, Lawrence J. 1992. Architecture, power and national identity. Yale University Press

Zaurbekova, Lazira Rasyhanovna. Koyanbayeva, Gulnara Romseitovna. Amangaliyeva, Gaukhar Bisultanovna. Universal Values of Kazakhs: Experience of the Nomadic Culture. Link: <https://almatau.edu.kz> (retrieved 10.05.2022)

Zuev, Yu. 2002. Rannie tyurki. Ocherki istorii i ideologii. Almaty. Daik-Press

Zumthor, Peter. Konersmann Ralf. Noever Peter. 2006. Zwischen Bild und Realität. Architekturvorträge der ETH Zürich, Zürich. GTA Verlag

Dictionaries

APA Dictionary of Psychology. Link: <<https://dictionary.apa.org/identity>> (retrieved 28.04.2022)

APA Dictionary of Psychology. Link: <<https://dictionary.apa.org/tradition>> (retrieved 28.04.2022)

Smith David Roger, Kazakhstan. In: Encyclopedia Britannica, link: <<https://www.britannica.com/place/Kazakhstan>> (retrieved 02.04.2022)

Internet Links

- About Kazakhstan. Link: <https://www.gov.kz/article/19305?lang=en> (retrieved 02.04.2022)
- Kazakhstan population. Link: <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/stat/press/news/details/341359?lang=en> (retrieved 02.04.2022)
- Kazakhstan population. Link: <https://kapital.kz/gosudarstvo/100987/nazvana-chislennost-kazakhstan-sev-po-itogam-perepisi.html> (retrieved 02.04.2022)
- Protests in January. Link: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/06/protesters-police-die-amid-kazakhstan-unrest> (08.05.2022)
- About Konaev. Link: https://rus.azattyq.org/a/dinmukhamed_kunaev_1875988.html (08.05.2022)
- About Zhanaozen. Link: <https://masa.media/ru/site/monologi-zhanaozen> (08.05.2022)
- Kazakhstan authorities raise death toll from unrest to 225. Link: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/16/kazakhstan-authorities-raise-death-toll-from-unrest-to-225> (08.05.2022)
- About mayor's office. Link: <https://kapital.kz/gosudarstvo/102266/zdaniye-akimata-almaty-plan-iruyet-sya-vosstanovit-za-5-mesyatsev.html> (08.05.2022)
- The history of yurts ancient and modern. Link: <https://www.yurtinfo.org/yurtstory-the-history-of-yurts-ancient-and-modern> (retrieved 05.05.2022)
- About October Revolution. Link: <https://masa.media/ru/site/stydnye-voprosy-ob-oktyabrskoy-revoljutsii> (retrieved 07.05.2022)
- Asylbek Bisenbaev. Link: <https://camonitor.kz/31209-mozhno-li-bylo-sohranit-kochevoy-uklad-zhizni-kazahov.html> (retrieved 07.05.2022)
- Sarah Cameron about the Kazakh Famine of the 1930s. Link: <https://blogs.loc.gov/kluge/2016/08/the-kazakh-famine-of-the-1930s/> (retrieved 07.05.2022)
- About housing in Kazakhstan. Link: https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/polovinyi-domov-kazahstane-postroenyi-pri-sssr-issledovanie-438349/ (retrieved 10.05.2022)
- The Irony of Fate, or Enjoy Your Bath 1 episode (comedy, directed by Eldar Ryazanov, 1976) Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVpmZnRIMKs> (retrieved 10.05.2022)
- Lehmann, Steffen in 60 Years Ago, The Modernist City of Brasilia Was Built From Scratch by Waldek, Stefanie. Link: <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/60-years-ago-modernist-city-brasilia-built> (retrieved 18.05.2022)
- Demolition of Nakagin Tower. Link: <https://www.dezeen.com/2022/04/29/nakagin-capsule-tower-demolition-video-tokyo-japan/> (retrieved 19.05.2022)
- International Competition for the Master Plan and Design of Astana, Kazakhstan. Link: <https://www.kisho.co.jp/page/222.html> (retrieved 19.05.2022)
- Lecture of Kurokawa on abstract symbolism. Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iOJFuQuRdI> (retrieved 09.05.2022)
- About Lesozavod. Link: <https://tengrinews.kz/fotoarchive/ranshe-syuda-taksisty-boyalis-ehat-jivut-astanchane-rayone-943/> (retrieved 03.04.2022)
- About LRT. Link: <https://thediplomat.com/2021/10/kazakhstan-light-rail-corruption-case-drags-on/> (retrieved 03.04.2022)
- Igor Lunin about adobe. Link: <https://yujanka.kz/staryj-dobryj-saman/> (retrieved 10.05.2022)

Figures

fig. 1 Landscape of Kazakhstan - own figure

fig. 2 Map of Kazakhstan - own figure

fig. 3 Ethnic division of Kazakhs - own figure

fig. 4 Mayor's offices after *Qantar*, Almaty - https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/akimat-almatyi-ot-pravit-odnodnevnyu-zarplatu-sotrudnikov-459375/

fig. 5 Cattle breeding - own figure

fig. 6 *Kiyiz üy* - own figure

fig. 7 *Kerege* - own figure

fig. 8 Floor plan of *kiyiz üy* - own figure

fig. 9 Hotel Kazakhstan - own figure

fig.10 Interior of Kazakh State Academic Drama Theater named after M.O. Auezov - own figure

fig.11 & 12 Illustrations from the movie "The irony of fate, or enjoy your bath" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ms5Ga6kNvHM>

fig.13 *Plano Piloto*, Photo by Uri Rosenheck - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brasilia_-_Plan.JPG

fig.14 Monumental axis of Brasilia - [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Planalto_Central_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Planalto_Central_(cropped).jpg)

fig.15 Interplay of forms between Seat of the Senate and Chamber of the Deputies - <https://www.welt.de/reise/staedtereisen/article116408201/Brasilia-Vom-Reissbrett-zur-modernen-Metropole.html>

fig.16 Another "bird" plan - <https://journals.openedition.org/cidades/3973>

fig. 17 Model of proposed Central Area of Abuja - <http://archi-learner.blogspot.com/2014/11/federal-capital-complex-of-nigeria.html>

fig.18 Astana in 1957. Source: NAK, F. 90, The JICA study on the mater plan for the development of the city of Astana, Main Report, Chapter 3, June 2001, p. 3. in Nari Shelekpayev (2020) Whose master

plan? Kisho Kurokawa and 'capital planning' in post-Soviet Astana, 1995–2000, *Planning Perspectives*, 35:3, 505-523, DOI: 10.1080/02665433.2019.1598889

fig.19 The initial Kurokawa plan for Astana presented for the international bid in 1998. Picture courtesy of the AstanaGenPlan in Bissenova, Alima. 2012. *Post-Socialist Dreamworlds: Housing Boom And Urban Development In Kazakhstan*

fig.20 General Plan of Astana modified by Kisho Kurokawa after consultation with Kazakh urban planners in Bissenova, Alima. 2012. *Post-Socialist Dreamworlds: Housing Boom And Urban Development In Kazakhstan*

fig.21 Kisho Kurokawa and Associates, land use plan for the year 2020, JICA master plan team, 2001 in Nari Shelekpáyev (2020) *Whose master plan? Kisho Kurokawa and 'capital planning' in post-Soviet Astana, 1995–2000, Planning Perspectives*, 35:3, 505-523, DOI: 10.1080/02665433.2019.1598889

fig.22 Urban fabric of the Right Bank - own figure

fig.23 Urban fabric of the Left Bank along the main axis- own figure

fig. 24 Aerial view of Astana - Google Earth

fig.25 Proposed 3D Model of the capital in Bissenova, Alima. 2012. *Post-Socialist Dreamworlds: Housing Boom And Urban Development In Kazakhstan*

fig.26 Presidential Palace Ak Orda protected by two warrior's hats - own figure

fig. 27 Buildings along the main axis - own figure

fig.28 Diversity of influences in contemporary landscape of the capital - own figure

fig. 29 Astana Opera - own figure

fig. 30 Form of *kiyiz üy* used as a souvenir shop - own figure

fig. 31 Reference to *kiyiz üy* in St. Regis Astana - <https://www.booking.com/hotel/kz/the-st-regis-astana.html?activeTab=photosGallery>

fig. 32 Reference to *shanyrak* as a skylight in Astana Airport - own figure

fig. 33 Reference to *shanyrak* as a decoration in Baiterek - own figure

fig. 34 *Kerege* as a structure Proposal for National Memorial, by Maciej Jakub Zawadzki - <https://m-j-z>.

com/project/memoriakazakhstan

fig. 35 *Kerege* as a decoration - own figure

fig. 36 Kazakh traditional ornaments in Kasteev museum - own figure

fig. 37 Elena and Victor Vorobyov, object "Ornamentalizer" - <https://www.facebook.com/artbatfestkazakhstan/photos/pcb.2628071597436823/2628071377436845/?type=3&theater>

fig. 38 Kuanysh Bazargaliev. "Between the bear and the dragon, between the hammer and the anvil, between the red Ivan and the black Wan, between" - <https://www.erarta.com/ru/calendar/exhibitions/detail/4960c568-c5e9-11e7-8335-8920284aa333/>

fig. 39 Combination of ornaments *tórt qulak* and *juldyz* on the facade of Aisha Bibi Mausoleum - own figure

fig. 40 Solar ornament on the facade of Babadji Khatun Mausoleum - own figure

fig. 41 *Shanyrak* above the main hall of Palace of schoolchildren - <https://www.archdaily.com/488674/palace-of-schoolchildren-studio-44-architects>

fig. 42 Abundance of local references on the facade of the Palace of schoolchildren by Studio 44 Architects - <https://www.archdaily.com/488674/palace-of-schoolchildren-studio-44-architects>

fig. 43 National Museum of Kazakhstan - own figure

fig. 44 inside the National Museum of Kazakhstan - own figure

fig. 45 Old man playing Kazakh traditional instrument - *dombyra* - own figure

fig. 46 Baiterek, Astana - own figure

fig. 47 Ethnoaul in Türkistan - own figure

fig. 48 Private houses on the outskirts of Türkistan - own figure

fig. 49 - outskirts of Türkistan - own figure

fig. 50 Eagle trying to fly away - own figure

fig. 51 Astana Airport by Kisho Kurokawa - own figure

fig. 52 EXPO City 2017 by Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill - <http://smithgill.com/work/expo-2017/>

fig. 53 Kazakhstan's Pavilion for EXPO 2017 by Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill - <http://smithgill.com/work/expo-2017/>

fig. 54 Floor Plan, Palace of Peace and Reconciliation - <https://www.fosterandpartners.com/projects/palace-of-peace-and-reconciliation/>

fig. 55 Front view of Palace of Peace and Reconciliation - own figure

fig. 56 Tri bogatyrya, Almaty - <https://www.inalmaty.kz/news/2603481/istoriceskie-zdania-sovetskoj-almaty-poteravsie-svoj-oblik>

fig. 57 Map of Astana - own figure

fig. 58 Residential housing in the Right Bank - own figure

fig. 59 Atyrau Bridge - own figure

fig. 60 Monument for corruption - own figure

fig. 61 Birch trees in Astana - own figure

fig. 62 House of my memories - own figure

Annex

Following are some of the interviews and answers from the survey

Interview 1:

Female, Astana, Resident of Left Bank

-What do you think about the architecture in Astana?

"Illogical, inconvenient, incompatible. Residential buildings are built hastily and with poor quality, so that soundproofing is bad, often the water turns off. It is inconvenient that in the Left Bank everything is located very far away from each other, not convenient for pedestrians, bicycle paths are also not everywhere."

-What do you think about the Right Bank?

"Right Bank has a soul, even though buildings here are old. I like walking on the Right Bank, because it has a certain atmosphere, but sometimes it can be too crowded, in that sense Left Bank is good because there is plenty of space."

What do you think about new architecture such as Baiterek, Pyramid?

"I don't know the story of Baiterek, I only know that it is supposed to be an egg, maybe they built it when Astana was newly built. For me it is just a building which is supposed to stand there for beauty. Expo building is meaningless, I don't understand its shape or function."

Interview 2:

Male, Astana, Resident of Right Bank

"Buildings on the Left Bank look beautiful, but it is not convenient to live there, because distance between schools, kindergartens and shops is big. I prefer to live on the Right Bank. Also newly built buildings on the Left Bank are cold in the winter, because they have a thin insulation and old buildings on the Right Bank are very warm in the winter. It is nice to look at the buildings on the Left Bank, but not live in them."

Interview with a Professor Rahima Chekaeva:

"New buildings in Astana have a streamline shapes because of climatic conditions, they protect from the wind. We do not have a pure Kazakh architecture, we invite a lot of architects from abroad. Kazakh elements can be seen mostly in ornaments. Independence Palace has a *shanyrak* inside. We have plenty of land and when developing a new plan for Astana Kurokawa connected both sides of the Ishim river. He valued old architecture of the Right Bank highly and I met him once when he gathered local experts and made a list of buildings which should be under conservation. Nowadays unfortunately some of them are being demolished because they are too old."

Interview 4&5:

Female & Male, Astana, Urbanist and architect

"A new masterplan from british company was developed, but it is not being implemented, because the government doesn't see a potential. There isn't enough infrastructure and interesting projects are happening in few places, we need to develop. There are a lot of young and initiative people who are

very motivated to make some changes. I feel like we are copying Dubai too much. Look at hotel St. Regis, where they made glassed yurt. Ornaments are being used in monumental architecture, but the implementation of a low quality. I think new buildings are being filled with myths and symbols because there is a request for identity. We are still searching for ourselves and trying to recant Soviet influence.”

Interview 6:

Female, Almaty, Architect

1. How do you feel about architecture that uses Kazakh elements, for example, shanyrak in Baiterek, kerege in the schoolchildren’s palace in Astana, ornaments on the facades, what associations do you have?

- It would be nice if it was done with taste, but I have not yet seen this in architecture.

2. What do you think about the architecture of Astana in general? Almaty? Which one do you like best (any city) and why? Which one do you identify with more?

- I like Almaty more because the city has a longer history and the location is better. The landscape and surroundings play a big role. And architecture is like wine, the older the better, but you can’t say the same about Astana. I can’t identify myself with the city, but I feel better in Almaty. Another reason is the scale, in Astana the ratio of distances between buildings to a person is greatly disturbed. This is further exacerbated by weather conditions, given that Astana is located in a sharply continental climate, it is doubly difficult to overcome such distances in hot and cold weather.

3. How common is free planning in Kazakhstan?

- It is spreading more and more every day, because construction companies are saving on building materials, and are trying to present free planning as a feature.

4. Do people prefer an open floor plan over an already planned apartment, or is it purely for financial reasons?

- Some people prefer free planning because it is presented to them as an opportunity to make any layout to their liking. But in fact, due to the location of the windows, which cannot be changed, engineering shafts, you can’t really clear up. And only a good specialist can offer the best distribution of space. But since the level of good specialists is low in Kazakhstan, especially in a short time, it is possible that it is better to do the layout yourself slowly. Although, no hurry there, people want to call in the apartment faster. But on the other hand, an open layout is good for designers, I guess. As for financial considerations, such apartments are still very expensive, despite the fact that the company did not spend money on internal partitions and doors. So everything is very ambiguous.

5. Do Kazakh apartments need balconies?

- I think it’s individual. But mostly Kazakh buyers love balconies, but they simply use them for other purposes. But on the other hand, it is also part of the culture. But if you design storage rooms inside an apartment, then in the future residents will still remove them in order to expand the room, and things will be put into balconies anyway. They will make a closet at the end of the balcony, a classic. So balconies are needed for a Kazakhstani hostess.

7. How logical do you think it is?

- Whatever the child would not amuse. Well, because people want big rooms, but at the same time things need to be put away somewhere, such as winter clothes, winter tires. Even now I have the idea that perhaps this is again due to the sharply continental climate. Too many things are not fully used in

a certain season, and they need to be stored somewhere.

8. What is the typology of modern apartments? And how many floors usually?

- The number of storeys depends on the permission for a particular site, and customers always use the highest possible number of storeys in order to increase the sellable area.

9. How does the façade interact with the interior during the planning phase?

- Depends on the specific people who are designing. If it is designed by one person in one program, in revit for example, then everything will be fine (well, if the specialist is good at the same time). If it is designed, as is generally done in our country, that different people are assigned a separate facade, a separate layout, then the result is obvious, you will have to adjust both the facade and the layouts a hundred times, and at the same time these specialists will quarrel, because no one wants to give in, and you can't separate the inside and the outer shell, all this should develop together according to one idea.

Interview 7:

Female, Astana, 2x, designer

“If you have money and want a good service, then you will go to the Left Bank. I think there is a Kazakh style in architecture, it manifests in ornamentation. I think we don't have a Kazakh in planning, because we haven't developed as a separate entity enough yet, Kazakhstan was always developing along with USSR. I think we import foreign ideas because it is nice to live and realize that you belong to something of a “high culture.” We still have a mindset from Soviet Union, we are building for profit and not for spiritual enrichment. The architecture in Kazakhstan is developing, specifically our architects and specialists are developing. I hope a bright future awaits it. When meeting a decision in a project, there are many interested mediators and financial aspects play a big role as well.”

Interview 8:

Female, Almaty, re:yurt

“Yurt is something that is far away for me. We look at it from outside. It is a cultural element that I research. In auls for celebrations it is used as an element of everyday life, in cities as a celebrational trend. Now ornament is being used as an embellishment for political validation. Kazakhisation is being exploited by politicians. Cultural elements are being exploited. I like cinema Arman, it is a Central Asian architecture. There are a lot of buildings in Almaty that were built by Russian architects using Kazakh ornaments, to what extent is it authentic? There are not a lot of materials about yurt. We are collecting them. Our aim is that everybody could experiment with these elements so that yurt does not stay as a mere museum piece. Our idea is to have a yurt biennale, there are so many different types of yurt, there is a two-storey yurt or moving yurt for example. I think there is a postcolonial nationalism in Kazakhstan which is a natural phase of freeing itself from colonialisation period.”

Survey

Participant 1

1. What do you think about the new architecture of Kazakhstan, for example, on the left bank of Astana?
- **Too much empty space around the buildings and inside the buildings**
2. What do you think about the architecture of Kazakhstan, which uses Kazakh elements, for example ornaments on facades, shanyrak in bayterek or domes?
- **Positive, I like authenticity**
3. What do you think about Soviet architecture?
- **Visually I don't like it, but they at least thought about the location and context**
4. What architecture do you identify with more? Which one do you like more?
- **Scandinavian**
5. What do you like about the city?
- **Rivershore**
6. What do you dislike about the city?
- **Too many apartment buildings in one place, large empty distances, absence of single style in the city**
7. What places do you use to meet friends?
- **Parks, Cafe**
8. Do you prefer to live in an apartment or a private house?
- **Apartments**
9. Do you like newly built apartments?
- **No**

Participant 2

1. What do you think about the new architecture of Kazakhstan, for example, on the left bank of Astana?
- **Interesting ideas, but implementation is done with poor quality. Absence of single concept, everything looks silly and scattered**
2. What do you think about the architecture of Kazakhstan, which uses Kazakh elements, for example ornaments on facades, shanyrak in bayterek or domes?
- **I think it is very good. National identity conveys the spirit of the country, is a tourist attraction and insta-spot**
3. What do you think about Soviet architecture?
- **If it is panel houses, then in ex-USSR they look very sad. Good examples of panel houses are in Finland, Estonia, Germany. If it is historical Soviet buildings, then I like them. It is also a part of a history**
4. What architecture do you identify with more? Which one do you like more?
- **I like contemporary buildings with good quality, for example Talan Towers.**
5. What do you like about the city?
- **A lot of green spaces. A lot of space in Astana to build from scratch and opportunities for contempo-**

rary planning. River and rivershore are the attraction centres

6. What do you dislike about the city?

- Badly conceived city plan, cheap materials for contemporary buildings, absence of single style, everything looks silly.

7. What places do you use to meet friends?

- Park Jetisu, Presidential Park

8. Do you prefer to live in an apartment or a private house?

- Apartment

9. Do you like newly built apartments?

- If the quality is good then yes

Participant 3

1. What do you think about the new architecture of Kazakhstan, for example, on the left bank of Astana?

- I don't know, haven't seen it

2. What do you think about the architecture of Kazakhstan, which uses Kazakh elements, for example ornaments on facades, shanyrak in bayterek or domes?

- I think it is very good, traditional things could be adapted to current times and something new could be created, most important thing is the originality

3. What do you think about Soviet architecture?

- It has a certain charm

4. What architecture do you identify with more? Which one do you like more?

- European, if I may say so

5. What do you like about the city?

- Can not select one thing, everything is mediocre

6. What do you dislike about the city?

- A lot of new residential houses are being built, but there aren't a lot of new cool places for tourists, or to just take a walk and spend time outside

7. What places do you use to meet friends?

- Cafe, coffeeshops

8. Do you prefer to live in an apartment or a private house?

- 50-50

9. Do you like newly built apartments?

- 50-50

Participant 4

1. What do you think about the new architecture of Kazakhstan, for example, on the left bank of Astana?

- Ambiguous. I like the functional aspect of this buildings, I have been to concert there. However the appearance could have been made more interesting and authentic in my opinion

2. What do you think about the architecture of Kazakhstan, which uses Kazakh elements, for example ornaments on facades, shanyrak in bayterek or domes?

- I like when ornaments and traditional elements are stylized

3. What do you think about Soviet architecture?

- I like Soviet modernism, especially in Almaty

4. What architecture do you identify with more? Which one do you like more?

- I like various things. It is good when historic objects are preserved and the place has its own identity and color

5. What do you like about the city?

- I like the diversity and convenience. I would like to have less cars and car streets, more alternative transportation modes and greenery

6. What do you dislike about the city?

- Cars, noise, highway, "muraveiniki"

7. What places do you use to meet friends?

- Cafe, parks, theatres and cinema

8. Do you prefer to live in an apartment or a private house?

- In an apartment, private house is awesome, but I prefer to live in the centre of the city

9. Do you like newly built apartments?

- They are different, but the demand for good, well-organized housing is raising, so I think gradually the housing market will change