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## **SEMANTIC ASPECTS OF ARCHITECTURAL DOMINANTS TRANSFORMATION IN WESTERN UKRAINIAN CITIES IN THE 1940S–1950S**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article focuses on the semantic aspects of architectural dominants transformation in Western Ukraine in the second half of the 1940s - 1950s. On the example of cities-regional centres, such as Rivne, Lutsk and Ternopil, the so-called "socialist reconstruction", which created new dominants in the urban silhouette, embodying the Soviet ideological principles in the architectural space is examined.

Keywords: dominants, architecture, semantic, Soviet neoclassicism, Western Ukraine, Rivne, Lutsk, Ternopil, 1940s - 1950s.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Semantic approach in architecture has been used for centuries, visualizing in the architectural environment certain ideologies and worldview principles according to the era. As known, the symbolic aspect is usually the most clearly manifested in the structure of architectural dominants, which play a leading role in shaping the image and cultural landscape of the city.

A lot of cities in Western Ukraine, as well as in other regions of the country, suffered from significant destruction during World War II, especially in their central parts. Reconstruction immediately in postwar years includes primarily the formation of new city centers and central squares. The city structure reorganization, or the so-called "socialist reconstruction" that took place in the 1940s - 1950s, created new dominants in the urban silhouette, which, in addition to the directly functional purpose of these buildings, played the role of embodying the Soviet era ideological principles in the architectural space. At the same time, old dominants, which were usually represented by churches, lost their leading role in the silhouette of the city.

In the wide variety of cities in Western Ukraine the modern architectural environment of their central areas was formed in the immediate postwar years and during the second half of XX – beginning of XXI century no longer underwent a profound transformation, except for decommunization process and some new additions. Usually the architecture of the city's central parts becomes its "visiting card" and forms the urban "brand". Therefore, the study of the postwar years' architecture semantic aspects becomes especially relevant.

## 2. SEMANTIC ASPECTS OF ARCHITECTURAL DOMINANTS TRANSFORMATION

The form, composition, style, decoration system of buildings and ensembles of the 1940s-1950s were used to express the Soviet era ideological foundations, using the signs and symbols encoded in architecture. Reading of this information by people was intended, obviously, both at the conscious and subconscious/intuitive levels, and the architectural objects themselves played the role of non-verbal linguistic means. In particular, V.Paperny in "Culture Two" represents the architecture of the 1940s - 1950s as the "word", or "slogan" (Paperny V. 2011).

A. Bogdanov characterizes architecture in general as "the language of a long and deep collective mood", and also emphasizes the "great educational value of architecture", that "embodies, consolidates, transmits people's emotions from generation to generation", acts as the "keeper of the organizing tradition" (Bogdanov A.1911).

Thus, architecture becomes a universal tool for integration of given ideologues into the cultural realm, what can be undoubtedly seen on the example of architectural dominants changes within the time limits of our study. In some cities, including the capitals of the Soviet republics, the change of dominance began in the pre-war period. It is well-known that the St. Michael Golden-Domed Cathedral in Kiev was demolished in the 1930s for its replacement with a new Government Center. In Moscow in 1931 the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was destroyed for the purpose of further construction at that place of the Palace of the Soviets. In the postwar Berlin, the capital of the GDR, the Berlin City Palace, which formed the core of the historic town-planning ensemble, was demolished within the "socialist building process" for the organization of the Marx-Engels square in its site (Cherkes B.S.2008).

With the incorporation of Western Ukraine into the Soviet Union and the city rebuilding processes in the post-war years, an architectural dominant change within the framework of the "socialist reconstruction" also took place.

In the pre-war silhouette of Rivne the role of architectural dominants was played by the neo-gothic building of St. Anthony Church and the Cathedral of the Holy Resurrection, built at the end of the 19th century on the main street. The rest of the city's central part architecture mainly consists of one- and two-story buildings (Pryshchepa O. 2006). Therefore, the urban structure of Rivne had two distinct vertical dominants, located at a distance from each other and "fixed" a central part of the city.

According to the scheme of the master plan, accepted in 1945, which provided the development of Rivne in the second half of the 1940s-1950s, the building of the Theater Square ensemble was foreseen among the priority measures (State Archives of Rivne region. 1945).

The main city's highway of the along which the building in the postwar years concentrated, formed a festive avenue, and the Theater Square (Fig. 1) became main urban core (Rudnytsky A.M. 1971). Theater Square ensemble included a theater (architects - O.Krylova and O.Malyshchenko) (Tymofiyenko V. 2003), a hotel and four-story dwelling houses with the stores on their first floors. These buildings, created in the style of Soviet neoclassicism, have approximately the same height and form a spatial dominant in the urban structure.

B. Posatsky draws attention to the lack of vertical dominance in the ensemble (Posatsky B. 2001). This fact, according to our assumption, is not accidental in terms of semantics: historically in Rivne, the role of vertical dominants was played by temples, as it was mentioned above. In this context, vertical dominants could be associated with sacral architecture, and mystical, spiritual tendencies are known to contradict the Soviet materialistic worldview system.



Fig. 1. Theater Square in Rivne. Source: photographs by author



Fig. 2. New center in Lutsk. Source: photographs by author

According to D. Khmelnytsky, idea of ensemble in the architecture of the 1940s-1950s “lead to bigotry”, and the artistic value of buildings was put in full dependence on their role in the ensemble (Khmelnytsky D. 2006).

The idea of ensembles in postwar architecture, in addition to achieving the effect of "greatness", had another aspect: the spatial dominant (ensemble) formed by a *group* of buildings, similar in style and height; it is, in its essence, a *collective* dominant, which is entirely in line with socialist ideologues. Individualism, isolation of the old architectural dominants, according to socialist ideology, were treated as clearly negative bourgeois phenomena.

Eventually, the significance of the historic vertical architectural dominants – temples, was lost due to increase in height of neighboring buildings, as well as old dominants reconstruction with the change of their functional purpose. It is known that the cinema was housed in the church building later (nowadays - the Organ Music Hall), and there was a museum of cosmonautics and scientific atheism in the orthodox cathedral.

It is worth noting that the arrangement of museums and other atheist-scientific institutions in the buildings of the former temples within the time limits of our study was quite common practice, which obviously has a deep symbolic aspect: like a lot of Christian churches located on the site of the former pagan places of worship, atheist museums performed the same function - to "broadcast" from the established "places of power" a new worldview into the information space of the city.

In Lutsk, the Lubart's Castle and neighboring churches played the role of architectural dominants during the centuries. In the 1950s, a new city center was built at some distance from the historical city core.

The central square (Fig. 2.) became a core of the new main avenue (Rudnytsky A.M. 1971), formed along the former transit highway on the high bank of the river Styr. Architecture of new central square included an administrative building (architect J.Borodin, 1954) (Kolosok B.V., Metelnytsky R.H.1990) which now houses Lesya Ukrainka Eastern European National University, and dwelling houses located symmetrically around the perimeter of the square.

Accordingly, loss of the leading role of the historical dominant in Lutsk occurred in a different way: the new area in the urban structure situated at a distance and slightly higher than the medieval center of the city; its buildings hang over a park planted in a river valley. Firstly, it was known, that an open panorama of the castle was foreseen from the new center terraces, but later the silhouettes of the old dominants were hidden behind the trees.

It can also be considered as a predicted and specially designed semantic aspect: the passage of time seems to emphasize loss of the leading role by the old dominants, gently hiding them from the views of citizens of a "bright communist future." The castle and churches around it still exist in the structure of Lutsk, but they completely lose the role of vertical dominants in connection with the distance, and a new spatial accent dominates them.

The neo-gothic church, built in the early XX century, represented vertical architectural dominant of Ternopil in the pre-war years. The building was partially damaged during World War II, and completely destroyed in the 1950s (Smirnow J.) in the process of "socialist reconstruction" of the city.

The need for the church demolition, along with the preservation and reconstruction of another historical architecture objects, damaged during the war, was explained by its building "in capitalist times for political purposes" (Rudnytsky A. M. 1971). A department store was built on the site of the church in 1958-1959 (Humennyi S.), which, along with other public and residential buildings, was included in the ensemble of the new central square. A boulevard was planted along the square, and the neo-classicist theater building (architects -I.Mikhailenko, D.Chornovil, V.Novikov) became the compositional center of the ensemble (Tymofiyenko V. 2003).

It is worth noting that during the "socialist reconstruction" in Western Ukrainian cities, the further fate of the buildings preserved during the war partly depended on their style. In particular, the architecture of neoclassical, neo-renaissance or local "folk" style usually had a chance to change its functional purpose and enter the structure of the new Soviet architectural ensembles, while the buildings of the neo-gothic style tried to "hide" (Rivne, Lutsk) or destroy it (Ternopil).

In addition to labeling the neo-gothic as "bourgeois" and, apparently, the "church" style, there are other explanations for the Soviet regime's dislike of the neo-gothic. First of all, it is a requirement for architecture to be "national in form, socialist in content" (Ikonnikov A. 2001). Neo-gothic absolutely did not meet these requirements and was interpreted as a "style of social decline" (Khmelnysky D. 2006). A. Shchusev in 1935 notes that "the idea of public buildings, such as [roman] thermae and forum, is closer to us than the idea of gothic cathedrals". He does not deny the importance of gothic style, but only as "a means of improving the skill of [architects]" (Barhin M.1975). A. Nekrasov explains the irrelevance of the neo-gothic in Soviet architecture by the fact that it is too "weightless" and therefore "denies realism", whereas Soviet architecture was supposed to express mass, stability, greatness and symmetry (Khmelnysky D. 2006).

Table 1. Architectural dominants in the urban structure of the pre-war years and the second half of the 1940's - 1950's.  
Source: illustrations by the author

City	The pre-war years	The 1940s - 1950s.
Rivne	 <p>Cathedral of the Holy Resurrection and Church of St. Anthony</p>	 <p>Theater Square ensemble</p>
Lutsk	 <p>Lubart's Castle and neighboring churches</p>	 <p>New ensemble on Volia avenue</p>
Ternopil	 <p>Church of the Incessant Help of God's Mother</p>	 <p>Theater Square ensemble</p>

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

In the 1940s - 1950s in Western Ukrainian cities old dominants, which were usually represented by churches, lost their leading role in the silhouette of the city by increasing the height of the neighboring buildings (in Rivne), rendering new architectural emphases on the distant territories (in Lutsk),

or the physical destruction of the old dominants (in Ternopil) with the creation on their site central square ensembles, which relied on the role of new spatial (collective) dominants in the urban planning structure. The new dominants at semantic level, in addition to their representative function and, undoubtedly, political propaganda, also embodied integration of the Soviet worldview system into the urban cultural space.

Thus, during the process of "socialist reconstruction" of the centers in the analyzed cities of Western Ukraine, the churches lose their leading role in the urban silhouette. Reflecting in the urban environment the ideological principles of the Soviet era, they were replaced by buildings of another functional purpose - administrative, residential buildings, theaters, stores, etc.

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