

Gulnoza Khasanova

**VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF DUSHANBE: A CITY THAT
NEVER GETS OLD**

MA Thesis in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management.

Central European University

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by

Gulnoza Khasanova

(Tajikistan)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the Master of Arts degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy,
Management.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

Chair, Examination Committee

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I, the undersigned, **Gulnoza Khasanova**, candidate for the MA degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Abstract

During its Soviet history from 1929 to 1991, Dushanbe turned from a rural settlement into a city, the industrial, political, and cultural center of the Tajik Republic. The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought about drastic changes to the status quo in Tajikistan, and the newly created sovereign state had to redefine its identity. Still, Dushanbe has preserved a substantial amount of Soviet architecture, which is disappearing year by year due to the decisions of public authorities. Facing the lack of transparency and dialogue on behalf of the decision makers, the residents of the city have initiated a discourse in the online realm, in social media, where they discuss their memories and the value of the city's architecture through photos about Soviet Dushanbe.

To understand how the residents perceive and relate to the architecture and urban space of the Soviet era in Dushanbe, this thesis explores the heritage discourse around those in the framework of memory studies and visual analysis. The main body of sources are photographs about the urban space and architecture from the Soviet period, preserved even after the independence in personal collections and recently shared in social media, and the discussion that has evolved around these. The thesis contrasts this discourse of private memories to the one initiated by the state and other public actors also applying images of the city as media, and compares the modern image and the narrative of the city to the one established and maintained in the Soviet period both in visual media and in printed literature. Dushanbe as the capital city is seen by all actors as a product of Soviet architectural practices: it was born and developed during the Soviet Union, witnessed its collapse, and is thereby indispensably connected to the Soviet era. In the Soviet period, its image was based on that of a young city, and this image keeps on dominating the official discourse even today. This narrative, however, has led to the conclusion on behalf of the authorities that the city does not have any historically valuable

architecture. The residents are not asked about the issue, they have no say in the decision making about urban development.

The findings of the thesis, however, show that the residents have a strong opinion about the architecture and urban space of Dushanbe, but the failure to critically rethink the heritage value of the Soviet architecture has led to a complete disconnect between the state and the people, the latter being utterly unhappy with the recent direction of urban transformation. To bridge this gap, it would be essential for the state and the city leadership to explore the current heritage and memory discourse among the residents, which would help to understand the place and role of Soviet architecture in the twenty-first-century Dushanbe and could serve as the basis of decision making concerning the development of urban space.

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I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisors, Volodymyr Kulikov and Dóra Mérai, for constantly pushing and steering me in the right direction. I'm gratefully indebted to them for their patience, valuable comments and tireless help in bringing this thesis into a shape.

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Introduction

The village of Dushanbe was designated as the capital of the new Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic in 1929 due to its convenient geographic location, favorable climatic conditions, and its accessibility via railway.¹ Back then it was a Central Asian settlement torn by the resistance from the side of the Bukhara Emirate against the establishment of the Soviet rule, devoid of the very idea of monumental architecture and large-scale construction.² It also used to be the place for large weekly bazaars held every Monday – hence its name Dushanbe, which in Tajik means Monday.

Industrialization turned Dushanbe – called Stalinabad from 1929 to 1961 – into a large economic, political and cultural center of the republic. In the very first years of the Soviet power, urban development was in full swing, with public and residential buildings rising at rapid speed. With the deployment of architects by the Central Government, the city started to acquire its architectural image. It was dominated by the style called Stalinist Empire or Socialist Classicism from the 1940s to the late 1950s.³ In the early 1960s, architects started designing high-rise residential buildings.⁴ This led to the expansion of Dushanbe to the right bank of the river Dushanbinka, which, until then, had been developed with predominantly

¹ Some sources spell the name as Дюшамбе (*Dyushambe*).

² Rustam Mukimov and Salija Mamadzhanova, *Arkhitektura Sovetskogo Tadjikistana / Pervyi Etap Razvitiia Arkhitektury v Tadjikistane (1922-1941)* [Architecture of Soviet Tajikistan / First Stage of the Development of Architecture in Tajikistan (1922-1941)] (Dushanbe: Maorif, 1990), 133–37. (hereafter: Mukimov, and Mamadzhanova, *Arkhitektura Sovetskogo Tadjikistana*)

³ Mosarchinform, accessed March 15, 2020, https://www.mosarchinform.ru/architecture/p2_articleid/12257.

Stalinist Empire denotes the architecture of the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin between 1933 and 1955

⁴ Rustam Mukimov, “On the Empire’s Periphery,” in *Soviet Modernism 1955-1991. Unknown History* (Zürich: Architekturzentrum Wien and Park Books, 2012), 239-243. (hereafter: Mukimov, “On the Empire’s Periphery”). A statement from the resolution: “Buildings and structures should take their attractive appearance not from the use of affected and expensive decorative embellishment, but from the organic link between architectural forms and function, as well as from good proportions and the correct use of materials, load-bearing structures, details, and from high quality of execution.”

industrial facilities. This period lasting until the late 1980s was marked by the construction of mass housing complexes and high-rise buildings as well as award-winning public buildings with the use of innovative construction technologies. Besides these buildings of various functionality, the urban landscape of Dushanbe also features spacious squares that bear witness to the Soviet past of the city. *The Aini Square* with the building of the *Dushanbe Hotel*, the “800th Anniversary of Moscow” Square with the *Opera and Ballet Theater*, the Central Square with the Parliament building, all are landmarks in the cityscape of Dushanbe even today. Dushanbe was also presented as a symbol of Soviet development in various media. Images of the new and modern city appeared in volumes and postcards to propagate Soviet progress.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Tajikistan, like all the rest of the Soviet republics, became an independent, sovereign state and stepped on the path of building its own national identity. This major shift from one statehood to another has affected the political, social, economic and cultural fabric of the country. However, since it gained independence Tajikistan has still preserved a substantial amount of Soviet architecture inherited from that era. The cityscape is still defined by architecture and space created during the Soviet time, even though back in 1991 the transformation of the public space started with the demolition of the statue of Lenin, a symbolic act marking the beginning of the post-Soviet era.⁵

The new republic intends to distance itself from the Soviet past, although, unlike, for example, in Georgia, the issue of rethinking the Soviet legacy in Tajikistan has never been politically

⁵ Stefan Rusu, *Spaces on the Run* (Istanbul: Mega Basim Yayin San ve Tic A.S., 2016), accessed May 30, 2020, https://issuu.com/suhebator/docs/spaces_on_the_run_dag_tj_2015 (hereafter: Rusu, *Spaces on the Run*)

discussed.⁶ An article by Tajik architect Shamsiddin Ismatov, a member of the Union of Architects of Tajikistan, is rather an exception.⁷ While recognizing the achievements of the Soviet period in the architecture of Tajikistan, Ismatov attributes more importance and higher value to the post-independence architecture and presents that as something to pass on to the future generations. Soviet architecture is not appreciated as a valuable heritage, and the practice of the past decades shows that changing the cityscape, demolishing Soviet architecture is part of the process of Tajik self-definition. The city leadership of Dushanbe has destroyed several significant buildings and erected new monuments to re-shape the urban space.

These changes of the cityscape were implemented in a top-down manner. People are generally not involved in decision-making in Tajikistan, which goes against Articles 7 and 8 of the Urban Development Code of the Republic of Tajikistan, which respectfully stipulate the participation of citizens in the implementation of town-planning activities, as well as the creation of the necessary conditions for citizen participation as well as for the involvement of public organizations in discussions and decision-making pertaining to town-planning activities.⁸ By constitution, Tajikistan is a sovereign, democratic, constitutional, secular and unitary state. Even though it provides for freedom of assembly, association, speech to name a

⁶ David Iberi, “What Does De-Sovietization of Georgia Mean?” The Jamestown Foundation. July 22, 2010, accessed May 30, 2020, <https://jamestown.org/what-does-de-sovietization-of-georgia-mean/>. See also Dea Gigauri, “The Late Soviet Architectural Heritage in Georgia: Use, Abuse, Re-Use.” (MA thesis, CEU, 2018).

⁷ Shamsiddin Ismatov, “Segodnia Vsemirnyi Den’ Arkhitektury. Arkhitektura – Zastyvshaia Muzyka” [Today Is the World Day of Architecture. Architecture - Still Music], Committee for Architecture and Construction of the Republic of Tajikistan, October 2, 2017, accessed May 30, 2020, <https://tajshtmon.tj/tj/navidho/1269-segodnya-vsemirnyy-den-arhitektury.html>.

⁸ “Urban Development Code of the Republic of Tajikistan,” Committee for Architecture and Construction under the Government of Tajikistan, September 30, 2015, accessed May 30, 2020, <https://tajshtmon.tj/tj/konun/96-kodeksi-sharsozii-umurii-toikiston.html>.

few, in reality these rights are strictly monitored and, in many cases, denied.⁹ The latest amendments to the Constitution brought up for a referendum in 2016 abolished the presidential term limits, giving the current President an absolute monopoly in governance. He unilaterally appoints and removes the members of the Cabinet, governors of provinces, heads of districts and cities. The Economist Intelligence Unit's Global Democracy Index 2019 ranked Tajikistan to the 160th place out of 165 countries attributing it to authoritarian regimes.¹⁰ Such a political environment creates serious obstacles to the development of a bottom-up civic initiative in the heritage domain, making it almost impossible.¹¹

Still, people have their own relation to the architecture and space and find their own ways to give voice to that. During the last decade, massive reconstructions in Dushanbe combined with a lack of transparency and dialogue on behalf of the decision-making bodies has generated discussions and a characteristic memory discourse around the Soviet architecture in Dushanbe among the residents. This discourse is predominantly confined to social media (mostly Facebook) the main advantage of which lies in interactivity and a relative freedom from the vertical power structure. Due to the insecurity experienced by the general public in voicing their concerns publicly, a shift from physical to a digital social realm has taken place and Facebook is the epitome of such opportunities for creating virtual communities.¹² This

⁹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2018 Country Report – Tajikistan, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018, accessed May 30, 2020, https://www.bti-project.org/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2018_TJK.pdf.

¹⁰ The Economist, Global Democracy Index 2019, accessed April 21, 2020, <https://infographics.economist.com/2020/democracy-index-2019/map.html>.

¹¹ About the importance of civic initiative in adaptive heritage reuse initiatives see: Levente Polyák, Daniela Patti, and Bahanur Nasya, Observatory Cases Report. OpenHeritage: Deliverable 2.2. Vienna, 2019, accessed May 30, 2020, URL: https://openheritage.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/D2.2_Observatory_Cases_Report.pdf

¹² José Van Dijck, "Facebook as a tool for producing sociality and connectivity," *Television & New Media* 13, no. 2 (2012): 160-176.

shift triggered the online circulation of old photographs and moving images presenting Soviet architecture as a means to discuss its value and preserve its memory.

The aim of this thesis is to understand how the architecture and urban space of the Soviet era in Dushanbe is perceived by the inhabitants, how they relate to the official discourse and the processes initiated by the state. To reach this aim, it is necessary to answer the following questions: do urban residents respond to and participate in the transformation of the urban fabric of Dushanbe? How does the changing cityscape of Dushanbe affect social and cultural integrity and division among its residents and the public bodies? This will be done by analyzing both sides of the discourse: on behalf of both the state and the public. Since photographs have a central role in the discourse, the analysis will focus on images and how they are connected to the discourse in written text. To understand the roots of the visual discourse, the thesis will investigate how the visual representation of Dushanbe and its architecture has expressed and shaped its perception throughout its history.

The analysis of the discourse will be done in the framework of memory studies, where images and texts operate as media of individual and collective memory. The recognition that not just individuals but also groups of people have some kind of memory was manifest in the scholarship of the first decades of the twentieth century, primarily in the writings by Maurice Halbwachs.¹³ Halbwachs recognized that the memory of individuals and groups is socially determined: an individual remembers in a socio-cultural environment, in which he or she is also a participant. Halbwachs also introduced the term “collective memory”, which he defined

¹³ In his book “The social framework of memory” he anticipates many of the ideas that he expressed in his last fundamental work “The Collective Memory” published after his death, in 1950. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). See also Dietrich Harth, “The Invention of Cultural Memory,” in *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin, New York: W. de Gruyter, 2008), 85-96.

as the type of memory that is shared by an entire society and which, as opposed to history, is not formally articulated.

In the 1990s, German Egyptologist Jan Assmann developed a theory of cultural memory building on Halbwachs' ideas of collective memory. Assmann identifies communicative memory as less formalized, rather an oral tradition that emerges in the interactive context of human relations in everyday life, a kind of "living memory" that exists over three generations. According to him, its relatively brief life (only 80–100 years) and the lack of universally recognized "fixed points" connecting it with the far past, distinguishes communicative memory from what he calls cultural memory.¹⁴ According to Assmann, cultural memory is connected to material objectifications, it is meticulously created, preserved and interpreted by specialists, and it often goes back to myths from the distant past.

The distinction of these two forms of communal memory are relevant to discuss Dushanbe's Soviet urban heritage as a medium of cultural memory that is fading away, and also as that of the communicative, living memory among the residents. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the political, social and cultural changes that followed thereafter, have greatly affected those generations of people who were born and raised in the USSR. These are people born in the early to mid-1950s labelled as "the last Soviet generation" essentially meaning the generation of the "seventies" – those who became active labor-wise in the period of the so-called "stagnation".¹⁵ This generation was the last one whose career began in the Soviet era, who were able to take full advantage of the career growth opportunities and experienced the signs of the decaying Soviet system. There is another generation, however, the author of this

¹⁴ Jan Assmann, and John Czaplicka, "Collective memory and cultural identity," *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125-133. (hereafter: Assmann, and Czaplicka, *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity*).

¹⁵ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was forever, until it was no more: The last Soviet generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

thesis identifies herself with. It is the so-called “children of Perestroika”, those born in the late 1970s – early 1980s, who found themselves within a shift between two eras, and had to adjust themselves to the turbulent social and political environment formed as a consequence of the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹⁶ Representatives of both generations in Dushanbe have, therefore, their own memories about the Soviet times, and contribute to a memory discourse about it, first in their small social circles, e.g. families, and recently also on online platforms and social networks. Without necessarily knowing each other in person, these people form new communities around these memories, thus nourishing the collective memory of Soviet Dushanbe. Along with this grassroots phenomenon there is also an official memory politics implemented through museums, archives, state mass media, and other organizations. Thus, there is an interplay between the individual and various forms of collective memories.

In this thesis, I study images of Soviet architecture in Dushanbe and their context in order to understand how the visual representation of Soviet Dushanbe contributed to the formation of various forms of collective memory in the past and in the present, and what does this show about the relation of various actors – the public body and communities of the inhabitants – to the architecture of Dushanbe as heritage. Throughout the thesis the architecture of Soviet Dushanbe will be interpreted, and thus, referred to as built heritage, as something “used to construct, reconstruct and negotiate a range of identities and social and cultural values and meanings in the present”.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Perestroika* ("reconstruction" or "rebuilding"): series of political and economic reforms launched by Secretary-General Gorbachev after coming to power in 1985, which moved the country away from centralized state control. See: Richard Taruskin, Andrew B. Wachtel et al, “Russia”, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, accessed May 30, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia>

¹⁷ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006), 3.

Sources

I studied photographs that had captured the onset, development and transformation of the architectural landscape of Dushanbe, as well as analyzed the contexts in which they have been used during the Soviet time and nowadays. The empirical base of the research is composed of a bulk of images of architectural objects in Dushanbe, that have been used in printed publications, such as books, articles, tourist booklets and guides, postcards and photo books. The earliest images are from the late 1920s – early 1930s, when scientist, scholars and journalists started to visit Dushanbe more frequently, offering an image of the city for this period from the outsiders' perspective. In the Soviet period, the most typical representations are on postcards, promotional booklets, coffee table books and academic publications, which predominantly pursued a propagandistic agenda. To understand how Soviet urban architecture is perceived today, I turned to social media as a platform where people can freely express their views and opinions. Many enthusiasts created special groups on Facebook where they share and comment on images made in the Soviet period. These are family photos as well as digitized photos from the above-mentioned publications (from the context of the former official discourse). In 2019, I conducted two interviews to understand the motivation of these collectors.¹⁸ Digitized images circulating in social media and photographs from personal collections are a source for visual analysis. The online albums trigger discussions which were my sources to examine how others think about these images and the Soviet past of the city. In addition to the visual analysis I studied the perception of the built heritage of Dushanbe in secondary literature. The analysis covers specialized publications written by architects and

¹⁸ One interview was with the owner of a private collection of amateur films and photographs, Iurii Agarkov, the other interview was with the administrator of the Facebook group *My Tadjikistantsy* [We are from Tajikistan], Shuhrat Dzhuraev.

historians of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods and identify the context that determines the use of certain architectural objects and the rhetoric around them. Acknowledging language constraints and source limitations I focused my research on the literature published in Russian and English, as well as the thin body of publications dedicated specifically to the architectural image of Dushanbe. I also used newspaper articles and magazines published in the Soviet period and after that, which helped me understand the ideological context in the past and offer a new perspective for the resurfacing of the images nowadays.

Structure of the thesis

The first chapter offers an overview of previous scholarship on the architecture and architectural photography of the Soviet period in Tajikistan and presents the theoretical and methodological framework of this analysis: memory studies and media studies with photography in the focus.

The second chapter provides a historical background by presenting the urban development of Dushanbe and gives some insight into the events and conditions that laid the foundation for Dushanbe's growth into a capital city. The chapter also offers an overview of the changes and shifts in the perception of the built heritage of Dushanbe as it can be detected in the specialized literature so as to understand how these sources interpret the emergence of the built heritage of Dushanbe depending on the nature, purpose and time period of the publication.

The third chapter looks into visuals used in printed and electronic media to offer an understanding of how they serve the State in showcasing the achievements of Socialism and the transformations of the urban fabric after the independence. It offers examples of how the State employed photographic images to create a cultural memory of socialist transformations juxtaposing them to the backwardness inherited from the Tsarist Russia. It also gives an

analysis of the visual representation of Dushanbe in the time of independence in the context of geopolitical changes and the process of nation-building in the post-Soviet Tajikistan.

The fourth chapter examines how the existing Soviet architecture is recontextualized in the visual representation of contemporary Dushanbe against the political background of the newly emerged independent state and its nation-building policy. It presents the public discourse around the Soviet architecture that fell victim to the modernization processes.

The fifth chapter discusses the resurfacing of photographs of Soviet Dushanbe in the modern context and the reasons for that. The chapter also examines the narratives of the Soviet architecture and the Soviet past in general by analyzing various projects in the framework of communicative and collective memory, place attachment and nostalgia.

Chapter 1 – Researching the architectural heritage of the Soviet period in Tajikistan

1.1 Literature review

During the Soviet period, Dushanbe (Stalinabad) did not feature in any publications which would have had a specific architectural focus. However, the authors of some more general works about the Tajik Republic left some comments on the cityscape of Dushanbe, which are relevant for this study.

In 1932, writers and reporters Boris Lapin and Zakhar Khatsrevin visited the republic to collect songs of the Tajik working class that “reflected the fight of working peasants against counter-revolutionary movement.”¹⁹ The Soviet geologist Nikolai Fedorovskii published his travelogue in 1937, in which he described his expeditions to Soviet Central Asia.²⁰ The book *Stalinabad* published by geographer Dmitrii Chumichev in 1950 presents the geographical location and natural conditions, history, culture and attractions of Stalinabad.²¹ In 1987 a work entitled *Across Tajikistan: Guidebook* by another geographer, Feliks Patrunov was published, which narrates about the nature of the history and modern days of the Tajik republic. This latter introduces the sights of Dushanbe as well as of other cities along touristic and excursion routes.²² The general pattern for using visual materials in such publications is a combination

¹⁹ Boris Lapin and Zakhar Khatsrevin, *Stalinabadski Archiv: Rasskazy i dokumenty o Sovetskom Tadjikistane* [Stalinabad Archive: Tales and Documents of Soviet Tajikistan], Moscow: Federatsia, 1932. (hereafter: Lapin and Khatsrevin, *Stalinabadski Archiv*)

²⁰ Nikolai Fedorovskii, *Po Goram i Pustynjam Srednei Azii* [Along the mountains and deserts of Central Asia], accessed May 20, 2020, <https://paraknig.me/reader/232056>. (hereafter: Fedorovskii, *Po Goram i Pustynjam Srednei Azii*)

²¹ Dmitrii Chumichev, *Stalinabad stolitsa Tadjikskoi SSR* [Stalinabad the capital of Tajik SSR], Moscow: State Publisher of Geographic Literature, 1950. (hereafter: Chumichev, *Stalinabad stolitsa Tadjikskoi SSR*)

²² Feliks Patrunov, *Po Tadjikistanu: Putevoditel* [Across Tajikistan: Guidebook], Moscow: Profizdat, 1987.

of long shots of facades and perspectives of public buildings and panoramic views of streets and squares.

In 1941, civil engineer Vsevolod Veselovskii, who came to the Tajik Republic in 1937 upon obtaining his civil engineer degree in Leningrad, published an analytical article about the architectural practice in Stalinabad. He provided a critical assessment of the principles of design and construction in the city, offering a few case studies from the perspective of national traditions in the architectural composition.²³ Decades later he published books on the urban development of Dushanbe, in which he discussed the major trends in the development of architecture and urban planning in the major cities of the Tajik Republic, including Dushanbe.²⁴ He also co-authored books with Tajik architects, and his influence is still palpable in the architectural scholarship of the post-Soviet period.²⁵

Post-Soviet literature on architecture in Tajikistan reflects on the tendencies in the evolution of the architectural style. Specialists discuss a shift from homogeneity in the past seventy years by rediscovering the traditional roots of Tajik architectonics, carefully avoiding to mention the Soviet era. To demonstrate the growth in architectural creativity, the authors mention monumental constructions erected in the post-Soviet period, such as *The Palace of Nations*, *1100th-anniversary Memorial of Samanids on the Dusti Square* (former Lenin Square), *The National Museum*.²⁶

²³ Vsevolod Veselovskii, “Arkhitekturnaja Praktika Stalinabada” [Architectural Practice of Stalinabad], in *Arkhitektura SSSR*, ed. Karo Alabian (Moscow: Poligraphkniga, 1941), 44-47.

²⁴ Vsevolod Veselovskii, *Arkhitektura i gradostroitel'stvo Tadjikistana* [Architecture and urban development of Tajikistan] (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1967). (hereafter: Veselovskii, *Arkhitektura i gradostroitel'stvo Tadjikistana*)

²⁵ Vsevolod Veselovskii, Rustam Mukimov, Munavar Mamadnazarov, Salija Mamadjanova, *Arkhitektura Sovetskogo Tadjikistana* [Architecture of Soviet Tajikistan] (Moscow: Stroyizdat, 1987). (hereafter: Veselovskii, Mukimov, Mamadnazarov, and Mamadjanova, *Arkhitektura Sovetskogo Tadjikistana*)

²⁶ Rustam Mukimov, Salija Mamadzhanova, Sirodzhiddin Djurahonov, “Problemy Razvitiia Arkhitektury i Monumental'nogo Iskusstva Tadjikistana v Gody Nezavisimosti” [Problems of Development of Architecture and Monumental Art of Tajikistan in the Years of Independence], *Polytechnic Bulletin* 4 (2018): 206-209.

Meant for the students of architecture, civil engineering, history and culture of architecture, *Architectonics of Tajikistan* – a work authored by Tajik professors of architecture and published in 1990, gives an overview of the evolution of structure and artistic expression in the architecture of Tajikistan from the 4th century BC to the 1980s. The book is still dominated by the ideological narrative celebrating the Soviet architecture.²⁷ The chapter on Soviet period is heavily influenced by the publications of Vsevolod Veselovskii. However, one part that makes it different from the previous publications is that the authors mention architectural monuments in Tajikistan under state protection, among which four are monuments of Soviet architecture: *the Opera and Ballet Theater*, *Firdausi Public Library* (now *Chamber of Accounts*), *the Supreme Council* (now *Parliament*) and the building of *the Central Committee of the Communist Party* (now the temporary seat of the Mayor).²⁸

The somewhat fragmented character of the visual representation of Dushanbe and Tajik architecture in general in publications is touched upon by Sangahmad Tilloev in his PhD dissertation defended in 2007, in which he addressed the history of the formation and development of architecture of public buildings in Dushanbe. Tilloev noted that in the architectural science of the former USSR, in particular the Central Asian republics, the architectural and cultural traditions of the Tajik people are presented as no different from those of the peoples of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. Therefore, when studying the published works of researchers on Central Asian architecture, materials and evidences about Tajikistan are oftentimes absent.²⁹

²⁷ Rustam Mukimov and Salija Mamadzhanova, *Zodchestvo Tadzhiqistana* [Architectonics of Tajikistan] (Dushanbe: Maorif, 1990).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Sangahmad Tilloev, *Istoriia stanovleniia i razvitiia arkhitektury obshchestvennykh zdani Dushanbe*, [History of Formation and Development of Architectural Buildings of Dushanbe], (PhD diss. Dushanbe, Academy of Architecture and Construction of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2007).

The urban development of Dushanbe is discussed by Artemy Kalinovsky in the context of development projects implemented by the communist regime in the 1960s-1980s.³⁰ The author addresses industrialization in Central Asia with Tajikistan in the main focus, placing it in a global perspective. In the chapter dedicated to Dushanbe, the author uses visuals of the teahouse and the main thoroughfare, *Prospekt Lenina*, to illustrate the fusion of traditional and modern architectural styles. Debunking the personality cult of Stalin gave way for the Soviet government to discuss more openly the economic situation and pay more focused attention to the country's southern part, that is, Central Asia. This explains the intensified construction pace in Dushanbe from the 1960s, which is further discussed below in the thesis.

In 2019, Firuza Emomova analyzed in her doctoral thesis the development of architecture and art from the late ninetieth to the early twenty-first century. Emomova presented as case studies two large cities in Tajikistan, Khujand and Dushanbe.³¹ Khujand represents a case where the formation of architecture took its roots from ancient urban patterns. In contrast, Dushanbe is presented as a vivid example of the new cities of the republic, which were built during the period of the Soviet statehood. The author, while admitting that the city has ancient roots as a settlement, states that Dushanbe is the embodiment of Soviet architecture typical to cities built from scratch during the Soviet rule. She also suggests that being a unique case in Central Asia of transformation from an oriental village to a big political, cultural and economic center, Dushanbe has been a sort of an experimental ground for the application of various architectural styles mixed with traditional practices.³² Here a shift in the perception of the

³⁰ Artemy M. Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (Cornell University Press, 2018). (hereafter: Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*)

³¹ Firuza Emomova, *Vzaimodeistvie plasticheskikh iskusstv i arkhitektury Tadzhikistana vo vtoroi polovine XIX – nachale XXI vv.* [Interaction of Plastic Arts and Architecture of Tajikistan in the Second Half of 19 – early 21 centuries], (PhD diss. Dushanbe, Tajik Technical University, 2019).

³² Ibid.

built heritage of Dushanbe can be detected manifest in the views of a contemporary researcher. During the Soviet period, publications underlined that Dushanbe was a unique case as a city that grew out of a village and emphasized the outstanding role of architects from Leningrad and Moscow in its creation. Now, three decades into the post-Soviet period, contemporary researchers tend to employ a more critical approach to the assessment of former practices and approaches.

Botakoz Kassymbekova, a historian at the Humboldt Universität in Berlin, evaluates the Sovietization of Central Asian Region from a colonial perspective by doing a thorough research focusing on the Soviet state-building project in Tajikistan, the southernmost border of the Soviet Empire.³³ She argues that planning the town and turning what used to be a bazaar into the capital city was an important part of the Five-Year Plan. She introduces the term ‘Soviet European identity’ in the context of replacing memories of the past and suggests that the “European imperial-style buildings of unprecedented size for the region were built to represent Soviet European superiority and might.”³⁴ Written in a modern, post-Soviet context, this book critically assesses the conditions and factors that forestalled the establishment of the Soviet rule in Tajikistan. As far as Dushanbe is concerned, it is regarded as a point where Soviet culture and identity penetrated to Tajikistan through the urban development of the capital.

Although presently there is a growing interest in Soviet architecture, no comprehensive study has been written yet addressing the visual representation of Dushanbe. Even in those rare cases where Dushanbe was mentioned in the Soviet or post-Soviet publications, the photographs of

³³ Botakoz Kassymbekova, *Despite Cultures: Early Soviet Rule in Tajikistan* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 2016). (hereafter: Kassymbekova, *Despite Cultures: Early Soviet Rule in Tajikistan*)

³⁴ Ibid.

its architecture serve only as illustrations.³⁵ A fundamental book *Soviet Modernism 1955–1991: Unknown History* is a result of a thorough study and extensive fieldwork conducted in the former Soviet republics by Architekturzentrum, the museum of architecture in Vienna.³⁶ The research focused on unknown, forgotten or collapsing architectural achievements in each of the post-Soviet republics, leaving only Russia outside the scope of the project. The deliberate exclusion of Russian Soviet Modernist architecture was dictated by the very optics of the research: the researchers wanted to see local, “national in form” manifestations of post-war modernism. Even though the architecture of Dushanbe is discussed in the book and is supplemented with an essay by Professor Rustam Mukimov, the researchers did not visit Dushanbe, while travelling to Tashkent, Bishkek, and Almaty. Instead they travelled to Tula (Russia) to interview two prominent architects, Yuri Parkhov and Eduard Erzovskii, who had lived in Dushanbe and designed significant public buildings in the city in the 1970s-1980s. However, the researchers did not travel to the city itself where “most of the interesting buildings were demolished or turned into ‘modern’ structures and there were none of the architects left there who had built there during the Soviet Modernism.”³⁷

The book entitled *Spaces on the Run* published in 2016, discusses the transformation of urban space in the cities of Dushanbe, Almaty, Bishkek, and Tashkent in the post-Soviet era.³⁸

Edited by cultural manager Stefan Rusu with contributions by historians, artists, and culture

³⁵ For example: Zhurnal *Arkhitektura SSSR* [Journal ‘Architecture of USSR’] n.d. The International Association of Eurasian Unions of Architects (IAUA), accessed April 27, 2020, https://www.maca.ru/journals_ussr.html.

³⁶ Katharina Ritter, Ekaterina Shapiro-Obermair, Dietmar Steiner, and Alexandra Wachter, *Soviet Modernism 1955-1991. Unknown History* (Zürich: Architekturzentrum Wien and Park Books, 2012). (hereafter: Ritter, Shapiro-Obermair, Steiner, and Wachter, *Soviet Modernism 1955-1991. Unknown History*)

³⁷ From the email correspondence with Katharina Ritter, Program coordinator and curator at Architekturzentrum Wien.

³⁸ Rusu, *Spaces on the Run*.

critics from the cities in question, the book uses the photographs of Soviet architecture rather as mere illustrations.

As far as research conducted in the former Socialist bloc countries on the visual representation of the cities is concerned, it is worth mentioning the research paper published by PhD candidate Jānis Matvejs on the “Visual Representation of Urban Environment.”³⁹ The article examines how Soviet films interpreted the discourse around residential areas in Riga and explores the significant changes in housing structure. Visual culture expert Simon Ward studies *Urban Memory and Visual Culture in Berlin* through photographs and films depicting the post-war city and analyzes memory processes induced by rapid transformations in politics, economics and society.⁴⁰

To sum up, images of Dushanbe, even though used in many publications, mostly served as illustrations and were not the subject of visual analysis, let alone in the context of memory studies. This thesis, therefore, aims to fill this gap in the literature.

1.2 Methodology

As presented above, previous literature discussed urban architecture in Tajikistan in terms of architectural history. As it has been recognized by the most recent research, the historical interpretation of architecture largely depends on how the Soviet era and its products are seen in the cultural memory. In this respect, history, including history of architecture, is understood as a form of cultural memory.

³⁹ Janis Matvejs, “Visual Representation of Urban Environment: Microrraioni of Riga in Soviet Cinematography.” ResearchGate, December 2017, accessed April 25, 2020. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322379759_Visual_Representation_of_Urban_Environment_Microrraioni_of_Riga_in_Soviet_Cinematography/stats.

⁴⁰ Simon Ward, *Urban memory and visual culture in Berlin: framing the asynchronous city, 1957-2012* (Amsterdam University Press, 2016).

Aleida Assmann, drawing on Johan Huizinga's concept of history as "a spiritual form in which culture is aware of its past" suggests that society is aware of its own past, and history is a form of collective self-report, a form of remembrance of the past.⁴¹ In other words, history owes it to memory for significance and value orientation, and memory owes it to history for correction of a complex of memories. This function of historical research has acquired new significance for the post-traumatic situation, in which Peter Burke places historians as "the guardians of the skeletons in the cupboard of the social memory" calling them "remembrancers."⁴²

The question of how collective memory and historical (institutional) memory are related was further taken up and elaborated on by the French historian Pierre Nora in *Places of Memory*.⁴³ In this multivolume collection, Nora presents how the memory and the history of the past of France are at the center of its identification in the present. For him it is not the events of the past that are of the main interest but rather their representations. A place of memory for Nora is not a physical, topographical place, but also a symbolic one. As examples of places of memory, Nora presents archives, the French tricolor, the Pantheon, festive ceremonies to name a few. He contraposes memory and history as two completely opposite realms:

"Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It is in permanent evolution...susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer..."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Aleida Assmann, and Sarah Clift, *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

⁴² The remembrancer was a debt collector, and his job was to remind people of what they would have liked to forget. One of the most important functions of the historian is to be a remembrancer. See: Peter Burke, "History as Social Memory." in idem, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 43-59.

⁴³ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," in *Representations* 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring, 1989): 7-24.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Nora's *les lieux des memoires* is relevant to the case of Dushanbe in the context of nation-building and memory politics formulated after independence. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan, as all other post-Soviet republics, was forced to go through a painful social and economic transformation. The political elites of the republic faced the task of legitimizing the new independent existence of a political nation within the existing borders with its own myths and narratives, along with creating a sense of unity among the population and ensuring its loyalty to the new government. This implied the implementation of a set of measures, which to a great extent included the processes of substantial revision of the historical narrative, for, "...what makes a nation is the past, what justifies one nation against others is the past..."⁴⁵

Studying the origins of the formation of national identity, Benedict Anderson introduced the term "imagined communities."⁴⁶ He suggests that nations are imagined communities of people who are aware of each other's existence yet have no idea of each other's identity as they will never get together, get to know each other. They only share the belief that such a community exists. Following up on this theory, Ekaterina Haskins contemplates that even though it was formulated with regard to the nineteenth century, Anderson's observations acquired new relevance after the collapse of the communist bloc, which has prompted many countries to reassess their national identity, reinterpret their historical and cultural heritage. These processes have inevitably led to the renunciation of old symbols of state power, which among others also included the renaming of streets and the demolition of monuments to communist leaders.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Eric J. Hobsbawm, "Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today," in *Mapping the Nation*, ed. G. Balakrishnan (London: Verso, 1996), 255–67.

⁴⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London-New York, 2006).

⁴⁷ Ekaterina Haskins, "Russia's Postcommunist Past: The Cathedral of Christ the Savior and the Reimagining of National Identity," in *History and memory* (April 2009), accessed February 20, 2020.

This meant the creation of a new type of cultural memory for the modern Tajik nation with the means of text, space, architecture, and other media. Consequently, its analysis cannot be confined into the borders of art history or architectural history, but it is rather an interdisciplinary enterprise. In this thesis I am analyzing architecture and its representation in the context of memory studies, an interdisciplinary field itself.

Reflecting on the diversity and complexity of memory as an “all-encompassing socio-cultural phenomenon” Astrid Erll believes that notwithstanding its presence in the academic discourse across established fields, such as art history, religious studies, sociology and the like, memory is owned by none of them.⁴⁸ Erll admits that at present, there is not and cannot be any privileged methodological position in this field of research, but it is possible to use specific methods from various disciplines, and these all contribute to our understanding of certain socio-cultural phenomena.

Astrid Erll analyzes the role of media in the construction of both individual and collective memory, since the cognition of the world happens only through media; consequently, she argues that the images of the past are media constructs.⁴⁹ On the individual level, mediation is a key in the sociocultural shaping of organic memories, e.g. oral communication, photographic images as an aid in reconstructing the past, etc. On the collective level as well, the (re)construction and circulation of memories of a shared past is possible only through media: through oral and written communication, through print and electronic mass media, and

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236747313_Russia's_Postcommunist_Past_The_Cathedral_of_Christ_the_Savior_and_the_Reimagining_of_National_Identity.

⁴⁸ Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2. (hereafter: Erll, *Memory in Culture*). This statement in a way echoes Patrick Hutton's discovery of the topic of memory as the quintessential interdisciplinary interest, which is for everyone, however no one is entitled to claim it as its own. See also: Patrick H. Hutton. *History as an Art of Memory* (Burlington: Univ. of Vermont, 1993).

⁴⁹ Erll, *Memory in Culture*.

through monuments. Media construct memories and mediate between individual and collective dimensions of memory. Personal memories only become meaningful when communicated and contextualized in social frameworks.⁵⁰ Consequently, by studying media and media products one can draw conclusions on individual and communal memories as well as on the process of their construction. In this thesis, the medium of photography and its products, photographs are analyzed to understand how the cultural and collective memory – as distinguished by Assmann⁵¹ – of Soviet architecture was constructed in the socialist period and in the independent Tajikistan.

1.3 Photograph as a medium of memory

Since the invention of photography, its capacity to preserve memories, memorable moments have been emphasized. On the connection of photographs to memory, John Berger wrote:

“The thrill found in a photograph comes from the onrush of memory. This is obvious when it’s a picture of something we once knew. That house we lived in. Mother when young.”⁵²

American sociologist and photographer Douglas Harper suggests that those parts of the human brain that process visual information are evolutionarily older than those responsible for verbal information. Therefore, images, unlike words, awaken deeper elements of human consciousness, involve more extensive parts of the brain.⁵³ Roland Barthes sees the bridging of the symbolic gap between the natural language and the language of images as an important

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Assmann, and Czaplicka, *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity*.

⁵² Gregory C. Stanczak, *Visual research methods: Image, society, and representation* (Sage Publications, 2007).

⁵³ Douglas Harper, “Meaning and work: A study in photo elicitation,” *Current Sociology* 34, no. 3 (1986): 24-46.

historical revolution. In this regard, he acknowledges that images convey ideas and meanings on a par with the natural language of communication, and not through it:

“...the image no longer *illustrates* the words; it is now the words which, structurally, are parasitic on the image...it is not the image which comes to elucidate or ‘realize’ the text, but the latter which comes to sublimate, patheticize or rationalize the image.”⁵⁴

Based on Barthes’ statement, photographs do more than “freeze” or “preserve” memories. They are actively creating memories instead, and there is a close link between the two, verbal and visual “languages,” which lies in communication as the basic mechanism of social interaction. This is demonstrated by the visual method called *photo-elicitation* widely used in visual anthropology, which includes photographs in the situation of the research interview: the respondent is asked to comment or somehow respond to the displayed images.⁵⁵ Such interviews produce two types of analysis: direct, related to the content or context of the image, and projective, focused on the feelings and memories that the photograph evokes. A similar thing happens in the context analyzed in this thesis: the images are deliberately used on social media as an invitation for a dialogue and reflection.

Since photographs and their role in the memory discourse are an essential part of the present thesis, it is important to look at the practices that make up the photographic experience. According to Barthes, photographic experience involves three agents: the Operator (the one who takes the picture), the Spectrum (the one who is being photographed), and the Spectator (the one who views, perceives and evaluates).⁵⁶ Sociologist Viktor Krutkin suggests adding a

⁵⁴ Roland Barthes, and Stephen Heath, *Image, music, text* (London: FontanaPress, 1977), 25.

⁵⁵ Elisa Bignante, “The use of photo-elicitation in field research. Exploring Maasai representations and use of natural resources,” in *EchoGéo*, no. 11 (24 February 2010), 2, accessed May 31, 2020, https://www.academia.edu/28913104/The_use_of_photo_elicitation_in_field_research_Exploring_Maasai_representation_and_use_of_natural_resources

⁵⁶ Roland Barthes, *Camera lucida* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1988), 9.

fourth agent to the photographic practices: the Demonstrator, i.e. the one who presents the pictures.⁵⁷ If according to Barthes the one who is viewing the image, that is, the Spectator, has a unique right to the final arrangement of the meanings of the image and the construction of interpretations, Krutkin in his turn suggests that the Demonstrator takes precedence over the reviewer, “appropriating the exclusive right to speak about pictures.”⁵⁸ The Demonstrator can be a specific person who has access and capacity to present images to the audience, for example, an exhibition curator or someone who shows a family photo album to the guests, as well as an inanimate media, for example, a magazine or a book, which defines the situation of image perception with its general concept. Demonstrators will also be examined related to various visual representations of Dushanbe in official, ideologically engaged printed publications as well as in electronic media, i.e. internet-based news agencies, and social media. These case studies will help identify the extent to which the role of the Demonstrator affects the Spectator’s perception and the memories of the Spectrum. This will help to understand the cultural and social division experienced by the residents through the changing cityscape.

Tajikistan, as a former Soviet republic, has not been in the focus of memory studies. Studies related to the visual representation of Dushanbe have not been conducted either. My research therefore is a first attempt to put Dushanbe in the memory frame from the perspective of visual representation, thus laying the foundation for further studies and research.

⁵⁷ Viktor L. Krutkin, “Fotoreportazh kak istochnik sotsiologicheskoi informatsii” [Photo reportage as a source of sociological information], *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* 3 (2012): 65-76.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Chapter 2 – From village to a modern capital: The development of Dushanbe

The chapter provides a historical background for the urban development of Dushanbe and gives some insight into the events and conditions that laid the foundation for Dushanbe to grow into a capital city. It also offers an overview of changes and shifts in the perception of the built heritage of Dushanbe in the literature. This will contribute to our understanding on how these sources interpret the emergence of the built heritage of Dushanbe depending on the nature, purpose and time of the publication.

2.1 Dushanbe in the Russian Empire

From the late nineteenth century, Dushanbe and the southern part of Tajikistan was part of the Bukhara Emirate under the protectorate of the Russian Empire, with the Emir as the vassal of the Russian Tsar, whereas the northern part of what is now Tajikistan and Pamir, plus Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan were colonized by the Tsarist Russia as Turkistan General-Governorship.⁵⁹ The first relatively detailed descriptions of the settlement were created by some Russian authors in the nineteenth century. The political and administrative expansion of the Russian Empire to the East in the second half of nineteenth century triggered the necessity to intensify research activities in the newly acquired domains in Central Asia and its adjacent territories, competing for influence in the region with other leading powers, most notably China and the British Empire.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Mukimov, and Mamadzhanova, *Arkitektura Sovetskogo Tadjikistana*.

⁶⁰ Sergej Abashin, Bahtier Babadzhanov, Ojbek Makhmudov, Tat'jana Kotiukova, *Turkestan v imperskoi politike Rossii: Monografiia v dokumentakh* [Turkestan in Imperial Politics of Russia: A Monograph in Documents], (2016), accessed February 15, 2020, <https://www.litres.ru/b-babadzhanov/turkestan-v-imperskoy-politike-rossii-monografiya-v-dokument/chitat-onlayn/>

Expeditions to the General-Governorship of Turkistan were of great interest for the Russian Empire, both politically and economically. It was important to discover and research the wealth of mineral resources, history, anthropology and ethnography of the region, for which the Russian Imperial Geographic Society was responsible.⁶¹ The routes of the scientific expeditions were usually laid out in a way covering Samarqand, Bukhara, the Fergana Valley and all the way to Pamir, whereas Dushanbe, as part of the Bukhara Emirate, was oftentimes left out.⁶² For example, Russian diplomat Lev Kostenko, who went on a mission to Bukhara through Samarqand, gives a detailed description of the latter emphasizing the differences within the architectural image and urban landscape of the city divided into Russian and vernacular parts – a feature characteristic of all major cities in the region occupied by the Russian Empire.⁶³ One of the first Russian researchers to study the that time unknown mountain system of the Tien Shan, Nikolai Severtsov conducted an extensive natural scientific expedition to Turkestan assigned by the Russian Imperial Geographic Society. However, his itinerary excluded the southern part of Central Asia, where Dushanbe is located.⁶⁴

Very few travelers made it to the southernmost part of Eastern Bukhara, and even fewer left any notes on it. Boris Litvinov, an officer of the Tsarist Army in Turkestan went past Dushanbe while traveling to Pamir through Bukhara in the early twentieth century and

⁶¹ *Russkie Turkestanskije Ekspeditsii v Pis'mah S.M. Dudina k S.F. Oldenburgu iz Sobraniia Sankt-Peterburgskogo Filiala Arhiva RAN* [Russian Expeditions to Turkestan in Letters from Dudin to Oldenburg from the Collections of the Saint-Petersburg Branch of the Russian Academy of Science], accessed March 14, 2020, <http://naukarus.com/russkie-turkestanskije-ekspeditsii-v-pismah-s-m-dudina-k-s-f-oldenburgu-iz-sobraniia-sankt-peterburgskogo-filiala-arhiva-r>

⁶² *Aziatskaia Rossiia. Illiustrirovannyi geograficheskii sbornik, sostavlennyi prepodavateliami geografii A. Kruberom, S. Grigor'evym, A. Barkovym i S. Chefranovym, 1915* [Asian Russia. Illustrated geographic collection compiled by Aleksandr Kruber, Sergej Grigoriev, Aleksandr Barkov, Sergej Chefranov, 1915], accessed March 14, 2020, https://rusneb.ru/catalog/000199_000009_004935639/

⁶³ Lev Kostenko, *Puteshestvie v Buharu Russkoi Missii* [Travel to Buhara of the Russian Mission], accessed March 14, 2020, http://drevlit.ru/docs/central_asia/XIX/1860-1880/Kostenko/text4.php

⁶⁴ Nikolai Severtsov, *Puteshestviia po Turkestanskomu kraiu* [Traveling across Turkestan], St. Petersburg: Tip. Trubnikova, 1873.

described it as a poor town where mudbrick cabins appeared among marvelous orchards, but houses made of burnt bricks were nowhere to be seen (*Figure 1*).⁶⁵ As Litvinov wrote:

“The city of Dyushambe, that beautifully stretches along the steep clay bank of the Varzob river, is no different from other cities in Bukhara and does not seem to be a commercial center. Nevertheless, it is extremely beautiful and proudly flaunts the old fortress with two dilapidated round towers, in which now lives the head of the city, the *amlyakdar*, a typical, handsome Tajik”.⁶⁶

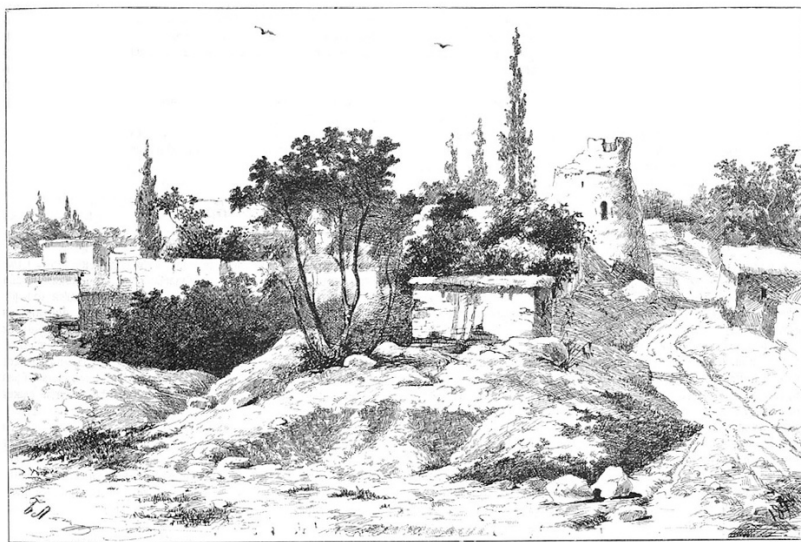


Figure 1 Illustration used as a visual aid to the depiction of Dushanbe in the diary of Officer Litvinov. Source: *Russian Turkestan*, LiveJournal, accessed May 8, 2020, <https://rus-turk.livejournal.com/101278.html>⁶⁷

Travel notes, diary entries, drawings and sketches made by officers of the Tsarist Army in the nineteenth century contained descriptions of specific oriental features, images of the local population. They served to shape the public opinion about the expansion of the Russian Empire to the South and the East, and to provide an image independent from that in western periodicals in a quest to claim a civilizing, “Europeanizing” role for Russia that was traditionally attributed to Western Europe.⁶⁸ Litvinov’s description of Dushanbe is a typical

⁶⁵ Dmitrii Chumichev, *Stalinabad stolitsa Tadzhikskoi SSR*, [Stalinabad the capital of Tajik SSR], Moscow: State Publisher of Geographic Literature, 1950. In this book Litvinov is referred to as a Russian traveler, however it is the same person who served in the Tsarist Army and made a drawing and a short description of Dushanbe; *Russian Turkestan*.

⁶⁶ *Russian Turkestan*, accessed May 8, 2020, <https://rus-turk.livejournal.com/101278.html>

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ksenia Polouektova, “*Foreign land as a metaphor of one’s own*”: travel and travel writing in Russian history and culture, 1200s-1800s. (PhD diss., Budapest, Central European University, 2009), 184.

example of the travel literature of nineteenth-century Romanticism. Dushanbe was a village with mudbrick wagons and lacking roads. Litvinov, however, romanticized the local landscape, calling the village a city, providing a poetic description of its location and rendering a sense of antiquity to the dilapidated fortress. Such a presentation also served to show his respect to the head of the city reflecting on his handsome looks. In a sketch he made probably of the central part of the village to illustrate the text, Litvinov stressed the abundance of greenery, the picturesque character of the uneven roads and earthen dwellings harmoniously completed by the ruins of what used to be the fortress. Similarly to the text, the image is also a typical expression of nineteenth-century Romanticism.

Before becoming a Soviet capital city in 1929, Dushanbe was a typical Central Asian settlement without any monumental architecture and torn by the resistance of the Bukhara Emirate against the establishment of the Soviet power.⁶⁹ The urban architecture of Dushanbe takes its root from the establishment of the Soviet rule. Descriptions of Dushanbe after the establishment of the Soviet power testify of a radical shift in the perception of the settlement. Litvinov's romanticist depiction of the otherwise muddy, poor settlement on the southern borders of the Russian Empire's protectorate stands in stark contrast with the narrative employed by the Soviet expeditors. As a relatively early account, an excerpt from the report to the Soviet Revolutionary Committee (the Bolsheviks' provisional government) from 1924 calls Dushanbe a half-city – half-village, which, before becoming the capital city, accounted for “42 dilapidated adobe wagons with only 242 inhabitants.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Mukimov and Mamadzhanova, *Arkhitektura Sovetskogo Tadjikistana*.

⁷⁰ Dushanbe – stolitsa kraia [Dushanbe – capital of the country], accessed March 16, 2020, <http://vecherka.tj/?p=39028>.

2.2 Becoming the capital of The Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic

After declaring Dushanbe capital of the newly formed Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic in 1929, the city was immediately renamed to Stalinabad – the name it bore until 1961. The new name for the brand new capital city was meant to symbolize a new beginning for the Tajik Soviet people, towards a bright socialist future, which would not have been possible without the genius of Stalin.⁷¹ The name, like hundreds of other toponyms across the Soviet Union, was the semantic embodiment of the Soviet state-building – it combined the Soviet ideological foundation with linguistic features of the relevant nationalities: e.g. Dushanbe – Stalin-abad – Dushanbe in Tajikistan versus Tsaritsyno – Stalin-grad – Volgograd in Russia.⁷²

When the territory of the Soviet republics was designated, the historically established boundaries were ignored, and the traditional forms of identity were destroyed. Tajikistan received the most backward and disadvantaged territories of former Eastern Bukhara and the mountains, whereas the intellectually and culturally rich and historically and ethnically Tajik Samarqand and Bukhara were given to Uzbekistan.⁷³ After the Soviets came to power, the territorial division and administrative units of what is now Central Asia still changed a few times, and the current borders of the Central Asian republics were established only in 1936.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Oleg Solov'ev, *Otazhenie kommunisticheskoi ideologii v russkoi toponimike sovetskogo vremeni* [Reflection of communist ideology in Russian toponymy of the Soviet era], (MA Thesis, University of Gent, 2008).

⁷² Dem'ianov, Ryzhenko, "Ideologia, toponimika, politika pamiati: O massovom pereimenovanii gorodov v SSSR" [Ideology, Toponymy, Policy of Memory: About City Renaming in the USSR], in *Vestnik Omskogo universiteta. "Istoricheskie nauki, № 4 (16)., 2017, 153–160.*

⁷³ Zubaidullo Ubaidulloev, "The Russian-Soviet Legacies in Reshaping the National Territories in Central Asia: A Catastrophic Case of Tajikistan", in *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 6, no. 1 (1 January 2015): 79–87. (hereafter: Ubaidulloev, "The Russian-Soviet Legacies in Reshaping the National Territories in Central Asia: A Catastrophic Case of Tajikistan")

⁷⁴ Uuriintuya Batsaikhan and Marek Dabrowski, "Central Asia – Twenty-Five Years after the Breakup of the USSR", in *Russian Journal of Economics* 3, 2017, 296–320.

The architectural image of the city was heavily influenced by the Neoclassicism of Leningrad, as architects from this city were mandated to design most of the buildings in Dushanbe serving various social functions. The first master plan for urban development was designed by the Town Planning Institute of Leningrad (Giprogor) and adopted in 1938. Architects, surveyors, constructors came to build the city also from Moscow and Kharkiv.⁷⁵ Large groups of intellectuals were sent to Dushanbe to build and develop the new republic and its capital city from Bukhara and Samarqand, the two major, predominantly Tajik cities of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, which were way more advanced in many social spheres including architecture.⁷⁶ The relocation of non-Tajik specialists from the European part of the country and from Uzbekistan was probably part of the general resettlement plan in 1928-1933 to eliminate the backwardness of the local population and streamline the sovietization process.⁷⁷ Dushanbe's location in a highly seismic zone was an influential factor in the urban development of the city. Architects faced a difficult task when designing the architectural image of Dushanbe since they had to take into account the climatic conditions, the morphology and geology of the area. These factors, combined with the limited capacity of the local construction industry, the absence of adequate construction expertise limited the number of floors of residential buildings in the newly emerging city to maximum three. Consequently, in 1937, out of 4,295 buildings, only seventy-three had two stories, and three-story buildings numbered no more than two. The population of the Tajik capital at that time was 50,000

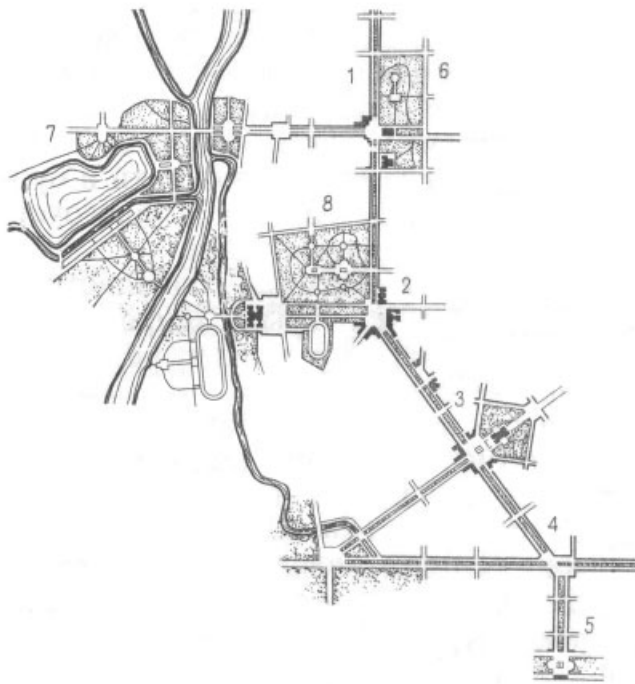
⁷⁵ Ritter, Shapiro-Obermair, Steiner, and Wachter, *Soviet Modernism 1955-1991. Unknown History*.

⁷⁶ Ubaidulloev, "The Russian-Soviet Legacies in Reshaping the National Territories in Central Asia: A Catastrophic Case of Tajikistan."

⁷⁷ Kassymbekova, *Despite Cultures: Early Soviet Rule in Tajikistan*.

people.⁷⁸ To put this into perspective, the capital of the Kazakh Soviet Republic, Alma-Ata had 250,000 inhabitants.⁷⁹

Wide streets and spacious areas with abundant greenery, combined with a picturesque landscape characterized the urban fabric of Stalinabad. With the first master plan designed in 1938 based on a scheme devised in 1935, the development of the city started on the left bank of the Dushanbe River. The master plan focused on the central part of the city (*Figure 2*).⁸⁰



*Figure 2 Scheme of the central part of Dushanbe, 1935. 1-Putovskii Square; 2-Lenin Square; 3-800th Anniversary of Moscow Square; 4-Aini Square; 5-Kuibyshev Square; 6-Kirov Park; 7-Komsomol Lake; 8-City Gardens*⁸¹

According to the master plan, particular attention was paid to the creation of a public space that centered around Prospekt Lenina (today's Rudaki avenue), a broad and green artery of

⁷⁸ Safarmuhammad Jusufdzhanov, "Gorod rozhdenyi družboi" [City Born by Friendship], in *Arkhitektura, Stroitel'stvo, Dizain*, accessed March 10, 2020, <http://www.archjournal.ru/rus/01%2042%202006/gorod.htm>

⁷⁹ Adambek Kapanov, "Obnovlenniy Oblik Stolicy Respubliki" [Refreshed Image of the Capital of the Republic, in *Architecture of USSR*], in *Arkhitektura SSSR*, no. 12 (1972): 40–41.

⁸⁰ "General'nyi plan rekonstruktsii Dushanbe 1934" [Master Plan of Reconstruction of Dushanbe], in *Arkhitektura i Proektirovanie | Spravochnik*, accessed February 17, 2020, <http://arx.novosibdom.ru/node/2447>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

the city connecting several areas into a single spatial system, including the Central Government Square.⁸² The public and residential buildings designed and built from the late 1930s to the mid-1950s displayed the style of Stalinist architecture, which drifted towards a mixture of Gothic, Baroque and Neoclassical elements manifest through a combination of columns, arches and statuary.⁸³

After the adoption of the urban development master plan in 1938, the next twenty years were marked by the construction of the buildings of *the Opera and Ballet Theater, the Tajik State University, the Government Palace, the National Library, the Hotel Vakhsh, the 25th Anniversary Stele* and a number of residential buildings along the Lenin Avenue.⁸⁴ This period of constructions was interrupted only by the Second World War. These constructions were meant to embody the Soviet modernization doctrine “national in form and socialist in content”, implying that the State encouraged the diversity in architectural styles stemming in national patterns or local conditions.⁸⁵

Building the city from scratch in extreme climatic conditions, bearing in mind the high seismicity and the specific morphology, and, at the same time, ensuring the fusion of European Classicism with national traditions was a big challenge for the architects. The failure to achieve a harmonious embedding of oriental ornaments into modern trends and the

⁸²“Gradoostroitel'stvo. 1933–1941” [Urban Planning. 1933–1941], in *Vseobshchaia Istoriiia Arkhitektury. Tom 12. Kniga Pervaia. Arkhitektura SSSR*, accessed December 17, 2019, http://ussr.totalarch.com/general_history_architecture/1933_1941/town

⁸³ Ross Woolfe, *In Drawings, The Historical Trajectory of Soviet Architecture*, accessed February 18, 2020, <https://www.archdaily.com/491093/in-drawings-the-historical-trajectory-of-soviet-architecture>

⁸⁴ *Dushanbe – stolitsa kraia* [Dushanbe – capital of the country], accessed May 30, 2020, <http://vecherka.tj/?p=39028>.

⁸⁵ Olga Nikonova, "Soviet Patriotism in a Comparative Perspective: A Passion for Oxymora", in *Studies in East European Thought* 62, no. 3/4 (2010): 353-76. Explanation: “The Soviet way of modernization built on the total ideologization of art and culture put at the service of socio-political doctrines. At the same time, ethnocentrism was an important constituent element of the ideology building, with the cultural policy declaring the right to national identity”.

overindulgence of the Constructivist style in the 1930s was touched upon and heavily criticized in the speech of the Tajik delegation to the All-Union Assembly of Soviet Architects in Moscow in 1937:

“Young Republic, rapidly flourishing at the frontier of the capitalist East, Socialist Tajikistan, deserves architecture that is as per its stylistics, expressiveness of forms and elements, in combination with best national features and specificities of lifestyle, climate and culture of the Tajik people, would honestly reflect the great epoch...”⁸⁶

Commenting on the forced development of Constructivism in Dushanbe, Professor Rustam Mukimov stated that the lack of knowledge of local architectural traditions by the architects was further exacerbated by a complete lack of understanding of architecture by local authorities, which resulted in the simplification of structures and motifs and a “flaunting of poverty.”⁸⁷

The construction of the city in the locality that used to be “masses of dirt” was meant to be the embodiment of the new era promised by the Soviet rule, hence the erection of buildings of European Neoclassicism otherwise unimaginable in the region were meant to represent “Soviet superiority and might.”⁸⁸

In the Soviet architecture of the 1930s Constructivism started to lose ground. The leading Soviet architect and editor-in-chief of the journal “*Arkhitektura SSSR*”, Karo Alabian labelled constructivism as the “decaying bourgeois architecture” of the West, and promoted the idea of turning to the best examples of folk art and traditions by employing the best techniques and practices of classical architecture, while relying on the state-of-the-art architectural and

⁸⁶ Veselovskii, Mukimov, Mamadnazarov, and Mamadjanova, *Arkhitektura Sovetskogo Tadzhikistana*.

⁸⁷ Mukimov, “On the Empire’s Periphery.”

⁸⁸ Kassymbekova, *Despite Cultures: Early Soviet Rule in Tajikistan*.

construction facilities.⁸⁹ This idea came to fruition in Stalinabad through the project of *the Opera and Ballet Theater*. Architects took into account the national traditions of the Tajiks, the specific climatic conditions of Stalinabad and the locality of the building. They made an attempt to deviate from the that time prevailing traditional scheme of an auditorium in favor of the local environmental conditions. Through the open stairs located symmetrically on both sides of the main entrance, there are walkways leading from the square directly to the second floor (*Figure 3*).



Figure 3 Facade of the Opera and Ballet Theater, 2018. Source: Gulnoza Khasanova

During the hot seasons, this system of separate entrances serve as functional amenities for the audience.⁹⁰ The theatre was the first attempt to define the image of a large public building in the city that encapsulated architectural order with traditional ornamentation, giving an even broader space for the latter in the interior decoration.⁹¹ The interior décor consists of national ornaments in intricate molding and carving. The walls on both sides of the portal to the spectators' hall were decorated using the national technique called “ganch carving” (gesso clay) (see *Figure 4*).

⁸⁹ Karo Alabian, *Zadachi Sovetskoi Arkhitektury* [Objectives of Soviet Architecture] (Moscow: 1937), accessed September 5, 2019, <http://tehne.com/library/alabyan-k-s-zadachi-sovetskoy-arhitektury-moskva-1937>.

⁹⁰ “Krupnye Obshchestvennye Zdaniia SSSR. 1933—1941 | Arkhitektura SSSR i Sotsialisticheskikh Stran” [Big Public Buildings of USSR. 1933-1941 | Architecture of USSR and Socialist Countries], accessed September 5, 2019, http://ussr.totalarch.com/general_history_architecture/1933_1941/public

⁹¹ Mukimov and Mamadzhanova, *Arkhitektura Sovetskogo Tadzhikistana*.

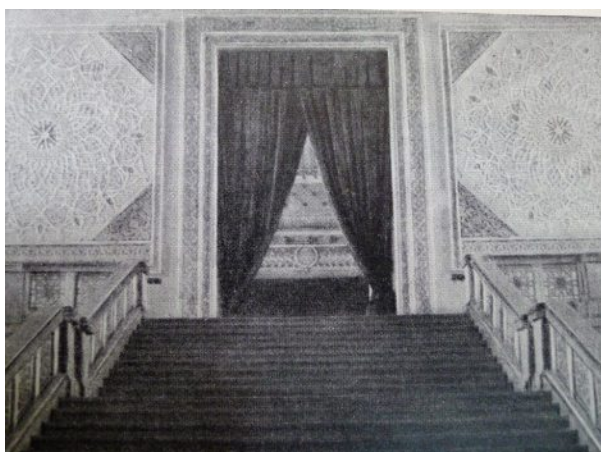


Figure 4 Entrance to the spectating hall with ganch carving. Source: Dmitrii Chumichev, *Stalinabad stolitsa Tadjikskoi SSR*, [Stalinabad the capital of Tajik SSR], Moscow: State Publisher of Geographic Literature, 1950.⁹²

Pointed arches and architectural orders, as well as ganch carving and plaster ornaments were characteristic for the buildings of that period. They reflected the architectural traditions of the early Middle Ages influenced by the Arab conquest (in the eighth century).⁹³ To bring another example, the architectural orders on the façade of the buildings of the Parliament and the Pedagogical University allude to the temple in the ancient Penjikent, northern Tajikistan (see Figure 5, Figure 6, Figure 7).



Figure 5 Axonometric projection of an ancient temple in Penjikent. Source: Rustam Mukimov and Salija Mamadzhanova, *Arkhitektura Sovetskogo Tadjikistana / Pervyi Etap Razvitiia Arkhitektury v Tadjikistane (1922-1941)* [Architecture of Soviet Tajikistan / First Stage of the Development of Architecture in Tajikistan (1922-1941)] (Dushanbe: Maorif, 1990)⁹⁴

⁹² Chumichev, *Stalinabad stolitsa Tadjikskoi SSR*.

⁹³ Mukimov and Mamadzhanova, *Arkhitektura Sovetskogo Tadjikistana*.

⁹⁴ Ibid.



Figure 6 Pedagogical University, 2018. Source: Gulnoza Khasanova



Figure 7 Facade of the building of Parliament, 2018. Source: Gulnoza Khasanova

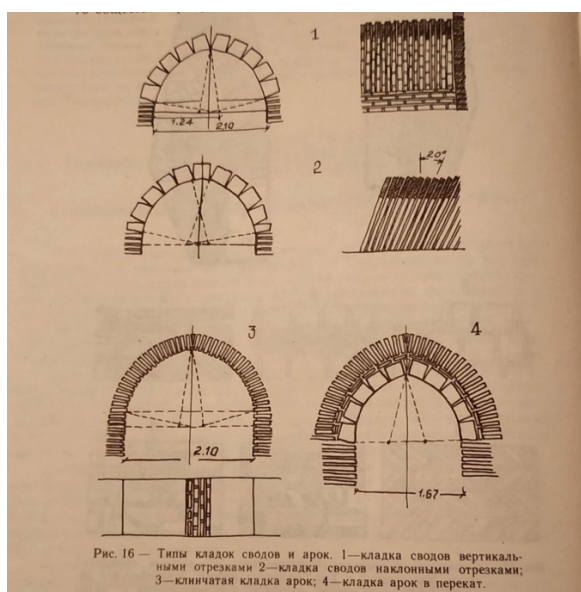


Figure 8 Types of arches and domes in early Middle Ages. Source: Rustam Mukimov and Salija Mamadzhanova, *Arkhitektura Sovetskogo Tadjikistana / Pervyi Etap Razvitiia Arkhitektury v Tadjikistane (1922-1941)* [Architecture of Soviet Tajikistan / First Stage of the Development of Architecture in Tajikistan (1922-1941)] (Dushanbe: Maorif, 1990)⁹⁵

In the early Middle Ages, pointed arches and domes were constructed four different ways (Figure 8). While externally it is impossible to identify which of the four types was used when constructing the buildings of the Local History Museum and the Public Library, it is, however, evident that the architects had taken this architectural element as a basis when designing the façade (Figure 9, Figure 10).

⁹⁵ Ibid.



Figure 9 Public Library (now Chamber of Accounts), 2018. Source: Gulnoza Khasanova



Figure 10 Local History Museum, 2018. Source: Gulnoza Khasanova

The Tajik Republic became the subject of interest for many people of various expertise who wanted to explore this exotic territory on the southernmost frontiers of the vast Soviet Union. Although in some cases Stalinabad was not the ultimate point of destination due to the diversity of missions, travelers nevertheless were keen to eyewitness how a former village was growing into a brand-new capital city.

Stalinabad was mentioned in the diary of the Soviet geologist Nikolai Fedorovskii published in 1937, in which he described his expeditions to Soviet Central Asia, including Tajikistan.⁹⁶ It is a travelogue about the search for rare and precious metals for the socialist industry, and about lively images of people he met along the way, whom he described as heroes who paved the way to the depths of the earth in distant deserts. Fedorovskii also gave a glimpse to the architectural and natural landscapes of Central Asian cities he had visited. As he described it, Stalinabad was a big, newly built city, with wide squares and new administrative and residential buildings in construction, which turned what used to be a settlement of spontaneous wagons into the cultural center of Tajikistan. There is a touch of skepticism and irony, however, as he elaborates further on the architectural image of the city. He called the town planning a “failed flight of fancy” by a “fiction architect” as he continues:

⁹⁶ Nikolai Fedorovskii, *Po goram i pustyniam Srednei Azii* [Along the mountains and deserts of Central Asia], accessed May 30, 2020, <https://www.litmir.me/br/?b=178745>

“It is difficult and expensive to lay asphalt or even pave roads. The city is drowning in dust, and in mud during rains, and suffers greatly from the lack of water supply and sewage system.”⁹⁷

Writers and reporters Boris Lapin and Zakhar Khatsrevin visited Tajikistan to collect songs of the Tajik working class that “reflected the fight of working peasants against the counter-revolutionary movement”.⁹⁸ The songs and poems collected from a different part of the republic were published in 1932. They had one long sentence about Stalinabad, and even this paragraph is sufficient to understand the ideological narrative as opposed to pre-Soviet backwardness. The description of Stalinabad is comparative: buildings of glass and concrete are contrasted with mudbrick houses, more automobiles and bicycles with less camels and donkeys. The most notable change in the urban landscape, however, is the shift from traditional clothes to the European style, and the lack of women wrapped in “sacks with black muzzles made of horse hair.”⁹⁹ The choice of words was probably dictated by the desire to oppose vernacular features as a vestige of the past to everything which is urban and modern. The same narrative was applied by geographer Dmitrii Chumichev in his book about Stalinabad published as late as in 1950. Chumichev’s agenda was to create an image of Stalinabad as a contemporary of Soviet rule, a young satellite city of progress and development under the careful guidance of Stalin, who, it must be noted, had never visited the city. The author quite frequently used the words “backward”, “illiterate”, “village” for old Dushanbe as opposed to the rapid urban development, education and industrial advancement, all thanks to the Soviet rule and personally to Stalin.¹⁰⁰

Chumichev distinguished three stages of creating the architectural image of Stalinabad:

⁹⁷ Ibid., 24

⁹⁸ Lapin and Khatsrevin, *Stalinabadskii arkhiv*, 8.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 7

¹⁰⁰ Chumichev, *Stalinabad stolitsa Tadzhikskoi SSR*.

- A utilitarian stage characterized by the construction of simple, functional buildings that were urgently needed to cater for the basic needs of the newly proclaimed city which, in reality, was a village, and of its growing population.
- Search for the architectural style of the capital city, which coincided with the “dominance of Constructivism.”
- Acquisition of a modern architectural style, which was introduced before and interrupted by the Second World War and gave rise to many public and residential buildings.¹⁰¹

When Chumichev visited Stalinabad and his book was published in 1950, Stalin was still alive and Constructivism was harshly criticized, hence not a single image of any iconic building in this style, like that of *the Post Office* or *the Supreme Council*, was used in his book.¹⁰² This already implies that after the Second World War, there was a change in the perception of the architecture of the new Soviet Tajik Republic.

2.3 Dushanbe after the Second World War

Due to the fact that Central Asia was located far behind the front line during the Second World War, many light industries from other parts of the Soviet Union were transferred to the region, including Stalinabad, which called for the intensification of industrial development.¹⁰³ At the same time, the pace of residential construction had considerably slowed down compared to the pre-war period.

The decade following the Second World War was marked by a new wave of constructing public and residential buildings, which, in fact, were planned before the onset of the war. The state funding was increased, which enabled the architects to continue their quest for the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 36

¹⁰² Both buildings have been demolished recently.

¹⁰³ Vladimir Semenov, “Poselki dlia predpriatii evakuirovannykh v Sredniuiu Aziiu” [Settlements for Industries Evacuated to Central Asia], in *Arkhitektura SSSR*, (Moscow: Poligraphkniga, 1941), 44-47.

modern national image that would combine current trends in construction with the local architectural heritage. Compared to Russia, where architects were limited in creativity and were supposed to follow the standards approved by the top management, architects “at the borders of the empire” enjoyed more freedom in architectural expression, which in some cases would lead to an excessive use of grills and ornaments.¹⁰⁴ Classical architecture was regarded as quintessential and its interaction with national elements was seen as a solution for ensuring a national form in the international Soviet architecture. This is why the continuous creative search for a specifically Tajik style in some instances had led to the overindulgence of the decorative side of architecture, with excessive use of ornaments, arches, columns and carving.¹⁰⁵

Vsevolod Veselovskii, senior architect of the republic who came to work in Tajikistan from Leningrad in 1937, was critical towards the excessive use of grills not only as a sunscreen but also in those parts of the buildings where they were utterly out of place, and called it overindulgence.¹⁰⁶ Veselovskii was against archaizing and the blind imitation of classical forms. Professor Mukimov, a graduate of the Department of Architecture established and headed by Veselovskii, was also among those who encouraged the town planners to study the practice of traditional Tajik residential construction and cooperate with artists, sociologists and architectural historians.¹⁰⁷

Architect Iurii Parkhov, now living in Russia, came to Tajikistan in 1965 from Kazakhstan to study at the Department of Architecture, and stayed in Dushanbe after graduation to design such remarkable projects as the buildings of the Ministry of Interior and the House of Political

¹⁰⁴ Ritter, Shapiro-Obermair, Steiner, and Wachter, *Soviet Modernism 1955-1991. Unknown History*.

¹⁰⁵ Veselovskii, *Arkhitektura i gradostroitel'stvo Tadzhikistana*.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*.

Education in Dushanbe. Parkhov calls himself a devotee of classical architecture, which resulted in disagreements with local employers who demanded decorations with grills and ornaments in excess. He recounts: “Of course this is a matter of taste. I, for example, could not stand it and I tried to avoid it. To hide one’s ‘sins’ behind those grills and then call it architecture: this I could not do.”¹⁰⁸

The resolution of the Communist Party Central Committee and the Council of Ministers “On the elimination of superfluities in design work and construction” issued on November 4, 1955, became a milestone in the development of the architectural image of Stalinabad and the entire USSR.¹⁰⁹ Determining the nature of the creative tasks faced by architects, the resolution regulated that Soviet architecture should be characterized by simplicity, the austerity of forms and cost-efficiency in decisions. The artistic component in architecture was recognized as something worthless and unnecessary. Reducing the construction costs became a priority, which entailed the modification of urban planning approaches in the Soviet Union. Developing new territories and public spaces without damaging the existing infrastructure – this was one of the guiding principles of Soviet urban development.¹¹⁰

Influenced by the resolution, towards the end of 1960s, references to the national architectural traditions would be limited to architectural solutions for climatic challenges, for instance, the use of sunscreen constructions, inner courtyards, and ventilation.¹¹¹ However, some architectural sites demonstrate a unique fusion of traditional patterns with modernity (*Figure 11*).

¹⁰⁸ Ritter, Shapiro-Obermair, Steiner, and Wachter, *Soviet Modernism 1955-1991. Unknown History*.

¹⁰⁹ Mukimov, “On the Empire’s Periphery”.

¹¹⁰ Olga Kazakova. “The Perfect Soviet City of 1960s and 70s”, YouTube. GARAGEMCA, January 24, 2015, accessed May 30, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWg3Zq_hGCI.

¹¹¹ Veselovskii, *Arkhitektura i gradostroitel'stvo Tadzhikistana*.



Figure 11 Farogat tea house, 1974. Source: Set of postcards “Dushanbe”, Moscow: Planeta, 1974¹¹²

Modern in style, the architecture of the *Farogat Tea House* combined the traditional mural technique with ganch and wood carving in the interior with grills that were meant to protect the visitors from the sun. The simple, concise architecture harmoniously blending with distinctive patterns of traditional ornamentation coupled with the advantageous location amidst heavy greenery in the city park turned the Tea House to one of the favorite places of the residents and visitors of Stalinabad/Dushanbe. It fell victim, however, to the capital reconstruction of the city park in 2007 and was completely torn down.

From 1960 onwards, this turn in architectural vision and the innovations in construction industry resulted in designing and erecting public and residential buildings which grew in size both horizontally and vertically. The advancement in the construction industry allowed for the construction of residential tower blocks as high as eight stories.¹¹³ The elaboration of a monolithic, beamless frame with multi-tier columns allowed for constructing high-rise residential and public buildings that would withstand the earthquakes to which Tajikistan is highly prone. This type of construction was then licensed as *Tadzhikskii Karkas* (Tajik frame)

¹¹² Set of postcards “Dushanbe” (Moscow: Planeta, 1974).

¹¹³ A.V. Ikonnikov and V.I. Pavlichenkov, “Gradostroitel'stvo. 1955—1970” [Urban Development. 1955-1970], in *Vseobshchaia Istoriia Arkhitektury* (Moscow: Strojizdat, 1975).

(Figure 12).¹¹⁴ The next Urban Development Plan adopted in 1966 foresaw the construction of earthquake proof buildings higher than three stories – first of a kind in a seismic-prone country.

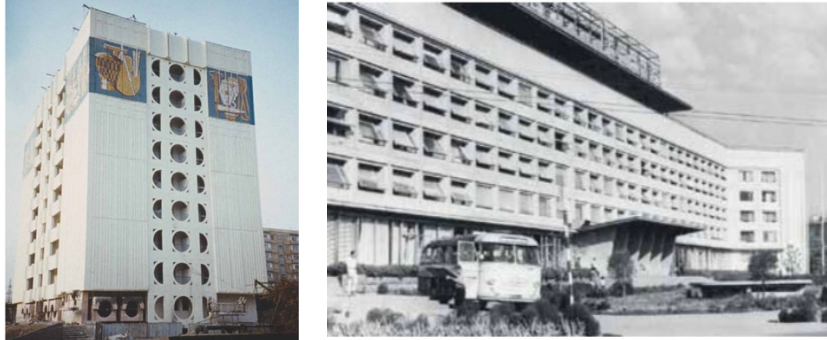


Figure 12 Residential building and Hotel Dushanbe using “Tajik frame”, ca. 1970s. Source: Rustam Mukimov, “On the Empire’s Periphery,” in *Soviet Modernism 1955-1991. Unknown History* (Zürich: Architekturzentrum Wien and Park Books, 2012), 239-243¹¹⁵

The discovery of traditional architectural heritage continued in the 1970s and acquired a much wider and deeper conceptualization. The search for national identity in architecture came to fruition in public buildings, such as the *Sadbarg* consumer services center. The modern building would stun with its beauty and unusual shape. The curvilinear tracery around the perimeter of the building is meant to serve as a sunscreen during hot seasons, which is in stark contrast with the double-glazed windows and plastic facework that has covered the building since 2006 (Figure 13).



¹¹⁴ Mukimov, “On the Empire’s Periphery”.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Figure 13 Consumer services center. Source: Rustam Mukimov and Salija Mamadzhanova, *Zodchestvo Tadjikistana* [Architectonics of Tajikistan] (Dushanbe: Maorif, 1990), 1980s vs. nowadays. Source: *Zhizn' v Dushanbe segodnia* [Life in Dushanbe Today], accessed May 16, 2020, <http://dushanbetoday.blogspot.com/>¹¹⁶

Another public building that embodies the new trends in architecture with the focus on the fusion of national identity and modernity is *the Palace of Professional Unions* (Figure 14). The architect of this building, Vil' Sheluhin, and his workshop developed a series of residential and public buildings taking into account the climatic conditions of Tajikistan and the local traditions.¹¹⁷



Figure 14 *Palace of Professional Unions*, ca. 1983. Source: Rustam Mukimov, “On the Empire’s Periphery,” in *Soviet Modernism 1955-1991. Unknown History* (Zürich: Architekturzentrum Wien and Park Books, 2012), 239-243¹¹⁸

The Palace of Professional Unions is the largest public building on the right bank of the Dushanbinka River. The spacious inner courtyard of this building flowing into a green park, the pools with fountains allowing intensive air circulation all echo the local architectural traditions.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Rustam Mukimov and Salija Mamadzhanova, *Zodchestvo Tadjikistana* [Architectonics of Tajikistan] (Dushanbe: Maorif, 1990), and *Zhizn' v Dushanbe segodnia* [Life in Dushanbe Today], accessed May 16, 2020, <http://dushanbetoday.blogspot.com/>

¹¹⁷ Gafur Shermatov, “Dushanbe: Istoria v Fotografiah - Arkhitektor Obschestvennykh Zdanii” [Dushanbe: History in Photographs - Architect of Public Buildings], Asia Plus, February 3, 2014, accessed November 12, 2019, <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/society/20140203/dushanbe-istoriya-v-fotografyakh-arkhitektor-obshchestvennykh-zdaniy>.

¹¹⁸ “Soviet Modernism 1955-1991.” Architekturzentrum Wien, accessed May 20, 2020, http://wiki.azw.at/sovietmodernism_database/home.php.

¹¹⁹ Mukimov, “On the Empire’s Periphery”.

The House of Political Education, the winner of the Council of Ministers Prize, sort of crowns the array of public buildings built in that period. Intended for large republican meetings and conferences, the five-story rectangular construction has a large conference hall surrounded with training rooms, offices and foyers. The lower foyer under the conference hall adjoins a smaller conference hall. The atmosphere of solemnity reigns in the simple, restrained interior design. The facades of the building are protected from overheating and the sun by a variety of solutions such as grills and metal decking, which, in combination with vegetation and fountains, ensures air ventilation (Figure 15).

The building is still in use, though renamed to *Kohi Vahdat Cinema and Concert Hall* after the independence, and it still accommodates events of national and international importance.



Figure 15 House of Political Education, 1985. Source: Set of postcards "Dushanbe", Moscow: Plakat, 1985¹²⁰

The erection of a sculptural ensemble with the monument of Sadriddin Aini, Tajik national poet and writer in its center on *the Aini Square* in the 1980s represents a turn to historical heritage in urban design and architecture.¹²¹ The sculptural groups of the ensemble illustrate the themes from Aini's famous novels. The fact that the entire sculptural ensemble was

¹²⁰ Set of postcards "Dushanbe" (Moscow: Plakat, 1985).

¹²¹ Sadriddin Aini is the founder of Tajik Soviet literature

designed by Tajik, Azeri, and Armenian sculptors and architects and created by masons from Leningrad, using granite mined in Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Georgia, makes the whole ensemble a true symbol of unity in diversity.¹²²

The architectural image of Dushanbe has been in a constant transformation, affected by the actual political agenda, the pace of industrialization and architectural trends. Looking at the phases of urban development in Dushanbe, from its declaration as the capital of the Tajik SSR in 1924 up until the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, it can be concluded that the architects who created the image of the city were in constant search of its true identity.

¹²² M. Davidzon, and V. Yurlov, *Guidebook Dushanbe* (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1983). (hereafter: Davidzon and Yurlov, *Guidebook Dushanbe*).

Chapter 3 – Creating the image of Socialist Dushanbe

This chapter discusses the narrative created by the visual representation of Dushanbe as it transformed from a village into a capital city during the Soviet age and is still under redevelopment in the post-independence era. Images were created and used in various media, and their visual analysis will reveal the patterns and agenda of the times they reflect. The chapter looks into visuals used in printed and electronic media to offer an understanding of how they served the state in showcasing the achievements of building Socialism and the transformations of the urban fabric after independence.¹²³ The chapter offers examples of how the state employed photographic images to create a cultural memory of socialist transformations juxtaposing them to the backwardness inherited from the Tsarist Russia. It also gives an analysis of the visual representation of post-Soviet Dushanbe reflecting geopolitical changes and processes of nation-building that have been taking place since the independence of Tajikistan.

3.1 Dushanbe as part of the socialist construction: 1926-1945

Dushanbe, a village in the Bukhara Emirate, a Central Asian protectorate of the vast Russian Empire, was not in the focus of Tsarist photographers who were rather interested in the

¹²³ “SSSR. Epokha Sotsializma” [USSR. Era of Socialism], accessed May 26, 2019, <https://www.booksite.ru/fulltext/1/001/008/106/977.htm>.

oriental “exquisite jewel” of the imperial crown of Nicolas II, Samarqand.¹²⁴ Even within the Soviet Union, Tajikistan was still a marginalized part of the Uzbek SSR before 1929. It started to attract more attention from the Central Government only after becoming a fully-fledged Soviet Republic.

The first collection of images about Soviet Dushanbe were created due to the scientific expeditions organized by the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, which had to include the new republic in its plans in order to contribute to its cultural and economic development. The first complex Tajik expedition took place in 1932 and unlike the previous expeditions that were extremely specialized, it was characterized by an integrated approach and a nation-wide significance. Its mission was to determine the prospects for the development of productive forces, new industries, and the agricultural potential of the area. The findings of this expedition were crucial in turning “the abandoned, backward colony of Tsarist Russia to a prosperous, agrarian-industrial region, which was of utmost political and economic importance.”¹²⁵ The online collection of the *Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in Saint Petersburg* (Kunstkamera) has 91 photographic images made by the expedition, 13 of which were taken in Stalinabad.¹²⁶ Some photographs depict Stalinabad as a single large construction site, with bleached one-story buildings emerging among bulks of stone and barracks made of clay. Other photographs are of anthropological and ethnographic character and portray people from predominantly local ethnic groups engaging with Caucasians (*Figure 16*).

¹²⁴ Sergej Prokudin-Gorskii, *Photographs for the Tsar: The Pioneering Color Photography of Sergei Mikhailovich Prokudin-Gorskii Commissioned by Tsar Nicolas II*, ed. Robert H. Allshouse (New York: Garden City, 1980).

¹²⁵ V. Zelenko, “Ekspedicii Akademii Nauk” [Expeditions of the Academy of Sciences] in *Front Nauki i Tekhniki*, December 1932.

¹²⁶ The Kunstkamera, accessed December 20, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2VQ5IZJ> (counted by the author)



Figure 16 Fruit sale in the market. Stalinabad, 1932. Source: Kunstkamera online collection¹²⁷

One of the images (Figure 17) displays a local market with makeshift shelters against the backdrop of plastered structures, which already represent a shift from clay barracks. The image captures the moment of purchasing a watermelon by a Caucasian woman from a local trader. The woman wearing a snow-white dress is barefooted, which may imply that she is part of the expedition travelling by car, and she might have gotten out of the car to buy a watermelon. The onlookers idling around the traders are obviously looking at the person taking the photo. All of them are wearing shoes, as it is uncomfortable to walk on the unpaved and probably hot surface barefooted. Another Caucasian woman in the background wearing a similar snow-white dress is presumably taking in the surroundings while her colleague is buying a watermelon. The photo in general shows a regular day in the local market where the mingling of people of local and European ethnicities had become habitual. It also manifests the potential of a photograph to be a powerful instrument in storytelling and delivering messages.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Photography was crucial in promoting Soviet ideology. The Soviet propaganda machine employed photography to document and demonstrate the fast pace of industrialization in the vast Soviet country to its citizens and to the West.

As the construction of Stalinabad progressed, it became increasingly important to showcase it for a wider audience. The city enjoyed its first international exposure in 1931 when an entire issue of the magazine *USSR in Construction* was dedicated to the Tajik SSR.¹²⁸ The photo reportage was made by the prominent Soviet photographer Maks Alpert who is known for photographing several major construction projects of Socialism, such as the Big Ferghana Canal in Central Asia and the *Turksib* (Turkestan-Siberia Railway)¹²⁹ The magazine published in Russian, English, French and German, had the mission to promote through documentary photography the “massive construction launched in the Soviet Union” juxtaposing the decline and economic collapse inherited from the Tsarist Russia with the fast-paced industrialization and socio-economic transformations led by the Communist Party.¹³⁰ The latter is reflected on the first page of Issue 10, which visualizes the progress made in Tajik SSR in terms of eradicating illiteracy and religiosity, and showcases the pace of industrialization, road construction, and electrification. The first page of the magazine, in line with its overarching mission, refers to the history of invasions in Central Asia characterized by a complete economic deterioration under the oppression of Tsarist Russia. The text is illustrated with a photo of a street depicting a pebbled road and earthen houses, and the semi-destroyed gate of the fortress. On the same page, there is a photograph of another, busier street

¹²⁸ “Introduction | USSR in Construction,” accessed May 17, 2020, <https://library2.usask.ca/USSRConst/>.

¹²⁹ Valerij Val’ran, *Sovetskaja fotografija. 1917-1955* [Soviet Photography. 1917-1955], Limbus-Press, 2018 <http://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT?query=сталинабад&fbclid=IwAR2kQVJ0CsaGdijuEMeYzwL9k8DsKf4vOugVyKRRRkoqnARHwN5Irg6JZhU&expedition=3630857>.

¹³⁰ Erika Wolf, “SSSR Na Stroike: Zhurnal i Ego Chitatel” [USSR in Construction: The Magazine and Its Reader], in *SSSR na strojke: Zhurnal novogo tipa*, ed. Egor Larichev, (Moscow: Agey Tomesh, 2006): 11-25. (hereafter: Wolf, “SSSR Na Stroike: Zhurnal i Ego Chitatel”).

where the houses are also made of clay bricks and hay is used for roofing. However, the stark difference between the two photographs is in the presence of an electric pole in the forefront of the second image (Figure 17).



Figure 17 First pages of the magazine. Source: *SSSR na Stroike*. Issue 10, 1931¹³¹

The accompanying text says, “Seven years ago, there used to be a small village, Dushanbe, which grew into Stalinabad, the capital city of the Tajik SSR.” It was also important to dedicate a photo to the statue of Lenin, hinting to the assumption that such radical developments in the architectural scene and socio-economic life of the Soviet Republic were taking place under the watchful eye of the Leader of workers of all countries.

The introduction on the first page and the visual representations set the tone for the reader to expect grandiosity and the scope of the construction works undertaken in the young Tajik Republic. The magazine depicts the progress made in the construction of the city from the

¹³¹ *SSSR Na Stroike* [USSR in Construction], 1931.

dilapidated mudbrick houses to wide roads and brand-new buildings. Each photograph is like an “instant arrested within a narrative flow” that provokes a tension in viewers not only about what they actually see in the photograph, but also about all the moments that had happened before and will follow after the depicted instant.¹³² Although there are some textual explanations, the photographs used in the magazine are self-explanatory and do not serve as mere illustration to the text.¹³³ The magazine exemplifies the idea of Soviet photojournalism of those times to speak with an entirely photographic language to its readership regardless of its cultural level, putting emphasis on socialist construction (*Figure 18*).¹³⁴



*Figure 18 Streets of Stalinabad. Source: SSSR na Stroike. Issue 10, 1931*¹³⁵

There are magnificent mountains in the background, a long shot of a vast street with a newly constructed road, although not yet paved with asphalt, new limed buildings, and a canonical element of the composition: electric poles along the road as a symbol of modernization. Another image depicts public transport, another sign of modernity and technological advancement. Although the magazine lacks the images of the airport and the railway station that had already been built by that time, the caption to the photograph of the new Communist

¹³² Barbie Zelizer, *About to Die: How News Images Move the Public* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3.

¹³³ Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 10.

¹³⁴ Erika Wolf, “The Context of Soviet Photojournalism, 1923-1932” in *Zimmerli Journal*, no. 2 (2004): 106–17.

¹³⁵ *SSSR na Stroike*

Party Office reads that the bus is on the way to the airport and the railway station, so the existence of these strategically important objects is mentioned too. In this respect, it does not really matter whether the bus in the picture was actually going in that direction or not. The composition of these photographs fit into the mission of the magazine outlined by the editorial staff in the very first issue from 1930: to offer “a visual image of those great changes that were taking place in the Soviet Union during the ‘socialist construction’.”¹³⁶

The ideologically charged article published under the title “Gift from the great Stalin” in the newspaper *Kommunist Tadjikistana* on February 14, 1942, shows the building of the theater constructed during the Second World War to illustrate the intensive urban development in the pre-war Stalinabad (*Figure 19*).



Figure 19 Article about the completion of the construction of the theater. Source: *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, 14.02.1942¹³⁷

Even though Tajikistan was far from the frontline, it was important to demonstrate that the path to the bright socialist future had never terminated. This was the time of the rapid pre-war growth of architecture and construction, characteristic for the formation of new cities during the second and third five-year plans. It was associated with the further implementation of the

¹³⁶ Wolf, “SSSR Na Strojke: Zhurnal i Ego Chitatel”, 12.

¹³⁷ *Kommunist Tadjikistana* [Communist of Tajikistan], 15 February 1942

principles of rational distribution and integrated development of the republic's productive forces.¹³⁸

These examples demonstrate how the Soviet state created an image of Dushanbe as a paradigm of a socialist city, the symbol of modernity and development. The combination of image and text as well as image and image were applied as a medium in this process. Photographers and journalists built on the tools of associations based on the knowledge of traditional images of cities in general, for example, by depicting roads and markets. They also created new symbols, such as the electric poles. Most importantly, they used the tool of contrasts, by bringing together images of old and new, backward and modern. The message of these images corresponds to that of the texts written about Dushanbe in the period, both being bricks in the Soviet construction of the image of modern cities.

3.2 Dushanbe after the Second World War: A city that never gets old

The narrative created by the visual representation of Dushanbe was modified depending on who it was meant for. For example, the magazine *USSR in Construction* targeted both a domestic and an international audience; to inform the former about the progress made by other fraternal republics in the Soviet Union, and to intimidate the latter with the pace of industrialization by the growing Soviet power. Therefore, the focus was made not on the architectural style, but rather on the scope and pace of constructions.

¹³⁸ “Архитектура и Проектирование: Справочник” [Architecture and Design: A Manual]. Novosibdom, accessed March 18, 2020, <http://arx.novosibdom.ru/node/2447>.

Postcards, the production of which boomed between the 1950s and the 1980s, were another visual means to demonstrate the evolution in the urban fabric of Soviet cities.¹³⁹ From 1924, the production of postcards was under the control of the State Publishing House (Gosizdat), and the thematic range varied from fine art pieces to landscapes, from monuments of architecture to the grandeur of the achievements of five-year plans.¹⁴⁰

In post-war postcards Dushanbe is shown as a city moving towards modernity. They depicted a combination of public buildings, paved roads, public transport, lamp poles and multi-story residential buildings – markers of a modern city (*Figure 20, Figure 21*).



Figure 20 Exhibition Hall of the Union of Artists, 1964. Source: Visualhistory, “Dushanbe-1964”, accessed May 25, 2020, shorturl.at/pqxQZ¹⁴¹



Figure 21 Lakhuti Avenue, 1964. Source: a set of postcards “Dushanbe”¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Marina Sambur, *Otkrytka v kontekste kul'tury: atribucija, nauchnoe opisanie, jeksponirovanie* [Postcard in the context of culture: attribution, scientific description, exposure], (PhD diss. on Cultural Studies, Moscow State University of Culture and Arts, 2014)

¹⁴⁰ Gosizdat was founded in mid-1919 to oversee the activities of the press departments. With respect to private publishers, a strict centralization policy was pursued, <https://bit.ly/38lohYC>

¹⁴¹ Visualhistory, “Dushanbe-1964”, accessed May 25, 2020, shorturl.at/pqxQZ

¹⁴² Ibid.

In contrast with the photos in pre-war journals, these postcards display the city in bright colors. Sergei Eisenstein regards color as a crucial element in regulating the intensity of composition.¹⁴³ The images in these postcards use predominantly green and red. Green stands for youth and freshness, while the red color is the symbol of the Soviet flag, the Country of Soviets who stand behind the transformations in the social and urban fabric of the city.

Roland Barthes described how photography as art impacts its perceiver: this impact can manifest itself through the historical, universal context, which he calls *studium*, when the photo catches our eye based on our understanding of its cultural and social background, or through personal associations, which he calls *punctum*, when certain details of the photo resonate with our emotions.¹⁴⁴ Bright colors with the dominance of green elicit a sense freshness and newness in the viewer, which can eventually be attributed to a new beginning, to youth.

Colorful postcards reflected the young age of the city featuring youth in different settings, be it in the reading room or at the entrance of the public library named after the Persian poet Firdausi, or in the courtyard of the university, or during leisure in a park or at the lake (Figure 22, Figure 23).



Figure 22 Komsomol Lake created by the youth of the city, 1964. Source: Visualhistory, 'Dushanbe-1964', accessed May 28, 2020, shorturl.at/pqxQZ¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Enzo D'Armenio, "Intermedial Editing in the Representations of Places of Origin," in *Visual and Linguistic Representations of Places of Origin: An Interdisciplinary Analysis*, ed. Maria Pia Pozzato, 2018: 19-48.

¹⁴⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.

¹⁴⁵ Visualhistory, "Dushanbe-1964", accessed May 28, 2020, shorturl.at/pqxQZ



Figure 23 Medical Institute named after Avicenna, 1964. Source: Visualhistory, 'Dushanbe-1964', accessed May 28, 2020, shorturl.at/pqxQZ¹⁴⁶

A photo depicting young people at the lake (Figure 22) was provided with a caption that offers a context for interpretation. It says that the lake was built by the youth of Dushanbe for their own good, and the young men in swimming trunks in the image are enjoying the fruit of their own work. The message of the postcard is about change both in terms of space and people: who would have thought that the backward village once populated by people with traditionalist mindset, would turn into a dynamic capital city in a few decades?

Another postcard (Figure 23) depicts future medical doctors in the front yard of the Medical Institute. The main figures in the photograph are the young students – two young women and two young men, which is an indication of equal rights for women and men in all spheres of life ensured by the constitution. The photograph is clearly staged, with the elderly man slightly behind the group looking straight at the camera, while the main characters are in movement and conversation. A feature pointing to the Tajik origin, albeit not obvious due to similarities with Uzbek culture, is the black and white dress of one of the young women with traditional

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

atlas print. The composition of the photograph is set in a way to capture the characters full-size against the backdrop of the façade of the neoclassical building of the institution, which creates an image of grandeur of the architectural scene.

As it was presented in Chapter 2, from the 1960s it was a new phenomenon in Dushanbe that the new constructions were high-rise blocks.¹⁴⁷ Architects were tasked to create economical buildings and structures, which by the end of 1960s led to the intensified construction of four-story brick houses as well as to the construction of the first eight-story residential houses with a monolithic reinforced concrete frame. Dushanbe started to expand on both sides of the Dushanbinka River, and a shift was made to the construction of micro-districts on the right riverside.¹⁴⁸



Figure 24 Lenin avenue, 1974. Source: *Set of postcards "Dushanbe"*, Moscow: Planeta, 1974¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ "Postanovlenie TsK KPSS, Sovmina SSSR Ot 04.11.1955 N 1871" [Ordinance of CC of CPSU, Council of Ministers as of 04.11.1955 N 1871, accessed July 15, 2019, http://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/ussr_5043.htm.

¹⁴⁸ "Gradostroitel'stvo 1955—1970." [Urban Development 1955-1970] In *Vseobshhaja Istorija Arhitektury. Kniga Pervaja. Arhitektura SSSR*, Vol. 12. (Moskva: Strojizdat, 1975).

¹⁴⁹ A set of postcards "Dushanbe" (Moscow: Planeta, 1974).



Figure 25 Lenin avenue, 1985 Source: Set of postcards "Dushanbe", Moscow: Plakat, 1985¹⁵⁰

Two postcards depicting the Lenin Avenue were produced with an eleven-year interval, in 1974 and in 1985 (Figure 24, Figure 25). Both display the same eight-story residential buildings along the avenue, but there is a striking difference between the two in the vegetation. In the postcard from 1984, trees are much taller and greener. However, in spite of the eleven-year interval, both postcards feature a construction crane, even though none of them capture any obvious construction activity. The new buildings and the crane emerge in a picturesque landscape with hills and mountains. Through the presence of the crane, the main message of these postcards is about the ongoing construction of the city, meaning there is more to expect in terms of its development. The propaganda machine made sure that citizens could see developments in the making: "an empty ditch was a canal in the making; a vacant lot where old houses or a church had been torn down, littered with rubbish and weeds, was a future park."¹⁵¹

"Not one inhabitant of the small village of clay huts which formerly stood here, could even have conceived that in its place a huge city would spring up with high-rise buildings, wide avenues and walks...", says the English version of the introductory text to the promotional

¹⁵⁰ A set of postcards "Dushanbe" (Moscow: Plakat, 1985).

¹⁵¹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

brochure “Dushanbe” published in 1979 in four languages – Russian, English, French and German.¹⁵² The photographs of *the Sadriddin Aini Square* used in the brochure had been taken before 1978, the year when the monumental ensemble was erected for the centenary anniversary of the prominent Tajik writer. In place of the memorial, both photographs feature rich vegetation (*Figure 26*).



Figure 26 The Aini Square, ca. 1978. Source: M. Davidzon, and V. Yurlov, *Guidebook Dushanbe* (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1983)¹⁵³

It is an interesting phenomenon that they did not choose fresh photographs which would have displayed the most recent additions to the cityscape. These photos however, with the green square, fit to the rest of the brochure which presented Dushanbe as a spacious and green city by offering images of wide avenues, abundant greenery, and the combination of classicism and modernity in the architectural style.

The fact that Dushanbe was a young city is strongly stressed upon in the tourist guidebook *Dushanbe* published four years later, in 1983. Juxtaposing Dushanbe to ancient cities like

¹⁵² Leonid Mahkamov, *Душанбе/Dushanbe/Douchanbe/Duschanbe*. Moscow: Progress, 1979.

¹⁵³ Davidzon, and Yurlov, *Guidebook Dushanbe*.

Rome and Moscow and presenting it as a city that cannot boast any historical landmarks, the authors emphasize the city's broad streets, and modern architecture as an epitome of its youth – “Dushanbe is young, Dushanbe is beautiful!”¹⁵⁴

The guidebook written in English targets foreign tourists. The route laid out for sightseeing in the city starts from Hotel Tajikistan, which used to accommodate foreign visitors during the Soviet times and was on the balance sheet of the All-Union Joint-Stock Company for Foreign Tourism in the USSR (Intourist).¹⁵⁵ The task of Intourist was to promote the Soviet ideology by various means including visual media, such as colorful posters and postcards. Since Intourist owned 450 hotels across the USSR by 1980, it was a powerful propaganda machine that had direct access to foreign visitors.¹⁵⁶ Hotel Tajikistan was among these 450 hotels, and the route that took its start from the hotel included the main landmarks of Dushanbe. The text of the guidebook offered a narrative aimed to create an image of the Soviet Union as an open and hospitable country for the eyes of foreign tourists and agents (*Figure 27*).



¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ “Soviet Modernism: 1955-1991”, *Architekturzentrum Wien*, accessed July 11, 2019, http://wiki.azw.at/sovietmodernism_database/home.php?il=4841&l=deu&findall=&function=&land=Tajikistan&act=print.

¹⁵⁶ “Spetsificheskie Usloviia Prebyvaniia Inostrannykh Turistov v SSSR” [Specific conditions of stay for tourists in USSR], accessed July 11, 2019, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/spetsificheskie-usloviya-prebyvaniya-inostrannykh-turistov-v-sssr>

Figure 27 Map of sightseeing tour along Lenin avenue. Source: M. Davidzon, and V. Yurlov, *Guidebook Dushanbe* (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1983)¹⁵⁷

The map does not exactly reflect the textual narration of the guidebook, in which the tour from the hotel (10) proceeds to the city gardens (11). The images applied to illustrate the text are, however, the ones depicting *the Putovskii Square*, which is located *between the Mayakovskii Russian Drama Theater* (5) and *the Lakhuti Drama Theater* (1). Those who compiled the guide apparently did not care much about the accuracy of visual representations, but rather emphasized the greenery, plants and fountains that are allegedly in abundance in the city (Figure 28).



Figure 28 Left: First 8-story residential building; Right: Putovskii square. Source: M. Davidzon, and V. Yurlov, *Guidebook Dushanbe* (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1983)¹⁵⁸

The theme of the youth of the city can be traced through the guidebook, and the Soviet rule and its role in the evolution of Dushanbe is the cornerstone of the publication's narrative. The way the excursion is laid out along the main vein of the urban plan is symbolic in this respect, starting with the statue of Lenin and ending with that of Kuibishev, a prominent figure of liberating Tajikistan from the Tsarist regime and establishing the Soviet rule (Figure 29).

¹⁵⁷ Davidzon, and Yurlov, *Guidebook Dushanbe*.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

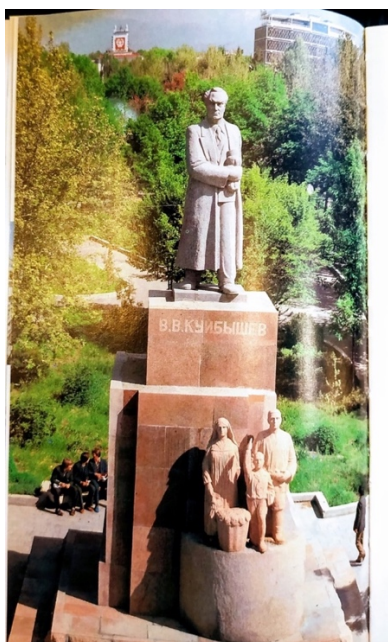


Figure 29 Monument to Kuibishev. Source: M. Davidzon, and V. Yurlov, *Guidebook Dushanbe* (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1983)¹⁵⁹

The figure of Kuibishev towers above the group of a Tajik family characterized by their vernacular clothing. The size of the main figure twice as big as that of the family clearly illustrates the hierarchy of the center of the Soviet Union and its southernmost border. The Soviet coat of arms on the dome of *the Local History Museum* in the background is a reference to the development in which the Soviet rule had a crucial part.



Figure 30 Funicular in the Victory Park. Source: A set of postcards "Dushanbe" Moscow: Plakat, 1985¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ A set of postcards "Dushanbe" (Moscow: Plakat, 1985).

The rhetoric of the brochure was also presented in colorful postcards emphasizing technological advancement and the fast pace of development of the natural and urban landscape. A photo (*Figure 30*) of a trio of young women waiting for their turn to board the cable car, and a group of young males inside the car running in the outskirts of Dushanbe refers to the technological advancement that became accessible for masses, the youth in particular. Besides the age of the people in the photograph, there is one more conspicuous element in the image: a man holding a blonde child. Even though the man does seem to be of Slavic appearance, it is the blonde child who represents not only the youth but also multiethnicity of the Soviet republic.¹⁶¹

As the city expanded across the Dushanbinka River to the west and to the south, its visual representation became more varied. The postcard series presented the new residential blocks and public buildings along the already well-established architectural landscape on the left bank of the river (*Figure 31, Figure 32*).



Figure 31 New nine-story residential blocks on Pravda Avenue. Source: Set of postcards “Dushanbe”, Moscow: Plakat, 1985¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Even though 10% of Tajiks are considered to be fair-skinned and blonde, they are prevalent in Pamir uplands, see also: Nicholas Shoumatoff, and Nina Shoumatoff, eds. *Around the Roof of the World* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

¹⁶² A set of postcards “Dushanbe”, Moscow: Plakat, 1985.



Figure 32 Nine-story residential buildings on Putovski Avenue. Source: Set of postcards "Dushanbe", Moscow: Plakat, 1985¹⁶³

These postcards demonstrate the scope of urban development through the changing cityscape.

The high-rising buildings, unimaginable at the advent of the city construction back in the 1930s, not only symbolized now the urban development per se, but also epitomized the industrialization of the national economy. The latter was seemingly flourishing as it made available a broad range of quality construction materials and technologies which allowed to erect residential tower blocks in an otherwise highly seismic area.

The territory of Dushanbe on the right bank of the river was developed not only through the construction of residential complexes. The expansion of academic institutions by means of building new branches signified the advancement of the republic in the field of scientific research (Figure 33, Figure 34).



Figure 33 New branch of the Medical Institute. Source: Set of postcards "Dushanbe", Moscow: Plakat, 1985¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.



Figure 34 New branch of the State University. Source: Set of postcards “Dushanbe”, Moscow: Plakat, 1985¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 4 – The image of eternal youth:

Dushanbe in the independent Tajik Republic

4.1 Dushanbe after the Independence

The attempt of coup d'état in Moscow by the State Committee for the State of Emergency in August 19-21, 1991, which eventually led to the collapse of the USSR, triggered a “parade of sovereignties” in the Soviet national republics. In Tajikistan these processes turned into an armed intra-ethnic conflict between supporters of the central government and various groups represented by the United Tajik Opposition. The brutal demolition and vandalization of the monument of Lenin on the central square in September 1991, gave a symbolic start to the irreversible geopolitical changes in the country that would be torn by the devastating five-year civil war to mark the start of its most recent history (*Figure 35*).



Figure 35 Tearing down the statue of Lenin, 1991. Source: “Tadzhikistan segodnia” [Tajikistan today], HU OSA 300-81-9-438-1; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Monitoring Unit: Video Recordings of Soviet and Russian Television Programs, Budapest: Open Society Archives at Central European University, September 1993¹⁶⁶

The frenzied mob that demanded tearing down the statue of Lenin saw in this monument a symbol of the hated communist regime, which they wanted to replace with an ideology that

¹⁶⁶ “Tadzhikistan segodnia” [Tajikistan today], HU OSA 300-81-9-438-1; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Monitoring Unit: Video Recordings of Soviet and Russian Television Programs, Budapest: Open Society Archives at Central European University, September 1993.

would be close in spirit and beliefs. The ideological vacuum that was formed after the independence mandated the state to establish a symbol that would embody the Tajik statehood and help to establish a sense of nation among the people of the country. Thus, in 1992, a statue of the Persian poet, Abul Kasim Firdausi was hastily mounted on the central square and stood there until 1997. It can be assumed, that the statue was just an interim solution and never meant to be a permanent landmark, judging from the small dimensions and the lack of monumental effect on the viewer. The statue is now the centerpiece of the former People's Friendship Park, which now bears his name (*Figure 36*).



Figure 36 Statue of Firdousi, 2018. Source: “Rakhmon progulialsia po obnovlennomu Parku imeni Firdousi v Dushanbe” [Rahmon had a walk in the refurbished Firdausi Park], Sputnik Tajikistan, accessed 20 July 2019, <https://tj.sputniknews.ru/photo/20180906/1026679334/dushanbe-park-firdowsi-photo-rahmon.html>¹⁶⁷

A TV broadcast entitled *Tadzhikistan segodnia* (Tajikistan today) demonstrates the attempts to redefine the relation of the new country to Russia in this first period of uncertainty, and how urban space and its image was used to support the arguments (*Figure 37*).¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ “Rakhmon progulialsia po obnovlennomu Parku imeni Firdousi v Dushanbe” [Rahmon had a walk in the refurbished Firdausi Park], Sputnik Tajikistan, accessed 20 July 2019, <https://tj.sputniknews.ru/photo/20180906/1026679334/dushanbe-park-firdowsi-photo-rahmon.html>.

¹⁶⁸ “Tadzhikistan segodnia”, Open Society Archives at Central European University.



Figure 37 Building of the Parliament as a backdrop, 1993. Source: “Tadzhikistan segodnia” [Tajikistan today], HU OSA 300-81-9-438-1; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Monitoring Unit: Video Recordings of Soviet and Russian Television Programs, Budapest: Open Society Archives at Central European University, September 1993¹⁶⁹

The program was produced for and broadcasted on the Russian central television and attempted to demonstrate that notwithstanding the turbulent period that forced hundreds of thousands of Russians to flee the country, Russians and Tajiks peacefully coexist in Tajikistan, and thanks in no small part to the Russian military presence. Although the program presents documentary footage showing the signs of armed conflict, such as collapse, migration, military men, battle fields and dead bodies, the primary idea is to show that Dushanbe is intact (Figure 38).



Figure 38 The Sadriddin Aini Square, 1993. Source: “Tadzhikistan segodnia” [Tajikistan today], HU OSA 300-81-9-438-1; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Monitoring Unit: Video Recordings of Soviet and Russian Television Programs, Budapest: Open Society Archives at Central European University, September 1993¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

The rhetoric around which the storyline of the documentary is built is pro-Soviet and clearly demonstrates the heavy dependence of Tajikistan on Russia. It is about the hardships of independence, political and socio-economic turmoil that had hit the country, and the ways of coping with those. Dushanbe is presented as a young city that emerged as the capital thanks to the Soviet rule that had defeated the forces of the enemy. Dushanbe appears as the capital of a multi-ethnic country, and landmark architecture is featured reaffirming the influence of the Soviet past still heavily palpable in the present.

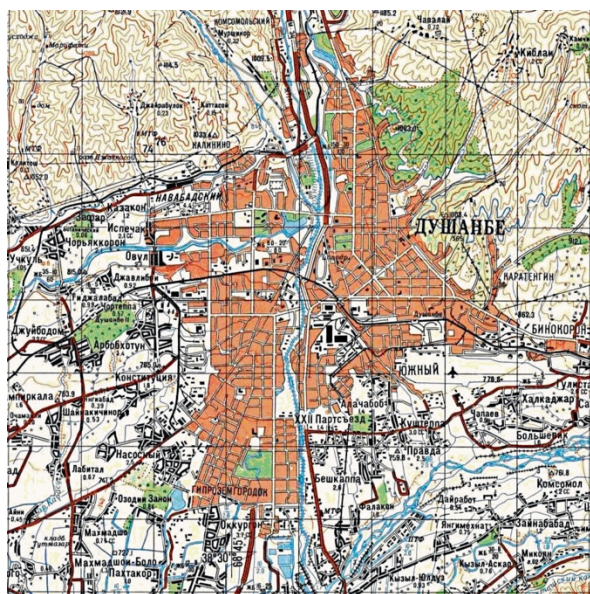
During the first decade of independence, the national economy was in the state of complete collapse and the ruling regime kept afloat only thanks to the heavy military presence and economic preferences rendered by Russia. The republic could afford a multi-vector external policy at the turn of the century after gaining exposure to international investments and becoming signatory to a number of international treaties, which to some extent loosened the Russian influence. The political leadership of the new independent republic soon started to create a narrative that had a different agenda centered around building an own national identity.¹⁷¹

The government started to shape the urban space of Dushanbe in accordance with their own narrative. The master plan devised and adopted in 1983 was a starting point for today's city redevelopment. It foresaw an increase in the population up to 750,000, which implied the expansion of the territory of the city and the construction of high-rise residential buildings. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the following Civil War had put the development on halt. The validity of the old master plan was extended until 2005, and the

¹⁷¹ See also, Kirill Nourzhanov, and Christian Bleuer, *Tajikistan: A Political and Social History*. Vol. 5 (ANU E Press, 2013).

elaboration of the new one was eventually mandated to the Russian Institute for Urban Planning and Design.¹⁷²

The lack of public discussion regarding the future of Dushanbe's cityscape was reflected on at an international level. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, of which Tajikistan is a Member State, recommended the Tajik Government to make the process of updating and adopting master plans open to the public.¹⁷³ The recommendation, however, has not been followed up on. The new master plan was endorsed by the Government in 2017, and due to the lack of transparency, the number of questions among the general public, such as those about the fate of the existing buildings and the construction of new ones, is only increasing, and so is the number of cases of violation of owners' rights.¹⁷⁴



¹⁷² “UNECE Country Profile on the Housing Sector, Tajikistan, 2011”, accessed May 30, 2020, <https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/documents/Publications/cp.tajikistan.e.pdf>. (hereafter: “UNECE Country Profile on the Housing Sector, Tajikistan, 2011”)

¹⁷³ “Explanatory note to the Revision of the Master Plan,” *Executive Body of State Power*, accessed May 30, 2020, <http://old.dushanbe.tj/masterplan/rewnote/#>

¹⁷⁴ “Genplan Sotsial'nyi i Kommercheskii” [Social and Commercial Master Plan], *Biuro Po Pravam Cheloveka i Sobliudeniiu Zakonnosti*, accessed May 5, 2019, <https://www.bhr.tj/analytics/genplan-socialnyi-i-kommercheskii>

Figure 39 Map of Dushanbe in 1980s – urban development along both banks of the river. Source: “UNECE Country Profile on the Housing Sector, Tajikistan, 2011”, accessed May 30, 2020, <https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/documents/Publications/cp.tajikistan.e.pdf>¹⁷⁵

The lack of open access to the Master Plan of Dushanbe gives the authorities the ultimate power to take decisions regarding the future of the architectural image of the city, which creates uncertainty among the general public.¹⁷⁶ The Master Plan and other supporting documentation is supposed to be published in the designated section called “Genplan” (Master Plan) on the municipality’s website; the webpage, however, is blank.¹⁷⁷ The last accessible document pertinent to the urban development of Dushanbe is the Revision of the Master Plan of 1983 performed by the architectural design studio of Giprogor, Moscow in 2010.¹⁷⁸ It is not known, however, how much of the recommendations made by the Moscow specialists have been incorporated into the “classified” document.¹⁷⁹

The modernization process in Dushanbe was in full swing even before the latest Master Plan was adopted. In 2015, the Mayor’s office announced its decision to demolish the building of the Russian Drama Theater, which became the momentum of the modernization dynamics. The building was designed and built in 1929 as *Dom Dehkanina* (Peasants Club) by the Leningrad architect, Petr Vaulin, before being repurposed to accommodate the theatre in 1937 (Figure 40).

¹⁷⁵ “UNECE Country Profile on the Housing Sector, Tajikistan, 2011

¹⁷⁶ After sending a written enquiry in October 2019 to the Committee for Architecture and Construction under the Government of Tajikistan regarding access to the documentation pertinent to the urban development of Dushanbe, the author of the thesis was referred to the Main Department for Architecture and Urban Development of Dushanbe. The front office of the Department advised that the Master Plan is a classified document, and that any information or project designs pertaining to the urban development of the city deemed non-sensitive by the Department, is published on its official Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/archdushanbe/>

¹⁷⁷ “Executive Body of State Power,” accessed May 22, 2020, <https://www.dushanbe.tj/ru/genplan>

¹⁷⁸ “Explanatory note to the Revision of the Master Plan,” *Executive Body of State Power*, accessed May 22, 2020, <http://old.dushanbe.tj/masterplan/rewnote/#>

¹⁷⁹ “Dzhamshed Ahmadzoda: Genplany Gorodov i Topograficheskie Karty Javlajutsja Sekretnymi” [Master Plans of Cities and Topographic Maps are Classified], *Vecherka*, February 4, 2020, accessed May 22, 2020, https://vecherka.tj/archives/42145?fbclid=IwAR1sIOspl6C5dNgjRuDcAtpzyX_HPuJTHOcsM8owU_MuVLyz_Yq4MHL2CA



Figure 40 Postcard Dom Dehkanina, 1932. Source: *SSSR na Stoiike*¹⁸⁰

The First Extraordinary Congress of Councils of the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was held in this building and adopted a historic declaration on the independence of the republic from the Uzbek SSR on 19 October 1929. Two months later, the building witnessed the announcement of the Tajik SSR becoming a fully-fledged member of USSR. The building, quite mediocre as it may seem from the architectural point of view, was literally the birthplace of the political, social, and cultural life of Dushanbe and the entire Tajik Republic. The decision on its demolition, therefore, sparked a debate amongst the residents of the city, triggering a sentiment that was framed around the Theater not just as a building but as the embodiment of the Soviet period that the Government wanted to erase.¹⁸¹ It must be noted that the Mayor of Dushanbe is assigned by the President, and the Dushanbe municipality as an executive body operates within the procedures prescribed by the Government of Tajikistan.¹⁸²

The primary argument presented during the public debates mainly confined to online space was that the demolition of the Soviet-era buildings was allegedly part of the so-called “de-

¹⁸⁰ *SSSR na Stroiike*.

¹⁸¹ Katharine Long, “Our History Began Here: Outcry as Tajikistan’s Cultural Heart Is Demolished,” *The Guardian*, 25 August 2016, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/25/our-history-began-here-outcry-as-tajikistans-cultural-heart-is-demolished>

¹⁸² “Executive Body of State Power of Dushanbe,” *Executive Body of State Power*, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.dushanbe.tj/ru/authority>

Sovietization” plan of the new Tajik government that wanted to systematically erase the Soviet past of the country. For example, Tajik writer Abduqader Rustam believes that the massive destruction of the Soviet architecture has a symbolic impact:

“I think the Tajik authorities are setting out to destroy the people’s memory,” he says. “For future generations, it [will] appear that history begins from the current time, as if we had had nothing before. The government will tell people ‘it was us who built the history, the city and the country’.”¹⁸³

Tearing down the white marble stele on the so-called Kilometer Zero in 2015 epitomizes the break of generational bridge mentioned by the writer. The twenty-four-meter-high stele was designed on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Tajik SSR by sculptor Elena Tatarinova who also worked on such iconic buildings as the Opera and Ballet Theater and the Parliament. The four plates of the octagon-shaped pedestal were carved with bas-reliefs to celebrate Tajik people and their history; the other four plates were left blank. It was the sculptor’s idea to leave it to the future generations to decide which further historical milestones to immortalize in bas-relief. Tearing down the symbol of the Soviet Tajikistan has put a symbolic end to its history.

The debates over the fate and value of Soviet architecture brought together the residents of Dushanbe and were mainly limited to the confines of social media and singular acts as in the case of *the Maiakovskii Russian Drama Theater*, which can rather be described as an act of desperation than that of protest.¹⁸⁴ From the side of political oppositional leadership, the head of the Communist Party appealed to the President of Tajikistan to help preserve the historical

¹⁸³ Esfandiar Adineh, “Demolishing Dushanbe: How the Former City of Stalinabad Is Erasing Its Soviet Past,” *The Guardian*, 19 October 2017, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/oct/19/demolishing-dushanbe-former-stalinabad-erasing-soviet-past>. (hereafter: Adineh, “Demolishing Dushanbe”)

¹⁸⁴ “So Snosom Jetogo Zdanija, Umiraet Chast' Menja – Legko Li Igrat' Na Razvalinah Teatra” [With the Demolition of this Buildings Dies a Part of Me – What it Feels Like to Perform on the Ruins of the Theater], *Current Time*, July 1, 2016, accessed May 22, 2020, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/27830999.html>

image of Dushanbe stressing on the need to safeguard the symbol of not only the country's theatrical culture but also its political history.¹⁸⁵

Nevertheless, the decisions to demolish yet another building of the Soviet era were coming one after another. Society perceived each decision quite ambiguously. Those who have opposed the decisions belong to older generations or whose properties are directly affected by the modernization plans.¹⁸⁶ They have their history and memories linked to the old Dushanbe. However, since the independence, an entire generation has grown up in Tajikistan. They have no special bond to the memories of the past. For them, the Soviet Union is a mere history. For example, one young resident of Dushanbe says her parents and the older generation of her family remember the Soviet Union with longing because it used to be a large multinational country with stability and confidence in future; but for her, independence opened up borders and opportunities to obtain education abroad.¹⁸⁷ Another resident believes that the city should be refurbished by getting rid of the old Soviet buildings because they have no historical value and should be replaced with modern and beautiful ones.¹⁸⁸

As it is seen by Konstantin Parshin, a Tajikistan-based freelance writer for US-based Eurasianet – an independent news organization that covers news from and about the South Caucasus and Central Asia – the total disconnect between the State and civil society, the lack

¹⁸⁵ “Lider Kompartii Tadjikistana Prosit Prezidenta Pomoch' Sohranit' Istoricheskii Oblik Stolicy, v Tom Chisle Teatr Majakovskogo” [Leader of Communist Party of Tajikistan Asks the President to Help Preserve the Historical Image of the Capital Including the Mayakovsky Theater], Tajik Telegraph Agency, April 28, 2016, accessed May 22, 2020, <https://tajikta.tj/ru/news/lider-kompartii-tadjikistana-prosit-prezidenta-pomoch-sokhranit-istoricheskii-oblik-stolitsy-v-tom-chisle-teatr-mayakovskogo>

¹⁸⁶ “V Dushanbe snesut raion 8 marta: Zdes' kazhdyi dom, kak muzei” [8th March district of Dushanbe cleared for demolition: every house here is like a museum], News of Tajikistan ASIA-Plus, accessed September 2, 2019, <https://www.asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/society/20171023/v-dushanbe-snesut-raion-8-marta>.

¹⁸⁷ “Rovesniki nezavisimosti: SSSR dlia nas – istoriia, a ne nostalg'giia” [Peers of Independence: USSR for not nostalgia but history], News of Tajikistan ASIA-Plus, accessed 6 September 2019, <https://www.asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/society/20170909/rovesniki-nezavisimosti-sssr-dlya-nas-istoriya-a-ne-nostalg'iya>

¹⁸⁸ Adineh, “Demolishing Dushanbe”.

of public involvement in the creation of urban development plans and a top-down approach in the Government's decision-making process makes it impossible for the interested members of society to stand up for and safeguard the Soviet architecture.¹⁸⁹ An expert committee of the Ministry of Culture recently compiled a list of heritage sites of Dushanbe in which out of twelve architectural heritage sites only four belong to the Soviet period.¹⁹⁰ There is no publicly available information on the composition of the committee and the criteria for assigning the heritage status to a site.

Chapter 3 of the Law on Protection and Use of Historical and Cultural Heritage Sites provides for the state protection of enlisted sites. Article 21 prescribes measures on the restoration and use of the sites, which include initial assessment, conservation, repair, restauration, regeneration, reconstruction, and adaptation.¹⁹¹ What is prescribed by law is not necessarily written in stone though. *The Palace of Central Committee of the Communist Party*, which accommodated the Presidential Administration during the independence and most recently served as a temporary seat for the city administration, used to be enlisted in the roster of architectural sites protected by the state.¹⁹² This status, however, didn't save it from demolition that is due in the nearest future.

¹⁸⁹ "Tajikistan: Dushanbe Demolition Discourages Denizens," Eurasianet, accessed 6 September 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-dushanbe-demolition-discourages-denizens>

¹⁹⁰ "V Dushanbe Opredelili Pamiatniki Arhitektury. Novaja Versiia?" Vecherka, accessed May 30, 2020 <https://vecherka.tj/archives/42498?fbclid=IwAR2RZLib-KJeQtPKrKqw5-IgD9rVIvcF4AzLdIwTUPILfkK2dI8ZsOvo5wo>

¹⁹¹ "Zakon Respubliki Tadjikistan Ob Oxrane i Ispol'zovaniju Ob'Ektov Istoriko-Kul'Turnogo Nasledija" [Law on Protection and Use of Historical and Cultural Heritage Sites], *National Legislation Center under the President of Tajikistan*, accessed April 16, 2020, <http://ncz.tj/content/закон-республики-таджикистан-об-охране-и-использование-объектов-историко-культурного>.

¹⁹² Rustam Mukimov and Salija Mamadzhanova, "Zakliuchenie / Voprosy okhrany, restavratsii, ispol'zovaniia i populiariizatsii arkhitekturnogo nasledia Tadjikskoi SSR" [Conclusion / Issues of protection, use and promotion of architectural heritage of Tajik SSR], in *Zodchestvo Tadjikistana*, Dushanbe: Maorif, 1990, 145–49.

What can be assumed is that nothing stands in the way of demolishing public buildings, no matter if they are in or out of the list. The lack of dialogue between the State and the residents of Dushanbe, coupled with the lack of coordinated efforts and the impotence of the political opposition does not mean, however, that people are not interested in what happens to the Soviet urban heritage. They are; nevertheless, there are not too many platforms where their views are visible. They have very little influence on what happens with the actual buildings, but they have access to their representations. Analyzing how and in what context these representations appear reveals a lot about how people relate to the urban space created in the Soviet era and the buildings in the city.

4.2 Post-Soviet Dushanbe in images

Similarly to the Soviet state, the independent Tajik state also uses photos of Dushanbe and its architecture to construct its image according to their own agenda. Though there are new visual landmarks in the city built after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and several emblematic monumental products of the Soviet urban development have been removed, the cityscape is still dominated by Soviet architecture, so the image of these needs to be recontextualized in the new propaganda context.

The monument of Ismail Somoni was placed on the front matter of the collection of postcards produced in the early 2000s by the Ministry of Communications. Ismail Somoni lived at the turn of the ninth and tenth centuries and he was the last ruler of the Samanid dynasty, who liberated the territory what is now Tajikistan, Iran, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan from the Arab oppression and the influence of foreign culture and language.¹⁹³ The monument was erected in 1997; it was probably the starting point in the process of architectural transformation of

¹⁹³ “Samanid Dynasty - New World Encyclopedia”, *New World Encyclopedia*, accessed July 20, 2019, https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Samanid_dynasty.

Dushanbe. It is composed of *the Arch of Independence* and the statue of Ismail Somoni underneath. He was proclaimed a key figure for the historical and cultural heritage of the Tajiks; therefore, his monument displays the main symbols of the Tajik statehood: the crown and scepter decorated with seven stars.

The monument has a central role in the cityscape of modern Tajikistan; this is why it was chosen for the cover of the postcard collection issued by the Ministry of Communications. However, the rest of the postcards depict buildings created in the Soviet era, such as the now-gone symbol of constructivism, *the Post Office*, the neoclassical Stalinist architecture of *the Opera and the Ballet Theatre*, *the Parliament*, and *the Tajik National University*. The collection features some modernist buildings as well, such as *the Hotel Tajikistan*, *the Hotel Dushanbe*, and *the Hotel Avesto*, and public monuments of Soviet-Tajik and Persian prominent figures. If one looks at the postcard collection without the cover displaying the image of *the Ismail Somoni monument*, it is not that easy to figure out in which historical period it was created: whether in the Soviet or in the post-Soviet era (*Figure 41*).



Figure 41 Front and back cover, ca. 2005. Source: Set of postcards “Dushanbe”, Dushanbe: AzArt. ca. 2005¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Set of postcards “Dushanbe”, Dushanbe: AzArt. ca. 2005.

The Somoni monument is the first landmark used to illustrate the attractions in Dushanbe also in the guidebook entitled *Welcome to Tajikistan*, produced by the Committee of Youth, Sports and Tourism under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan (Figure 42).¹⁹⁵

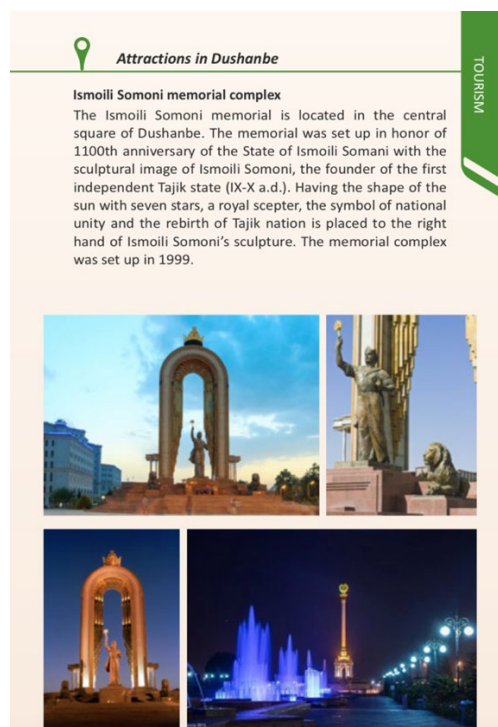


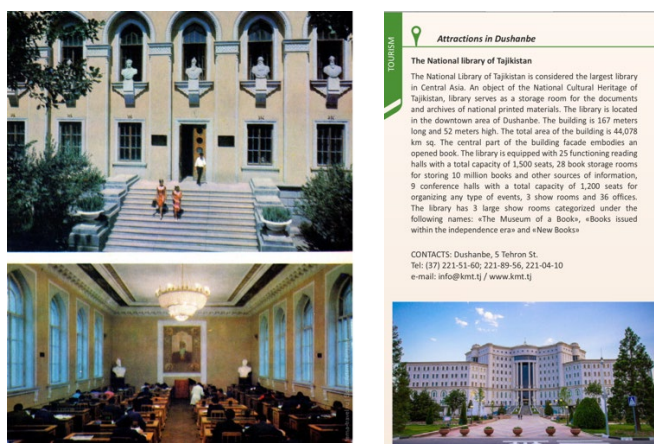
Figure 42 Monument and memorial of Ismail Somoni from different angles and time of the day, ca. 2011. Source: “Guidebooks – Tajikistan”, *The Committee on the Tourism Development under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan*, accessed July 21, 2019, <https://traveltajikistan.tj/guidebooks/>¹⁹⁶

Even though the patterns employed for the visual representation of the city are similar to those applied during the Soviet era, here the emphasis is placed on the buildings themselves instead of the people and their experience of the buildings and space as it was done in images from the Soviet period. In contrast with the postcard collection presented above, images in this publication emphasize the changes in the architectural scene of the city, to demonstrate how Dushanbe has moved on from its Soviet past and has acquired its own modern architectural style (*Error! Reference source not found.*,

¹⁹⁵ “Guidebooks – Tajikistan”, *The Committee on the Tourism Development under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan*, accessed July 21, 2019, <https://traveltajikistan.tj/guidebooks/>.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

Figure 44).

Figure 43 Left: Lenin city park in 1964; Right: Rudaki park¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ A set of postcards “Dushanbe” (Moscow: Planeta, 1974), and “Guidebooks – Tajikistan”, accessed July 20, 2019, <https://traveltajikistan.tj/guidebooks/>

Figure 44 Left: State public library in 1974. Source: Postcards “Dushanbe, Moscow: Planeta, 1974”; Right: New National Library, ca. 2012. Source: “Guidebooks – Tajikistan”, The Committee on the Tourism Development under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, accessed July 21, 2019, <https://traveltajikistan.tj/guidebooks/>¹⁹⁸

The label of a “young city” popular in the Soviet times was re-applied in another guidebook entitled *Urban Cultural Tours: Dushanbe* published in 2015.¹⁹⁹ The youthful character of the city, however, is presented here through images of modern, post-independence buildings. This is the most recent available guidebook about Dushanbe. It was produced by a public organization called “Tourism Development Center”.²⁰⁰ The fact that it is offered online on the official website of the Committee on Tourism Development under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan indicates that it has been endorsed by the State.²⁰¹ The guidebook is richly illustrated with images of facades and inner spaces of memorial museums created for prominent Tajik figures in the fields of literature and music. It also contains images of monumental symbols of the past, such as the now gone *Mayakovski Russian Drama Theater* and *the Opera and Ballet Theater*, both buildings from the Soviet period. However, since the guidebook focuses on the cultural life of the city, the choice of the Soviet-era buildings of cultural institutions does have its relevance.

The visual content of the guidebook demonstrates how the re-evaluation of historical and cultural values of the Soviet and post-Soviet legacy still needs to happen and offer a glimpse to the process of cultural memory creation in contemporary Tajikistan. The devastating civil war that ripped the country followed by economic stagnation, social insecurity and ideological void had set Tajikistan back for decades in all spheres of life including this field.

¹⁹⁸ A set of postcards “Dushanbe” (Moscow: Planeta, 1974), and “Guidebooks – Tajikistan”, accessed July 20, 2019, <https://traveltajikistan.tj/guidebooks/>.

¹⁹⁹ Bakhridin Isamutdionov, and Abdurakhmon Nazirmatov, *Urban Cultural Tours: Dushanbe, Travel Guide*, Turkey: Mega, 2015.

²⁰⁰ “Turistskii Informatsionnyi Portal Tadjikistana” [Tourist Information Portal of Tajikistan], accessed July 22, 2019, <http://tdc.tj/>.

²⁰¹ The Committee is the central executive agency of the country in the sector of tourism and is responsible for the formulation of a consistent national policy and a legal frame, <https://traveltajikistan.tj/>.

Chapter 5 – The heritage of Soviet Dushanbe: urban space, image, and memory

Visual artefacts from the Soviet past, such as stills from old movies, photographs of domestic items, as well as of architecture have recently flooded social media platforms. Numerous groups and pages have been created where members post and repost such images from the past. The somewhat random nature of dissemination of such posts have turned the social media platforms into a sort of “antique shop” where contributors mix digital images – still and moving – generating at times heated discussions and triggering fond memories. It is becoming almost impossible to preserve the built heritage of Soviet Dushanbe in its material form, and the process is entirely controlled by the state. Public places no longer belong to the public, and do not serve as a place of dialogue between the city and its inhabitants.²⁰²

However, the massive demolition of Soviet-era buildings in Dushanbe lead to a resurfacing and circulation of archival photographs of Soviet architecture in electronic mass media and social networks. Here people share their own memories, and, in contrast with the official cultural memory processes, have their agency to shape the memory discourse. These two forms of memory can be distinguished and connected to the categories of cultural and communicative memory as defined by Jan Assmann.²⁰³

²⁰² Rusu, *Spaces on the Run*.

²⁰³ Jan Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” in *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning (Berlin, New York: W. de Gruyter, 2008), 109–18. (hereafter: Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory”).

5.1 The use of old narratives in a modern context: the Asia Plus project

In 2014 the Tajik Media Holding Asia-Plus launched a special project under the title “Old Dushanbe.” The holding is an independent agency as opposed to state-owned mass media, and the leading Russian-language media outlet that covers political, economic, cultural, and social issues in the country. For their journalistic investigations on the activities connected to the ruling elite and critical articles, the website of the news agency has been blocked for over two years.²⁰⁴ The project about old Dushanbe is probably another way to demonstrate their position and solidarity with the general public, which is frequently, if not always, left out of the official decision making processes. In addition, the project appears as an attempt to romanticize Soviet Dushanbe, which was a city built by people for people, juxtaposing it to the contemporary elitist, non-inclusive and corrupt city. In this project, they publish articles about the Soviet history of Dushanbe and its built heritage using archival documents and photographs, although with no references to the sources or the origin of the photographs.²⁰⁵

The introduction to the project reads as the following:

“Dushanbe of the Soviet era is a city with an atmosphere of general goodwill and mutual respect. It is a city where citizens, young and old, were confident in their future, they knew their life goals and how to achieve those... We remember Soviet Dushanbe as the most international city in the world... As time goes by [...] the current generation of young people in Dushanbe are increasingly reproaching us for excessive nostalgia for the past. The Soviet time nonetheless stays in the memory of most of the indigenous residents of Dushanbe who remember those distant years as something joyful, immeasurably kind, and almost magical. The years when we were young.”²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ “Independent Tajik News Agency Asia Plus Kicked Offline.” *Committee to Protect Journalists*. September 10, 2019, accessed April 15, 2020, <https://cpj.org/2019/09/independent-tajik-news-agency-asia-plus-kicked-off.php>.

²⁰⁵ “Staryi Dushanbe - Spetsial'nyi Proekt” [Old Dushanbe - Special Project], Asia Plus, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://asiaplustj.info/projects/olddushanbe>.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. (own translation from Russian into English)

The authors admit in the text that the idea to launch this project is dictated by nostalgia. The representation of the Soviet world is sustained in the spirit of utopia. They offer to join the good old time, make a journey into the world of positive emotions. Zavadski, Sklez, and Suverina call these “museums of affect” that provoke strong psychological and physiological reactions, although, unlike in the museums, in the current project it is psychology that plays the most significant role.²⁰⁷ The project does not factualize the past, but rather builds a nostalgic mythologization. Nostalgia for socialism is a phenomenon typical for former Socialist countries that have experienced rapid changes in political orientation and ideology.²⁰⁸ Longing for the past may be connected to a search for identity. For example, “Yugonostalgia” – longing for the former Yugoslavia, translates into consumer culture.²⁰⁹ A similar phenomenon can be observed in the former German Democratic Republic, where nostalgia turned into “Ostalgie.”²¹⁰

In the post-Soviet space, many feel that they liked to be part of something they were told was grand, beautiful, and nothing came to replace what has been lost.²¹¹ This leads to an idealized image of a country where everyone lived happily and enjoyed social security, at the same time, omitting facts such as heavy censorship, travel restrictions, and the almighty KGB.

²⁰⁷ Andrej Zavadski, Varvara Sklez, and Katerina Suverina, *Politika affekta. Muzei kak prostranstvo publichnoi istorii* [Affect Policy. Museum as a Space of Public History] (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2019).

²⁰⁸ Maria Todorova, and Zsuzsa Gille, *Post-Communist Nostalgia* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012). (hereafter: Todorova and Gille, *Post-Communist Nostalgia*)

²⁰⁹ Bostjan Rogelj, Katja Mally, and Tatjanja Planinc, ““Yugonostalgia” among young Slovenes”, 2017, ResearchGate, accessed May 10, 2020,

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321168005_Yugonostalgia_among_young_Slovenes

²¹⁰ Alessandro Figus, Andrea Pisaniello, and Stefano Mustica, “Multiculturalism and Ostalgie”, in *Geopolitical, Social Security and Freedom Journal*, (2018), 49-60.

²¹¹ Adam Taylor, “Why Do so Many People Miss the Soviet Union?” The Washington Post. WP Company. December 21, 2016, accessed April 14, 2020,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/12/21/why-do-so-many-people-miss-the-soviet-union/>.

As David Lowenthal formulated “What we are nostalgic for is not the past as it was or even as we wish it were; but for the condition of *having been*, with a concomitant integration and completeness lacking in any present.”²¹² The project “Old Dushanbe” is a manifestation of such kind of yearning for an idealized past, when all the negative aspects are forgotten giving room only for the re-collection of good memories.²¹³

Nostalgia harbored by the residents of Dushanbe in the context of urban redevelopment should not be confused with longing for the Soviet past. The latter might be the case for many people, but not for everyone in the post-socialist countries, since how nostalgic people feel depends, for example, on their generational, gender, and political affiliation and whether they live in urban or rural areas.²¹⁴ Soviet built heritage could embody good times long gone, when people experiencing nostalgia were much younger, when social security was guaranteed, and the living standards were higher.²¹⁵ It does not essentially imply people’s love for the regime but rather the visual memory and personal recollections evoked when looking at images of the past.

An example of a somewhat partial interpretation of secondary sources is Gafur Shermatov’s article published on Asia Plus in 2013, using an abstract from Nikolai Fedorovskii’s description of Stalinabad, which was discussed in Chapter 2.²¹⁶ However, a part of Fedorovskii’s text was left out, where he had discussed some problematic aspects of town planning which, in his view, resulted in the shortage of water supply and sewage systems. This

²¹² David Lowenthal, “Nostalgia Tells it like it Wasn’t”, in *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, ed. Christopher Shaw, and Malcolm Chase (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 18-32.

²¹³ Alan R. Hirsch, "Nostalgia: a Neuropsychiatric Understanding", in *NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 19*, eds. John F. Sherry, Jr. and Brian Sternthal, Provo, (1992), UT: Association for Consumer Research: 390-395. (hereafter: Hirsch, "Nostalgia: a Neuropsychiatric Understanding")

²¹⁴ Todorova and Gille, *Post-Communist Nostalgia*.

²¹⁵ Hirsch, "Nostalgia: a Neuropsychiatric Understanding".

²¹⁶ “Fantasticheskii Gorod – Dushanbe” [Fantastic city Dushanbe], ASIA-Plus, accessed April 12, 2020, <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/society/20170422/fantasticheskii-gorod-dushanbe>

slight but meaningful modification makes the reader assume that Fedorovskii was in awe of the pace and scope of the city construction, and this is why he used the metaphor of it being designed by a “fiction architect.” Such a re-contextualization of evidence contributes to the revival of the Soviet narrative around Dushanbe.

The Asia Plus Media Agency made an attempt to show the history of urban development of Dushanbe amidst the massive demolition of old buildings in 2014, the year of celebration of Dushanbe’s ninetieth anniversary. The printed album *Dushanbe* of over 200 pages in Russian, English and Tajik languages contains black and white as well as color photographs of architectural landmarks in Dushanbe from different time periods; some photographs are placed together for comparison. The foreword by the authors gives a brief overview of the history of the city that used to be a plain village and is still in the process of growing into a large city, so repeating the old Soviet narrative. The album also offers bibliographical data on the architects that had created the architecture of Dushanbe throughout its history, but without connecting them to any specific building. There is no elaboration as to the methods and criteria for the choice of photographs, neither do the authors provide reference for the sources.

The album presents the drastic transformation in the architectural scenery of Dushanbe over ninety years through archival photographs juxtaposed with recent ones, but without any detailed description or explanation, which is especially disturbing regarding the street names. Sometimes the same building is presented in two photographs but with different street names in the captions (*Figure 45, Figure 46*).

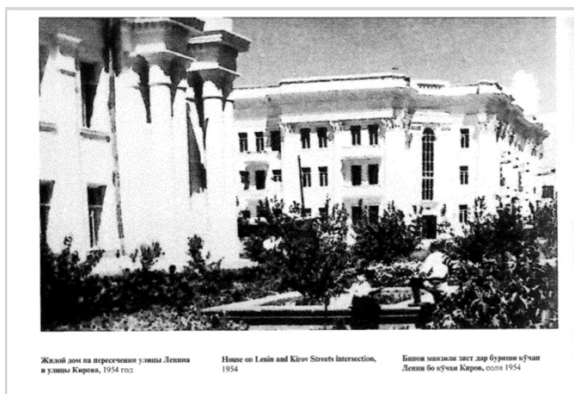


Figure 45 Residential building on Lenin/Kirov street, 1954. Source: *Asia-Plus, Dushanbe, 1924-2014 (Dushanbe, 2014)*²¹⁷



Figure 46 Residential building on Rudaki/Khuseinzoda street, 2013. Source: *Asia-Plus, Dushanbe, 1924-2014 (Dushanbe, 2014)*²¹⁸

The National Library was built on the place of the Soviet-era *Dynamo Sports Compound and Stadium* in 2014 (Figure 47, Figure 48). However, this drastic change in the architectural scene of the central part of the city can be hardly traced without any context.



Figure 47 Dynamo Stadium, 1984. Source: *Asia-Plus, Dushanbe, 1924-2014 (Dushanbe, 2014)*



Figure 48 National Library. Source: *Asia-Plus, Dushanbe, 1924-2014 (Dushanbe, 2014)*

²¹⁷ *Asia-Plus, Dushanbe, 1924-2014 (Dushanbe, 2014).*

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Here the authors wanted to highlight the drastic changes that have taken place on one site over thirty years. Residents of Dushanbe who had witnessed those times and the transformations in the architectural landscape may realize the scope of these changes and even mentally travel through time and space by looking at these two images. This is, however, highly unlikely for the younger generation and non-residents who cannot relate. Not only do both photographs differ in composition – people versus building –, but also the chosen angle and location of shooting are completely different.

According to the authors of the photo album, it is meant to preserve the visual memory and architectural image of Dushanbe throughout its existence as the capital city. However, this project also seems to have a for-profit element using a nostalgic sentiment to sell the past. Its primary target audience are foreigners and emigres judging by the rather high price tag in the standards of Tajikistan. Besides, the poor quality of photographs both in terms of technique and composition, the lack of contextualization and artistic idea decreases the value of the album.

5.2 From private memories to collective memory: amateur photographs in a new context

Amateur photography reflects significant features of the socio-cultural development, socio-political moods, ideology and deeply rooted social norms. People, their postures, clothes, the internal setting and environment, landscape, and architecture – all these make photographs a visual evidence of the past, just as taking photographs is a way of certifying experience.²¹⁹ For people who look at them, photographs evoke emotions and trigger remembering of their personal experience. It is important to use the word “remembering” in this case, for to

²¹⁹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: RosettaBooks, 2005).

remember, it is necessary to forget, and culture, like memory, lives on by means of forgetting, burial, neglect or active destruction, scraping of old “texts” and censorship of new ones.²²⁰

According to Aleida Assmann, a place vacated for memory is filled with what is always at hand, in the very center of the cultural space, as well as with what outlines the boundaries of that inhabited space. In the first case, it is the *canon*, a semi-sacred set of cultural samples for all times, reproduced everywhere from school to theater and museums, and in the second case, it is the archive – almost forgotten contents of storerooms, attics and basements.²²¹ The case study of the present subchapter will be put in the perspective of such an archive, the content of which are undeveloped films retrieved, digitized, and published online.

The Facebook group called “My Tadjikistantsy” [We are from Tajikistan] has over 118,000 members from Tajikistan and beyond, and it covers a wide range of topics, from sports to popular culture, social issues and politics, and also serves as a large platform for sharing visuals as evidences from the present and the Soviet past.²²² Images from the Soviet time attract wide attention among the group members and trigger discussions and debates. The posts in the group are not heavily moderated, meaning that its members are widely exposed to the images and can freely engage in the discussions. In the absence of a public space and the lack of open dialogue with the city leadership, the group has created its own forum where they feel safe to express their opinions and enter public discussions, including those about built heritage.

Visuals published in the group representing the Soviet past of the country are scans and digitized images that circulate online on diverse platforms dedicated to Soviet nostalgia,

²²⁰ Aleida Assmann, “Canon and Archive”, in *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. by Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning (Berlin, New York: W. de Gruyter, 2008), 97–108.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Facebook group “My Tadjikistantsy”, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/tajikistanians/>.

architecture, ethnography, anthropology. Some members have access to institutionalized digital resources, thus share the images with metadata, while others simply repost the images they come across in the internet. The only exception regarding the ownership of the images is Iurii Agarkov, a resident of Dushanbe, who is doing his personal project by scanning and digitizing black-and-white photographs produced by his late grandfather.²²³

The Facebook group “My Tadjikistantsy” [We are from Tajikistan] is the largest in the Tajik segment of the social network where images of the Soviet past are widely circulating.²²⁴ In order to understand the rhetoric and discourse that is being developed with regard to the memories of places and practices, I interviewed the administrator of the group, and observed the discussions unfolding under the photographic posts and articles to see how this initiative contributes to the memory discourse around Dushanbe.

The administrator of the group believes that photographs of Soviet Dushanbe help preserve the history of the city and transfer its memory from one generation to another. He suggests that by posting and reposting the photographs, the group brings together not only the residents of Dushanbe but also those who had long left the city, yet, are still emotionally connected to it.²²⁵ It is a social group of contemporaries that carry and share memories of the Soviet-era Dushanbe through its visual representation. Given the temporary character of communicative memory by virtue of its transmission from generation to generation, it is highly prone to falling

²²³ Agarkov, Iurii. [9 maia 1981 goda.], accessed May 20, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10216080397036003&id=1632057368.

²²⁴ Facebook group “My Tadjikistantsy”, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/tajikistanians/>. The creation of the group is the reaction of sorts to the region-specific Facebook groups like Ya Dushanbinets [I am from Dushanbe] or I Love Khujand, hence the name of the group.

²²⁵ From the interview with the administrator of the Facebook group Shuhrat Dzhuraev through Facebook messenger on May 9, 2019, appendix 1

into oblivion as it is inextricably linked with the chronological framework.²²⁶ In order to keep its relevance, a social group tends to relay it continuously on an intersubjective realm, which in our case is social media.

Iurii Agarkov, a resident of Dushanbe, initiated a personal project of scanning and digitizing films left to him by his amateur photographer grandfather.²²⁷ He posts his grandfather's photographs both on his personal Facebook page and in the group "We are from Tajikistan." After the digitalization, Iurii curates his collection and posts only photographs taken during celebrations and festive destinations, or those of the cityscape.²²⁸ The photographs are both candid and staged, and for some members of the Facebook group they evoke memories of their own childhood or youth when they had experienced the events depicted in these images. People in the frame are full of enthusiasm, carrying proudly the placards and photographs of the communist leaders.

Even though the practice of amateur photography does not require special skills, it nevertheless enables creativity because the photographer himself chooses his subject and the moment.²²⁹ These images exemplify the everyday practice of photographing and the amateur photographer who participates in the process of constructing the visual in the socio-cultural space (*Figure 49*). They also show the practice of different educational or professional organizations to build their image by applying symbols and participating at social events,

²²⁶ Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 23.

²²⁷ Iurii's post of Facebook, accessed May 20, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10216921346259208&id=1632057368.

²²⁸ From the interview with Iurii Agarkov, see appendix 2

²²⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*, Oxford: Polity Press, 1998, 6.

thereby affirming their belonging to a certain scientific or educational entity in the urban milieu.²³⁰



Figure 49 First of May demonstration, end of 1970s. Source: Iurii's post on Facebook, accessed May 20, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10216770216601061&id=1632057368²³¹

As it is reflected by the discussion in the comments, members of the Facebook group try to identify the year when and the location when and where the photograph was taken. Identifying the year seems to be easier based on the fashion and transport details (Figure 50).

²³⁰ Serhii Posokhov, and Yevhen Rachkov. "Kharkiv As a University City: The Evolution of Symbolic Space.", in *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies*. Contemporary Ukraine Studies Program at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, April 15, 2020, accessed May 20, 2020, <http://ewjus.com/index.php/ewjus/article/view/571>.

²³¹ Iurii's post on Facebook, accessed May 20, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10216770216601061&id=1632057368

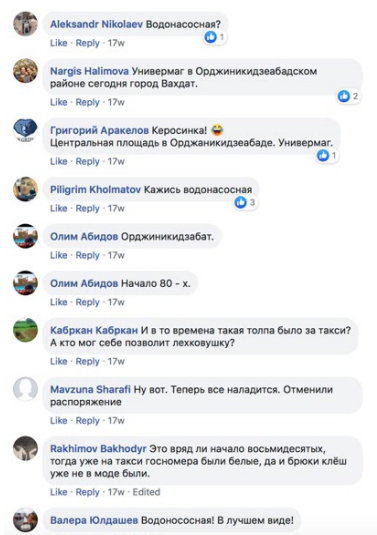


Figure 50. Photo of an unidentified location. Source: Iurii's post on Facebook, accessed May 20, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10216770216601061&id=1632057368²³²

Posting a photo representing a building with groups of people, some waiting in the bus stop, others boarding a taxi (Figure 50), Iurii asked the viewers to identify the location of the site and the year of the shot. One commenter suggested: "It's unlikely these are the early 1980s. By that time, the plates on the taxis had been changed to white, and flared pants were no longer in fashion."

Some photographs trigger memories of family rituals and social habits: the viewers associate these with what they see in the pictures. For example, one commenter recognized the place – *the House of Political Awareness* – and recalled the habit of taking pictures near that place. The other commenter shared the memory of solemn preparations for each parade, including inflating balloons and making flags (Figure 51). Personal memories triggered by the photos mediating someone else's personal memories are channeled into communicative memory when shared in social media. This demonstrates an interplay between individual memory and collective memory through the medium of paper photo and digitized photo. In this case, however, there are two types of media since the photo album and the social media surface are

²³² Iurii's post on Facebook, accessed May 20, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10216770216601061&id=1632057368.

also media through which the photo appears. Media actively contribute to the creation of memories. Media also act as intermediaries between the inner world of a person and the outer world, because the physical strength, mental and emotional processes inherent in an individual can be designed and transferred to the social world only through media. Images in photographs circulating on social media thus become media – in this case, media of memory – themselves, for the “content of any medium is always another medium.”²³³



Figure 51 Photos from the Victory Day Demonstration, 1981. Source: Iurii's post on Facebook. Accessed: May 20, 2020.

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10216080397036003&id=1632057368²³⁴

According to Iurii, his grandfather's photos bear witness to the positive image of Soviet Dushanbe. For Yuri, these photographs represent the times when his parents were alive, thus the times when everything was well.²³⁵ Not a single comment under his posts in the group testify of a negative connotation: the photographs evoke fond memories in the audience who are thankful to Iurii for bringing back the images of their “fairytale” life the young generation will never understand.

²³³ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 1994).

²³⁴ Iurii's post on Facebook. Accessed: May 20, 2020.

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10216080397036003&id=1632057368.

²³⁵ From the interview with Iurii Agarkov through Facebook messenger. 30.04.2019

Iurii considers these photographs unique because they were taken by an amateur without any special agenda. Unlike photographs taken by Soviet professional photographers who worked under the pressure of socialist ideology and propaganda, the compositions of these photographs are not thoroughly thought over.²³⁶ Each amateur photo is a sort of mis-en-scène, where the urban space and architectural heritage serve as a setting.²³⁷ If put together, this mis-en-scène series will make up a photo-essay narrating the events of one particular day in the life of the author. By categorizing the digitized photographs according to the date or the event, and posting them on Facebook, Iurii wants to transmit the memories of happy times and happy people as seen and captured by his grandfather. For the viewers these photos are a way to dive in those times, when ethnicity, place of origin didn't matter; all they see is happy, educated, intelligent people who used to live peacefully in the "best city in the world."

Iurii's case shows that the viewers' collective memories of the space and place help reconstruct experience through the visual representation of social practices, like parades, fashion, etc.²³⁸ As urban cityscape changes, certain sites lose their significance in the perception of the city. When measures to preserve a collective memory of urban space are lacking, and the carriers of such memories die, the probability of losing this memory is high. The cases presented above show the potential of preserving a collective memory of urban landscape using cyberspace, and how this can emerge as a bottom-up process.²³⁹

²³⁶ Fiona Macdonald, "Eye-Opening Soviet Photos", BBC, accessed August 24, 2019, <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20181123-eye-opening-soviet-photos>.

²³⁷ See David Bordwell, and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*. 6th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2001).

²³⁸ Assmann and Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity".

²³⁹ Segah Sak, *Cyberspace as a Locus for Urban Collective Memory* (Ph.D. diss., Ankara, Bilkent University, 2013), 181.

5.3 Discussing place attachment through images

The boundaries of any place are defined by how a subject is functioning in it. The place a person feels attached to can be, for example, a country, a city, a district, a home. According to Daniel R. Williams and Susan I. Stewart, attachment to a place is “a system of meanings, beliefs, symbols, values, and feelings” associated with the place by a person or a group of people.²⁴⁰ Attachment to a place is a positive emotional connection that arises between a person and his or her environment. The viewer identifies with a place by attributing to it an identity that is built on positive feelings and experience connected to that place, which gives the viewer a sense of homecoming.²⁴¹ The photos of places and buildings from Soviet Dushanbe evoke personal memories of the viewers related to the images they preserve in their own mind based on their perception. This also happens because place identity is inextricably connected to the past and is oftentimes dictated by nostalgic sentiments. History of a place is a battlefield of sorts, where proponents of the developments justify them as being in line with traditions, whereas opponents state “that doesn’t fit in at all.”²⁴² This process is evident around the current changes taking place in the architectural scene of Dushanbe. As urban theorist Kevin Lynch formulated, the visual image of the city in a person’s mind is “the generalized mental picture of the exterior physical world that is held by an individual.”²⁴³ A person creates an imaginary drawing of the cityscape building on diverse details and influenced by her age,

²⁴⁰ Daniel Williams, and Susan Stewart, “Sense of place: An elusive concept that is finding a home in ecosystem management”, in *Journal of Forestry*, 96(5), (1998), 18–23.

²⁴¹ G. J Ashworth, and Brian J. Graham, *Senses of Place: Senses of Time* (London, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: MIT, 1968).

social status and education. Images of the city can be as individualized as possible as they are “the product both of immediate sensation and of the memory of past experience.”²⁴⁴

The image of the ritual of laying flowers by newlyweds to the monument of Lenin in Dushanbe and the discussion underneath can be regarded along the veins of Proust’s suggestion that the attachment is essentially not to the landscape per se but to the experience and memory of that (*Figure 52*).²⁴⁵



*Figure 52 Newlyweds on the Lenin square (now Shohidon Square) of Dushanbe, 01.10.1987, photo by Vsevolod Tarasevich. Source: Post on Facebook group “My Tadjhikistantsy”, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2091959834216608&set=gm.2274876792796222&type=3&theater&ifg=1>*²⁴⁶

The erroneous caption to the photograph as having been taken on the Shohidon Square triggered a whole range of memories and associations. The audience mentions moustache as being in fashion those times as opposed to beard nowadays. They engage in heated political debates triggered by the misnaming of the place, and switch to recognizing the residential buildings, albeit barely visible, in the background and recollect schooltime rituals. “Behind the Supreme Council was our house. In the evenings we used to take a walk across the square” – reads one comment, which reflects on the memories evoked by looking at the architectural

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Robert B. Riley, “Attachment to the Ordinary Landscape”, in *Place Attachment*, (New York: Plenum Press, 1992), 13-35. (hereafter: Riley, “Attachment to the Ordinary Landscape”).

²⁴⁶ Post on Facebook group “My Tadjhikistantsy”, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2091959834216608&set=gm.2274876792796222&type=3&theater&ifg=1>.

site, the building of *the Supreme Council* (today's *Parliament*) and the central square, and the family ritual associated with the place. The comment continues: "And on vacations we used to go to the cinema on coupons provided by the school. And most importantly we were not accompanied by the parents." This second part of the comment is not directly related to the composition of the photo. It does, however, reflect on the social practices common for those times, i.e. going to the cinema with class, and the safety of children during the Soviet time versus the present days.

There are cases when an image of an architectural object with incorrect caption triggers a visual analysis among the audience, who use both tangible and intangible aspects to prove their point (*Figure 53*).

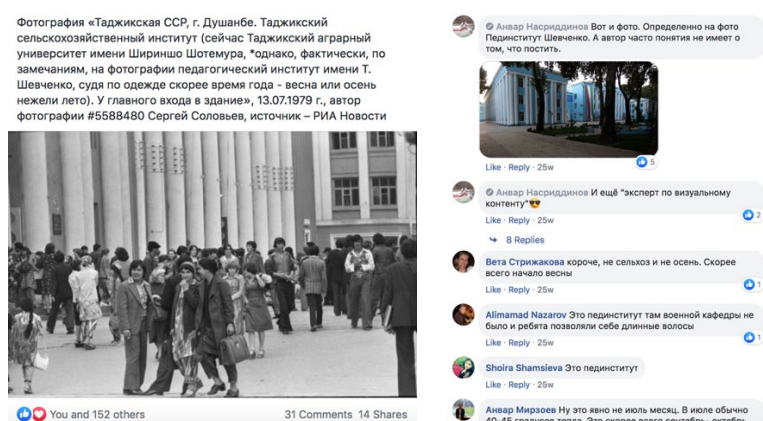


Figure 53 Dushanbe, Tajik Agricultural Institute. At the main entrance, 13.07.1979, Source: Post on Facebook group "My Tadjhikistantsy", accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/tajikistanians/permalink/2310106939273207/>.²⁴⁷

The incorrectness of the caption in the photograph in *Figure 53* drew the attention of the audience. They questioned the identification due to the presence of the colonnade that was typical not for *the Agricultural Institute* but for *the Pedagogical Institute*.²⁴⁸ To prove this point, one of the commenters added a photo of the present-day *Pedagogical University*. Another commenter used a quite anecdotal fact in favor of the Pedagogical Institute. He used

²⁴⁷ Post on Facebook group "My Tadjhikistantsy", accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/tajikistanians/permalink/2310106939273207/>.

²⁴⁸ Later, both of the Institutes have been transformed into Universities.

the fashion component of those times, particularly the length of young men's hair – the Pedagogical Institute did not have a reserve-officer training department; thus, men could afford having longer hair.

Memory is a complex phenomenon here, and nostalgia is an important element in it. However, it is not an idealization of the Soviet system, but people are nostalgic due to their personal memories. Through such reflections the members of this Facebook group express their longing for the routine they had experienced in their everyday life in the past.²⁴⁹ Taking the concept of nostalgia to another temporal dimension, these people having lived through the geo-political changes that the collapse of the Soviet Union has meant, fear the future, and, at the same time, also fear the truth about the past. They fear the changes they are experiencing; therefore, they live in the illusion of lost stability.²⁵⁰ The photographs of Dushanbe cityscape evoke in their memory the image of the city where the future was bright as opposed to their uncertain present. The online discourse shows that they have a complex, ambiguous relation to the Soviet past but an unambiguously strong relation to their city.

On the negative side, from the perspective of the Central Asian region, the USSR is associated with industrialization, oftentimes at the expense of traditional way of life, as well as the distortion of the ethnic composition of the region due to the Stalinist “state demarcation,” characterized by significant population displacement and the suppression of local languages. The so-called Russification of names is considered another imposed Soviet legacy. In Tajikistan, one of the first steps towards the revival of national identity was changing toponyms in honor of Tajik historical figures that had long been in oblivion, thus do not really resonate with the “Soviet” generations. The bill passed by the Parliament on 29 April 2020

²⁴⁹ Riley, “Attachment to the Ordinary Landscape”.

²⁵⁰ Christopher Lasch, “The politics of nostalgia,” *Harper's* 269, no. 1614 (1984): 65-70.

that bans naming newly born children of Tajik ethnicity with Russified names is another step in returning to cultural roots initiated by the President in 2007 when he denounced the Russian suffix in his family name. Nevertheless, as the disappointment with current quality of life grows, the general public wants back the economic stability, interpersonal relations and social security that used to be ensured by the Soviet Union. These aspects of the Soviet past are predominant in the social discourse around the fading Soviet architecture.

There is another kind of relevance of the photos and the related discourse in online social media in terms of collective memory. Residents of Dushanbe are excluded from the decision-making processes concerning urban heritage, so they have created an alternative space where they can express their views, opinions, motivations. The visual and textual discourse demonstrates which aspects should be taken into consideration by the public bodies, how urban residents respond and participate in the urban transformation, how complex their relationship is to the Soviet built heritage and past in general, but how important it is in terms of their present identities; ultimately, how important it would be to channel the communicative memory discourse into the creation of cultural memory.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory”.

Conclusion

To paraphrase the Montreal Expo-67 motto, after ninety years of its existence as the capital city, Dushanbe is still an enormous construction site.²⁵² Only now it fell victim to the processes of state-led reconstruction of the symbolic landscape of the city and the market-driven destruction of public and residential buildings from the Soviet era. Dushanbe was created as a city and capital in the Soviet period, and now it is disappearing. The problem is while building the nation, the State failed to do so without prejudice to the short Soviet history of the city. The decision-makers do not try to rethink critically Dushanbe's Soviet past, which makes it impossible to give an adequate, objective assessment of what needs to be preserved as heritage. If not for positive sentiments, the monuments of the previous political system could be preserved as a symbol of what should not be repeated. By erasing the Soviet past through the demolition of architecture as a medium of memory the State is depriving the present and future generations of the choice to know their history, and the chance to interpret their past for themselves. No matter how traumatic or problematic it might be, it is still a part of history. Reviving national traditions and culture does not necessarily mean destroying the previous way of life considered alien in the present. Instead, the past can be used to create a contrast, to emphasize the present values in culture or architecture. This problem is exacerbated by the complete neglect of public opinion and lack of dialogue with the civil society.

Dushanbe's urban space and architecture is a product of the Soviet era, it is contemporary with the Soviet Union and therefore can be considered historical. The architectural image of

²⁵² Elke Beyer, "The Soviet Union is an Enormous Construction Site", in *Soviet Modernism 1955-1991. Unknown History* (Zürich: Architekturzentrum Wien and Park Books, 2012).

Dushanbe was created by graduates of architectural schools of Moscow and Leningrad. Without knowing the peculiarities of the climatic conditions and local traditions, the architects of public and residential buildings in the 1930s-1950s created them in the styles of Neoclassicism or, to a lesser extent, Constructivism that was later in the center of heated discussions and criticism. As a city built from scratch epitomizing socialist construction, Dushanbe reflected all architectural styles used in the Soviet Union.

The city's expansion gave way to new construction trends and styles. Mikroraions and landmark architectural sites on the right bank of the Dushanbinka River manifest the response to the mass housing policy as well as the shift to Soviet Modernism from the late 1960s until the 1980s. New names among the architects, still dominated by Russian specialists, brought novelty to the architectural design. However, there is no way of idealizing the Soviet architecture – unprecedented and monumental changes in the architectural scene of the city had their pitfalls and stylistic drawbacks or excesses. Nevertheless, the city has been in constant transformation, and architects were in continuous search for its true identity through the fusion of national traditions with classical architecture until the end of the Soviet era.

The identity of Dushanbe as a city was created based on the Soviet-era image. The analysis of Soviet-era presentations of Dushanbe in text and images demonstrated that this image was that of a young city. The visual representation of Dushanbe created its image as a paradigm of a socialist city, the symbol of modernity and development. The government employed photographic images to create a cultural memory of socialist transformations juxtaposing them to the backwardness inherited from the Tsarist Russia. It centered around the narrative that if not for the Soviet rule, Dushanbe would have still been a village on the fringes of civilization. For this, the State used a combination of image and text as well as image and image as a medium in this process. Photographers and journalists used the tool of contrasts,

by bringing together images of old and new, backward and modern. These images did not serve as mere illustration but as a parallel medium to narrate the same rhetoric about Dushanbe as the one presented in texts, thereby being building blocks in the Soviet construction of the image of modern cities.

The influence of the Soviet narrative on the visual representation of Soviet Dushanbe in the modern context is still present. Thus, there is a room for contesting memories of the past and rethinking Soviet architecture as heritage and understand its place and role in the post-Soviet identity formation and cultural memory.

Though the independence meant a huge change in terms of politics, economy, social and cultural environment, and the official position of the Tajik state is that they are reviving the national traditions and culture by distancing itself from the Soviet past, the cultural memory of the new Dushanbe created by them is still based on the Soviet identity of the city – a young city. This is demonstrated by texts, but even more by images presenting the city. However, the lack of explicit official position on the Soviet past and the lack of initiatives to rethink and assess the heritage value of the Soviet architecture creates tension and speculations among the general public.

The exclusion of the civil society from the decision-making process and its inability to uphold the buildings of Soviet era has intensified the related memory discourse among residents of Dushanbe. With the lack of public forum, the only sphere for public discourse is social media. People have no agency concerning the buildings and the urban space, but they have agency concerning their images. The discourse shows that they have a very complex relation to the urban built heritage, which is not taken into consideration at all by the decision-making public bodies.

The Soviet heritage of Dushanbe, for which there is an interest on behalf of the local community, is disappearing without even being explored. Instead, the state is making decisions without public hearings. Architects are perceived by the public as politically motivated because their positions on the fate of Soviet architecture is also based on the master plan, which is not open for the public. Citizens should be involved into this process of defining and exploring heritage as well as in the decision-making processes about what happens to heritage. Independent expert and peer reviews need to be conducted to offer alternative views on the subject matter in order to avoid imposing one perspective and opposing the alternative one. For this, state archives must be open and accessible and unclassified archival documents made available to the researchers.

There is a need for dialogue between the state and the citizens. Transparency and open discussions will help avoid discontent and speculations. A politically independent historic and artistic assessment of the Soviet architecture and publication of its findings will help answer numerous questions triggered by the state policy. In order to avoid the monopolization of memory, more personal projects like Iurii Agarkov's must be supported. The human dimension to the memory of the Soviet past will ease the tensions and circumvent the Soviet propaganda sentiment, as Iurii's case study demonstrated.

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Appendices

Appendix I. Questionnaire to the administrator of Facebook group My Tadjikistantsy,
Shuhrat Dzhuraev

1. Name, age, place of birth and living. Occupation
2. Who is your audience? How would you characterize it?
3. What triggered your interest in reposting photos of Dushanbe? what photos/content draws your attention the most?
4. In your group there is a large quantity of photos of Soviet Dushanbe. What is the reason in your opinion?
5. Which sources/collections do you use? Why?
6. Is there a logic behind selecting a certain photo before posting or approving the publication?
7. How would you assess discussions under photos of Soviet Dushanbe posted in the group?
8. Were there cases when a photo triggered heated/controversial reaction/discussion? If yes, then what?
9. What in your opinion is the role of photographs in transmission of memory across generations?
10. Do you think that photo publications reflect nostalgic mood of the audience? If yes, then how?

Appendix II. Questionnaire to Iurii Agarkov – personal digitalization project

1. Name, age, place of birth and living. Occupation
2. For whom and for what purpose did you decide to digitize photos made by your grandfather?
3. How do you build your collection? Is there any logic behind picking a photo for digitizing and publishing?
4. Why did you decide to develop and digitize films and not printed photos from the family album?
5. Which social media do you use for publishing the photos and what is your audience?
6. What is the main subject in the photos made by your father – people, urban architecture or the interaction of both? Why?
7. What is the role of your photographs in preserving and transmitting the memory?
8. What memories do you specifically have looking at these photographs? Can you bring an example?
9. What image do you want to create in the memories of people through digitizing and publishing the photographs in social media?
10. What if these films belonged to a stranger? What would you have done in this case?