

KHARKIV IN THE 1920S-1930S AS THE CAPITAL OF VICTORIOUS MODERNISM

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ABSTRACT: Documenting and demonstrating (based on material from archives and literary primary sources) the extraordinary growth and development of Kharkiv in the interwar period with an emphasis on the time when it became the first capital of Soviet Ukraine is the main goal of this article. The ideas of modernism were vividly embodied in the architecture and urbanism of the city in the 1920s and early 1930s. Large-scale urban transformations turned it into one of the largest and most significant industrial, cultural, scientific and educational centers of the USSR in a very short period. It became the third most important city after Moscow and Leningrad. And in 1928 modernism was officially recognized as the leading direction in its architecture.

KEY WORDS: interwar modernism in Ukraine, the first capital of the Ukrainian SSR, Kharkiv Constructivism, urban planning in the 1920s-1930s.

INTRODUCTION: Kharkiv became one of the first cities where residents heard explosions in the early morning of February 24, 2022. For two years, it has been on the pages of newspapers, websites, news with military reports in connection with the destruction that befell the city. But almost a hundred years ago, Kharkiv was also well-known thanks to its active unprecedented construction, its cutting-edge modernist architecture, which was captured, among other things, on the pages of the foreign architectural press. Some modern historians still refer to it as the “capital of Constructivism”, although in the 1920s and 1930s there seemed to be more significant centers of the Soviet avant-garde, such as Moscow and Leningrad. What was the modernist phenomenon of Kharkiv? Finding an answer to this question is *the purpose of the article*. It is necessary to define and document the unique place of the city in the history of the development of modernism in Ukraine.

The study is based on archival documents, materials from original magazines, books, albums and other publications of the 1920s-1930s, and on previous research by the author of this article.

The foundation of the fortress town on the territory subjected to nomad raids dates back to the middle of the 17th century. A favorable, strategically important position for its development as an industrial center was appreciated at the end of the 19th century during the rapid growth of industry in the Russian Empire, with the beginning of the active development of the Donetsk coal deposit and especially after the opening of the railway in 1869, when Kharkiv

became a major railway junction connecting St Petersburg and Moscow with Donbass and southern regions.

But the real realization of the transformation of Kharkiv into an industrial, cultural and educational center began with its capital status in 1919-1934. Having experienced a series of rebellious events caused by the February and October revolutions of 1917, the civil war and the German intervention in 1918, the city became the first capital of Soviet Ukraine in the most difficult time of the country's formation. It was already one of the most significant centers of the USSR along with Moscow and Leningrad in the early 1930s.

The development of Kharkiv in the interwar period can be called unprecedented. Its population nearly quadrupled from 1920 to 1940, and its population density doubled. The territory of the city had reached almost thirty thousand hectares and its housing stock had grown more than four times. Kharkiv then had more than four million square meters of living space, over forty percent of which was in multi-story residential buildings. Dozens of new schools and kindergartens, universities and technical schools, research institutes, hospitals, theaters, clubs and other public buildings were built. The volume of production of Kharkiv industries exceeded the level of 1913 before World War II by more than seventy times (Kasyanov, 1955, pp. 14-15). These figures are taken from the book of the famous Kharkiv architect Alexander Kasyanov, who was a direct participant in the architectural and urban transformations of those years. He led the development of the architectural



01 Plan of Kharkiv, drawn up by the city department of communal services in 1924. The layout of the future new administrative center with a circular square has already been mapped out and is clearly visible in the northern part of the city. © Photo by S. Smolenska from the original.

and planning part of the master plan of Kharkiv in 1931-1938, and then became the chief architect of the city in the post-war restoration period of 1944-1950.

URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS

The city grew so fast that it was ahead of any plans for its enlargement. Analysis of primary sources (documents and literature of the second half of the 1920s), carried out in the course of the study, revealed previously unknown facts regarding the progress of Kharkiv in those years.

The city limits were expanded to an area of 14,200 hectares in 1923. However, as it turned out, this was not enough and the city experienced difficulties in allocating land for new development. The population was 260,367 people in the former old city limits, and in the new – 324,530 people according to the District Bureau of Statistics on January 1, 1923 (Guidebook, 1927, p. 36-37). Kharkiv lagged far behind the major cities of Ukraine – Kyiv and Odessa in terms of its amenities and sanitary conditions at that time. The city department of communal services, under the leadership of chief engineer I. Voitkevich, began to develop a number of preliminary options for the city remodeling and expansion. The planning work undertaken in 1923-1926/27 laid the foundations for the further urban development of Kharkiv. The most significant activities included:

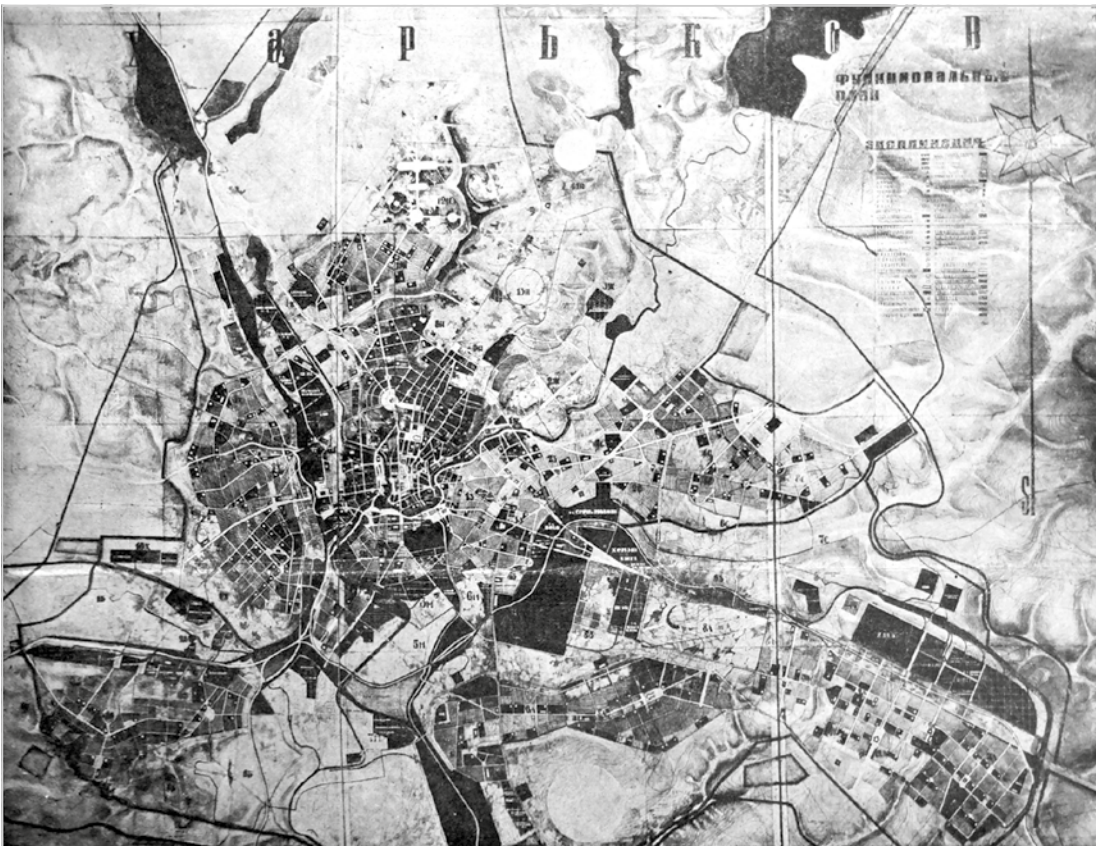
- Conducting research on the geological structure of the city, its demography, studying the existing transport system, traffic, the structure of building blocks, etc.
- Drawing up schemes of a network of city green spaces; highway networks; the laying of slopes to connect the upland part with the lower sections of the city (projects of Klochkovsky and Zhuravlevsky descents); linking the planning project with railway facilities, etc.
- Preparation of planning schemes for individual districts of the city: planning of the center; the village "Red October"; the village on Saltivska road; the layout of the University lands, where a place for the construction of Dzerzhinsky Square (Svoboda Square) as a new metropolitan administrative and cultural center was chosen, and a number of others [FIGURE 01].
- Organization and management of river regulation activities in order to prevent flooding of banks by spring floods.
- Improvement of squares, bazaars, punching of new streets and improvement of existing ones.
- Restoration and creation of new gardens, parks, boulevards, squares; establishment of regulatory data for urban construction.

It was at that time that the main vectors of the future development of the city were determined on previously unoccupied lands. It was planned to concentrate new industrial facilities, mainly in the east and southeast direction, where industrial enterprises already existed,

and where there were a railway line and vacant sites for construction. It was planned to build the Kharkiv Turbine Generator and Tractor Plants there later. The northern direction was mostly intended for the construction of housing and a new metropolitan administrative center. The large green forest area existing in the north (Pomerki) was transformed into a forest park with an area of 2000 hectares – one of the largest in the USSR. It was supposed to serve as a recreation area for inhabitants and provide the city with fresh air. Only holiday homes, pioneer camps, and hospital complexes were allowed to be built there. The construction of an aircraft factory was started in 1926 in the northern part of the city, since there was a place for an airport. The FED plant, which produced electromechanical locksmith equipment, was also located nearby. Its launch took place in January 1932. And in 1933 the first Soviet film camera with the same name FED began to be produced there.

Archival documents found during the study confirm the information that a special planning Bureau was established under the city council in 1929. This bureau developed a scheme for reconstruction of the capital, which is also called the “first general plan of Kharkiv”. Engineer A. A. Maine was the bureau chief and the leader of the project. It was assumed that Greater Kharkiv was to be similar to Ebenezer Howard’s social city, consisting of satellite cities, interconnected by economic and cultural interests and gravitating towards the center – the old city.

Industrial enterprises were located in the vicinity at a distance of at least twenty kilometers from the center along radial and ring automobile and railway roads. Each city was created to serve industrial enterprises. Therefore, both in size (from 20 to 100-120 thousand people), and in the features of its construction, and in the way of urban life, it was intended to reflect the characteristics of the production of its industry, i.e. have a certain “specialization”. The average population density in the satellite towns was to be 300 people/ha. A significant part of the urban area was set aside for public green spaces (Smolenska, 2017, pp. 206-211). This plan, submitted for approval in 1930, was criticized. Why? As Kasyanov noted (Kasyanov, 1955, p. 23), it “contained the ideas of deurbanization that were fashionable in those years in Western Europe. Therefore, the scheme of the engineer Maine could not be approved and was rejected”. As we see, political considerations turned out to be stronger than urban planning arguments. In addition, Maine had a very authoritative opponent – Professor Alexander Eingorn, who was opposed to the ideas of deurbanization. It was he who subsequently led the development of a new master plan of the capital at the Ukrainian State Research Institute for Urban Design DIPROMISTO (it was created at the same time, in 1930). Work on the master plan continued for several years. It was submitted for final consideration to the government only in 1936 [FIGURE 02]. But already in 1932, Eingorn outlined the main ideas of the general plan at a conference



02 Master plan of Kharkiv.
Functional diagram.
DIPROMISTO, 1936.
© Reconstruction of Kharkov,
1936, p. 1.

in Kharkiv, to which a French delegation was invited for a joint discussion. It is worth citing here his own words about the key provisions of the city planning, which were then developed in the subsequent stages of design work:

"The basic idea of the theme developed for the reconstruction of Kharkiv comes from the analysis of the topo-hydrological, sanitary and hygienic conditions of the locality, the current situation of the essential parts of the city worthy of preservation; according to this theme, it is necessary to divide the housing estates of the city into 5 massifs, located on the highest and salubrious plateaus. The intervals between these settlements are the valleys of the Kharkiv rivers, which are poor in water, with a fairly high level of groundwater. Industrial enterprises, garages, factories-kitchens, electricity and heating plants, etc., as well as green plantations, will be distributed in these zones. At the same time, great works will be carried out to straighten and deepen the bed of the rivers and to raise the water level by building dykes and reservoirs, by drying out the marshy and feverish places, by draining the high underground waters. For each of these 5 housing estates, a whole network of institutions of public interest has been planned. Only the most important cultural and scientific institutions, which cannot be repeated in each radius and can be built only in the capital of Ukraine, scientific institutes, some museums and theaters with 4-5 thousand seats, etc., as well as the administrative and economic institutions, belonging to the region or to the whole republic, keep their place and develop in the old central part of the city" (Architecture, 1932).

THE NEW ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER OF THE UKRAINIAN CAPITAL

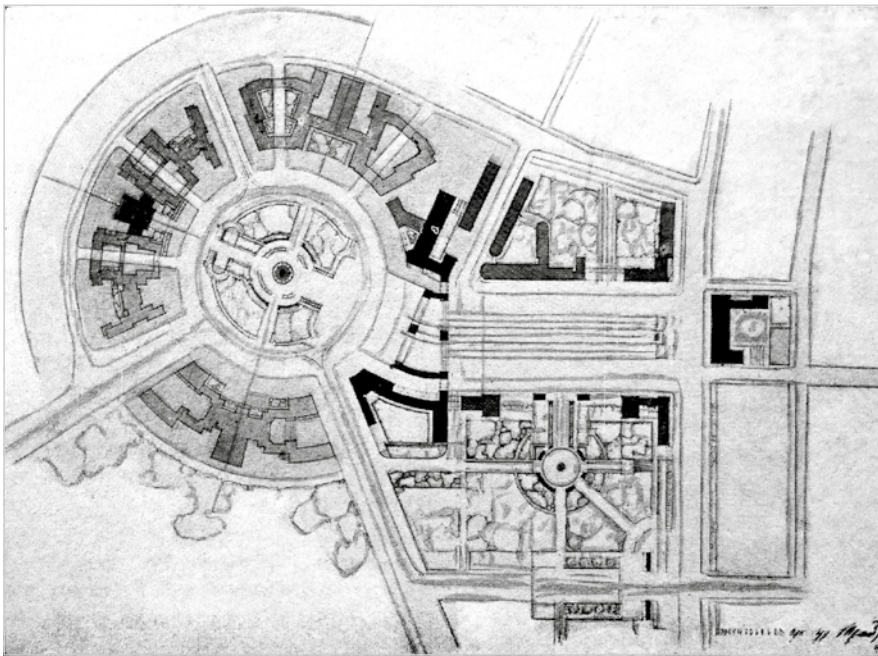
The formation of a new representative metropolitan center proceeded in stages. A competition for a planning scheme for a new residential area started it. The round shape of the square with radial streets for housing and a new wide avenue in the northern radial direction, proposed by the architect Viktor Trotsenko, were taken as a basis. The planning project for the area of the former University lands and Shatilovka on the site of a former wasteland cut by a deep ravine was drawn up in 1923–1924. The main administrative ensemble of Kharkiv was created, not according to a town-planning project, but sequentially, in the process of competitive design of each building. The first of them, erected on the future square, its pearl and constructivist symbol of the city was the State Industry House (Derzhprom). The competition for it was announced in 1925, and its construction lasted only 2.5 years (1925-1928). This giant reinforced concrete high-rise multifunctional complex for many offices of industrial institutions concentrated in the Ukrainian capital (its



03 Pre-war view of the round part of Dzerzhinsky Square (Svoboda Square) with the buildings of Derzhprom and the House of Projects. The new high-rise residential area "Zadepromye" is visible behind Derzhprom. Photo of the late 1930s. © Architecture of the USSR, 1940, 8, p. 65.

volume amounted to 347,000 cubic meters) gained fame far beyond the borders of Ukraine. The Globus magazine wrote about the future new metropolitan center in the year the construction of Derzhprom was completed: "Here ... according to the plan of the architects, 5-6 monumental giant buildings should be built in the style of the latest architectural and artistic structures, sustained in sharply expressive, simple lines, without any frills, with large transparent areas interspersed with iron and concrete. It will be a real embodiment of a new city, a city of the future, a city of iron, concrete and glass" (Babat, 1928, p. 266). Two more high-rise buildings to match Derzhprom were called upon to form a round part of the square. In 1929, the construction of the House of Cooperation began according to the project of architects A. Dmitriev and A. Munts, which they had previously submitted to the competition "House of the Government of the Ukrainian SSR". In the same year, a competition was announced for the House of Design Organizations for institutes that were engaged in the design of large plants. Its construction was started immediately in 1930 according to the project of one of the authors of Derzhprom prof. S. Serafimov and arch. M. Zandberg-Serafimova [FIGURE 03].

The round part of the square was attached to one of the main city streets, Karl Liebknecht (Sumska street) with a rectangular part. The building of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (reconstruction project by Jacob Shteinberg) and the Hotel International (designed by the winner of the competition for a hotel, architect Grigory Yanovitsky) decorated it already in the early 1930s. The unusual irregular shape of the square, its gigantic size and its phased formation without a preliminary urban plan gave rise to certain difficulties. The length of the rectangular part of the area is 750 m, the width is 130 m, the diameter of the round part is 350 m. The difference in the height of the marks along the longitudinal axis is over 11 meters. Derzhprom is located at the lowest point of the square. The highest point is at Karl Liebknecht Street (Sumska St.). The axes of symmetry of the round and rectangular parts do not coincide, they are directed at an angle of approximately 20 degrees to each



04 An unrealized project for the architectural completion of Dzerzhinsky Square (Svoboda Square). Arch. B. Priymak and V. Andreev, early 1930s. The displacement of the axes of the round and rectangular parts of the area is obvious. © Kasyanov, 1934, p. 62.

other [FIGURE 04]. This problem was discussed among architects and in the press of the 1930s: "It must be pointed out that, as a result of uncoordinated actions of individual construction projects, the basement mark of the House of Cooperation is four meters higher than the mark of the basement of the House of State Industry, and the mark of the basement of the latter is 1.20 m higher than the mark of the basement House of Projects. The result of this was the ugliest slopes near the House of Cooperation and the Hotel International..." (Kasyanov, 1934, p. 54). A note is appropriate here: although these slopes really exist to this day, they do not interfere with the perception of the square as an integral ensemble. The "irregularity" of the form and the special relief of the square gives it originality and is a clear confirmation of the extraordinary history of its creation. The ensemble was supplemented and reconstructed in the spirit of socialist realism in the 1950s after World War II (for more on the history of the ensemble, see Smolenska, 2023).

"NEW KHARKIV"

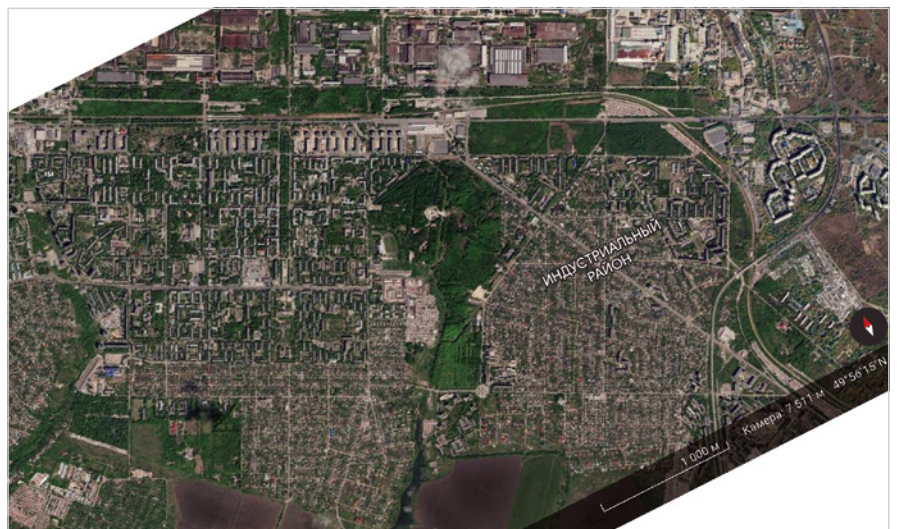
New construction could not wait for the city planners to complete the work on the design of the city in full. At the end of the 1920s, the question arose of building a tractor plant, designed for the annual production of 50,000 tractors, with an estimated number of workers of 25,000 people. Kharkiv and its environs were suitable for its location, both in terms of transportation options and potential labor force. The site for the future plant and the settlement near it was determined 8 km from the historical core of the city to the south-east of it near the Losevo railway station. It was a free territory, allowing the implementation of advanced modernist urban planning ideas: a clear separation of industrial and residential areas with a protective green strip between them, uniform placement of children's institutions, shops, public service institutions in residential

areas, row building. The project of "New Kharkiv" – that was the name of the city for the Kharkiv Tractor Plant (KhTZ) was designed by a group of young architects, headed by Professor Pavlo Alyoshin in 1930, and was intended for 100-120 thousand inhabitants. Analysis of the scheme of the master plan of "New Kharkiv" (Scale 1:5000), which I found during my dissertation research in 2013 in the archives of the project leader prof. Alyoshin, allows us to judge the urban planning ideas of the designers [FIGURE 05].

The industrial zone received linear development along the Chuguev highway and the railway. The placement of KhTZ, Machine Tool and other factories was planned in it, as well as a large food plant to serve the needs of residents. A green sanitary protection strip 500 m wide was laid along the highway and the industrial zone, separating them from residential areas. Seven-year schools were placed in this green strip from the side of residential development, and the tram park – from the side of the industrial zone. A simple rectangular grid of streets, parallel and perpendicular to the Chuguev highway, was the basis for the layout of the town. Two main ones were singled out: a boulevard running in a transverse direction towards the factory area and Losevo railway station, and a wide green central esplanade parallel to the railway track and the highway with public buildings located in it: hotels, cinemas, museums, etc. The city park with the Palace of Physical Culture and the administrative and cultural center: the square for meetings, the Palace of Culture, the City Council, the police, the Opera House, the post office, the department store, etc. were concentrated at the intersection of these two main perpendicular directions. The city was surrounded on all sides by greenery, which entered it in a deep wedge-park. The rest house, which effectively completed the esplanade running from the central square, was moved to the periphery, as well as the ten-year school, next to which an educational complex



05 The scheme of the master plan of "New Kharkiv", Scale 1:5000 (it was found and identified by the author of this article in 2013). © Alosin Pavlo Fedotovitch (1881-1961), papers (Fund 8, Inventory 1, Folder 259-265), Central State Archive Museum of Literature and Arts of Ukraine (CSAMLA), Kyiv, Ukraine.

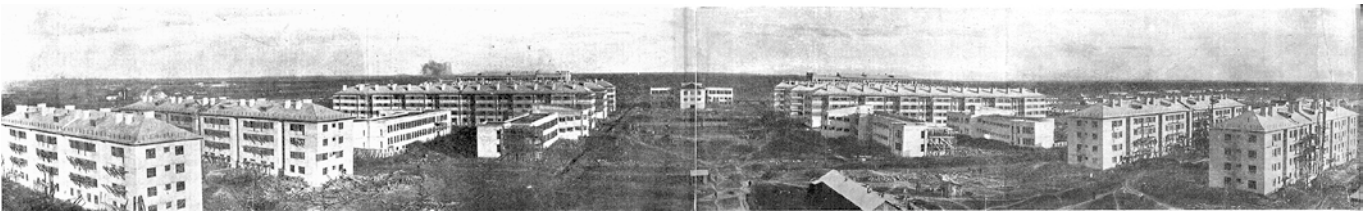


06 Current state of KhtZ settlement. © Google Earth.

was provided: a technical university, a technical school, a factory school. A large complex of children's sanatoriums was located outside the residential area in greenery on the southwestern side. The territory for nurseries and greenhouses was allotted next to it. The city was planned to expand in a southeasterly direction parallel to the development of the industrial zone (Smolenska, 2017).

Compositional harmony and logical clarity, the integrity of the plan, taking into account the terrain, the use of typical row buildings, environmental friendliness is fully inherent in this masterpiece of Ukrainian urban planning in 1930. Its true meaning is revealed only today when the project is applied to the existing planning situation. Only a small fraction of the original grandiose idea was realized by its authors in the 1930s: the main street network was outlined, a park and a wide boulevard to the factories and the railway station were laid, several residential complexes / quarters closest to KHTZ with kindergartens and canteen clubs, a ten-year school (school № 119 now) were implemented. The construction of "New Kharkiv" continued in the post-war period in a different style of

socialist realism, but still with the preservation of the main planning structure. However, it was later broken. The central square with administrative and cultural buildings has not been completed. Urban intervention without taking into account the historical significance of the settlement, its value as modernist heritage, continued and especially intensified in recent decades. The five-hundred-meter green strip between the industrial and residential area, which served as a park, as well as the green zone around the entire settlement and the wide central esplanade are completely built up [FIGURE 06]. The Orthodox Church of the Holy Martyr Alexander was built in 2000-2004 near the Palace of Pioneers at the intersection of Aleksandrivskiy and Industrialniy Avenues (this is the boulevard perpendicular to the Chuhuevske Highway, connecting the settlement with factories) in a very dubious "Ukrainian neo-baroque" style, completely inconsistent with the nature of the surrounding buildings and original urban design. And in 2010, a monument to St. Alexander was erected next to the Church, closing the prospect of the boulevard (Industrialniy Avenue), which also contradicts the original



07 Panorama of the socialist city "New Kharkiv", 1931. © Khitrov, 1931.

urban planning idea. Only a few residential neighborhoods, whose spaces and buildings continue to undergo transformation – rebuild, lose authentic details and proportions – can be called the remnants of this unique urban heritage [FIGURE 07].

To complete the formation of Railway station Square – the main "gates" of the Ukrainian capital was an important urban planning task of the second half of the 1920s. The construction of the Main Post Office on its northern side played a special role in the history of Kharkiv modernism. The building began to be erected according to the project of a student of the Faculty of Architecture of the Moscow Higher Technical School Arkady Mordvinov, who became one of the winners (second prize) of the 1927 competition for the design of the building of the Central Sorting and Distribution Post Office in Kharkiv. Advanced technologies and designs were applied in the project. The dynamic modernist façades contrasted with the classical architecture of the other buildings in the square [FIGURE 08, FIGURE 09].

A letter from a group of engineers and railway employees under the heading "The project of the Kharkov post office should be reviewed" was published on July 28, 1928 in the newspaper "Kharkov Proletarian". It became an occasion for a wide public discussion of questions about the ways of development of Kharkiv architecture. The authors of the letter expressed their categorical disagreement with the project: "We ... protest against the disfigurement of Station Square by a building that violates the architectural ensemble, and we ask the district engineer to raise this issue in all its breadth before a meeting of representatives of the artistic thought of the city of Kharkov" (Gnusyn et al., 1928). The newspaper published a letter from a large group of architects, a response from

the author of the project, Mordvinov, and the opinion of the editorial staff a few days later on August 1. The latter, under the heading "What should be the new Kharkov", contained a proposal to open a discussion on the issue of "artistic design of construction" with the involvement of the public.

The debate on the topic "On New and Old Architecture" took place on August 14, 1928. The editors of the newspaper "Kharkiv Proletarian", the Presidium of the City Council and the district engineer acted as its organizers. The exhibition "Architecture of Kharkiv" was timed to coincide with this day, as well as an exposition of architectural diploma works of graduates of the Kharkiv Art Institute. The topic of discussion aroused great interest from the Kharkiv public. The editors received applications from 200 largest enterprises, universities, construction and other organizations to participate in it. A total of 800 people gathered, including representatives of other Ukrainian cities: Kyiv, Odessa, Poltava. The first speaker was the chairman of the City Council Kozhukhov. He noted how important it is for the capital of Ukraine to have its own architectural face, different from the image of the old bourgeois city. In addition to the author of the project, Mordvinov and his opponents, 15 speakers took part in the debate – workers, architects, and members of the public (B-ov, 1928). The dispute ended with the victory of the new architecture over the old forms, which, according to the decision of the meeting, "should irrevocably leave" (for more on this event, see Smolenska, 2013).

KHARKIV 1920s-1930s

Unlike the large, densely built-up capital cities of Moscow and Leningrad (it was called the "second capital"), Kharkiv



08 The building of the Post Office on the Railway Station Square in Kharkiv. © Postcard from the 1930s.



09 The building of the Post Office on the Railway Station Square in Kharkiv. © Photo by S. Smolenska, 2022.

had a place to turn around - on new, undeveloped lands, "on the previously empty outskirts of the city, or outside it", where "whole new districts, forming in many cases, as it were, separate villages, closely connected with the city" (Peretiakovych, 1928), made it possible to freely create a new image of the Ukrainian capital.

How did the generation of the 20s-30s see this image? Here is how the writer V. Ivogin described it in his essay "Kharkov - Kharkiv", published in the journal "Uzh" in 1928:

"Kharkiv sprawled wide, girded itself with a dense network of railways, crossed the streets with tram tracks, bound the earth with asphalt and cobblestones, rose to the sky with stone giants, chimneys of factories. What was still so quiet and unapproachable not so long ago is now disturbed by the fussy roar of the propellers. Buses, taxis, trams, loudspeakers, multi-colored shop windows, coffee houses, theaters, cinemas, illuminated advertising ... The city is noisy, the city is nervous, the city of plants and factories, the capital of the U.S.R.R. – the cultural and political center of a large country"
(Ivogin, 1928, p. 67)

In the album "Kharkiv is building", published by the city council in 1931 (Khitrov, 1931), the image of the city appears in the photographs of that time and in scarce but convincing figures. Kharkiv grew into the largest industrial center not only in Ukraine, but in the entire Union literally before their very eyes. Its industry increased by 14 times in comparison with 1913. Large Kharkiv factories "Hammer and Sickle", "Svit Miner" and many others were reconstructed. In addition to them, the "Socialist giant" KhTZ went into operation in the fall of 1931, and the Turbine Generator Plant – in 1932 ("the largest in the world", as stated in the publication). 35 universities, 48 technical schools, 80 research institutes, 13 museums, 10 stationary and 5 mobile theaters, 62 clubs, 76 libraries, 9 cinemas, 2 radio stations, 140 newspapers with a circulation of 1.5 million copies, 125 periodicals with a circulation 1.5 million copies, etc. there were already then in the city.

Kharkiv became one of the three Ukrainian centers for the training of architects and builders along with Kiev and Odessa in 1930. The Kharkiv Construction Institute was formed on the basis of the eponymous faculty of the Kharkiv Technological Institute. Its new building in the spirit of Constructivism, taking into account the characteristics of architectural education (large auditoriums for architectural design, classes for drawing and specialized laboratories) was built in 1930-1933. It was badly damaged during World War II and was reconstructed for the

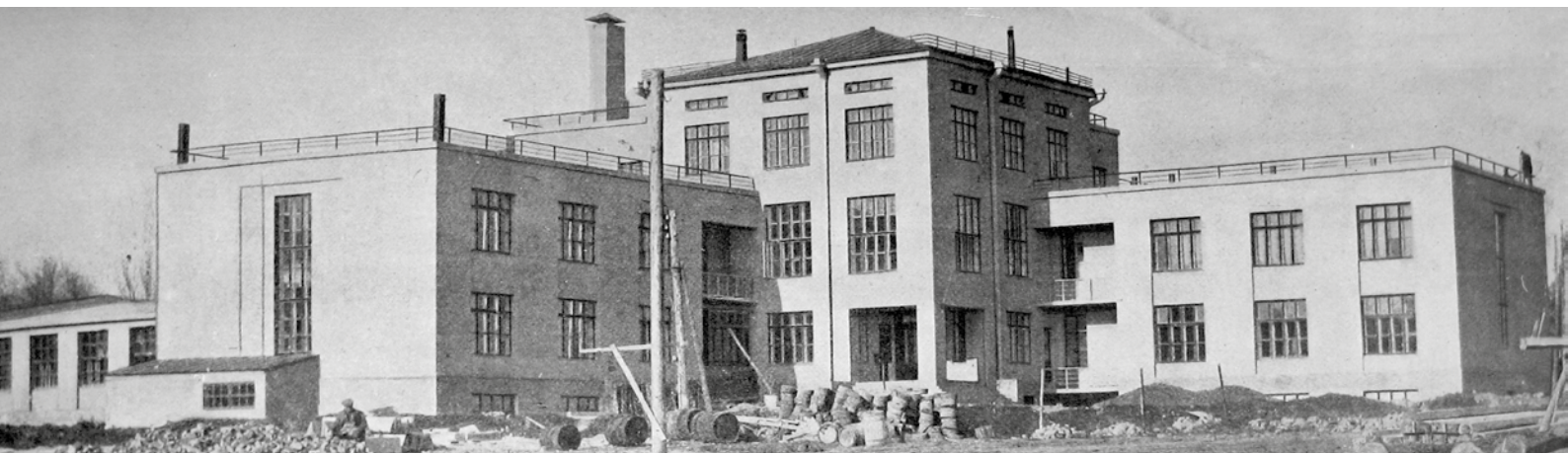
needs of another university in the socialist realism style in the 1950s.

One example of the scientific potential of the capital in those years is the Ukrainian Institute of Physics and Technology (UPhTI), formed in 1929. The large modernist complex of the UPhTI: laboratories, administrative and residential buildings were built in the upland part of the city. Famous physicists A. Walter, L. Landau, K. Sinelnikov, L. Shubnikov and others worked there. The first in the USSR and the fourth in the world cryogenic laboratory was established there in 1930. Liquid hydrogen was obtained at the Institute in 1931 for the first time in the country. The proton accelerator was built in 1932 and the world's second artificial nuclear fission reaction of the lithium nucleus was carried out. The town-planning and architectural ensemble of UPhTI has retained its modernist authenticity thanks to the long-term closed regime of access to it. It can be restored and recognized as a specific modernist heritage item in view of its special research function in combination with housing [FIGURE 10, FIGURE 11].

The material resources allocated for the new capital, of course, contributed to its rapid development. But an important role in the renewal of the urban environment was played by people attracted by the wide possibilities of a dynamically changing city, hopes for the realization of their efforts and talents. The newly created spaces and buildings were filled with significant events, populated by bright, talented individuals.

The theatrical, artistic, literary, architectural life of the city was seething, reflecting innovative revolutionary trends, coexistence and struggle of creative associations and groups that defended different views on art and architecture. It was they who fueled the image of the city with energy: "Only modern functional architecture based on technical achievements and changed social conditions has won the right to exist. Now the struggle of this new, fresh architectural idea with the remnants of a still strong tradition, borrowing and eclectic, unprincipled decoration is especially felt" (Lopovok, 1928, p. 79).

Innovation in literature influenced the worldview of people, innovation in painting found a way out in industrial graphics, in numerous printed products – covers of books, magazines that saturated urban life, splashed into urban spaces in the form of street advertising, decoration of city festivities [FIGURE 12]. Experiments in theater directing (in particular, in the Berezil Theater under the direction of Les Kurbas) initiated a search for extraordinary solutions for stage decorations, made new demands on the spatial construction of theater halls, on the architecture of the theater. It is no coincidence that the idea of creating an advanced technically equipped building of a modern theater was born in Kharkiv, and the international



10 The main building of UPfTI. © Khitrov, 1931.



11 UPfTI. The laboratory building. © Photo by S. Smolenska, 2020.



12 Covers of periodicals designed by famous Kharkiv artists: Kharkiv is building (Adolf Strakhov, 1931), New Art and Art Materials. Avangardo (Vasil Ermilov, 1927 and 1929). © Photo by S. Smolenska from the originals.

competition announced for it gathered so many participants from different countries.

The journal "Zodchestvo" (Architecture), published in Kharkiv in those years, called for a renewal of the old city's appearance: "The architectural appearance of the capital must be reorganized. This reorganization is carried by young modern architecture. It is only necessary not to interfere with this new fresh constructive thought to carry out work on the creation of modern structures, freed from decorative design..." (Lopovok, 1928, p. 81). The image of the first capital of the Ukrainian SSR was exactly like this – a large experimental platform for new modern architecture.

CONCLUSIONS

The 1920s-early 1930s was a period of struggle between different styles in the architecture of Ukraine. Modernism, supported by the urban community, was officially recognized as the leading trend in the architecture of Kharkiv in 1928. The style of most buildings was predetermined. Were there similar historical precedents in other European capital cities in those years, or does Kharkiv remain the only one of its kind – a unique "capital of Constructivism"?

Urban planning ideas laid down in the 1920s-1930s became fundamental for the development of Kharkiv for many years to come until 1990. Subsequently, the city

really grew in the directions planned then. The residential areas of Pavlovo Pole in the north and the Selection Station in the southeast were built in the late 1950s-1970s. "New Kharkiv" became one of the urban areas. Saltivka – the largest residential area in Ukraine (400,000 inhabitants in 2018) was built in the 1960s-1980s in the northeast of the city. Svoboda Square continues to be the heart of the city, its active center.

Not only archival documents and primary sources of the 1920s-1930s testify to the extraordinary development, the grand scale of the transformation, the modernist nature of the architecture of Kharkiv in the interwar period. Existing buildings and urban spaces are the irrefutable proof of this. They have become symbols of the city. They were distorted due to hostility towards them in the late 1930s and early 1950s, due to many years of neglect until today, due to destruction during WWII and military operations in 2022-2024. But the modernist heritage of the Soviet avant-garde is still recognizable. It cannot be completely erased from the face of the city, since it is embedded in the urban structure, in key urban complexes, and is an integral part of urban life. The main task is to preserve them, restore their national and international value, make them more visible and significant in the image of modern Kharkiv.

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