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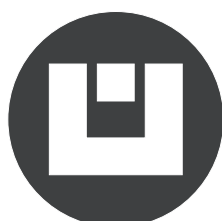
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URBAN MEMORY AND HERITAGE: THE ISSUE OF CITY HERITAGE IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CENTRE OF BAKU

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ABSTRACT

In a context of globalized urban production, it is common to notice a dissociation between urban memory and urban project; some city districts are transformed into a space-museum, an enclave out of time, while others are destroyed and “Dubaised” allowing the rise to interchangeable places around the world.

The city itself consists of material and immaterial elements and the second ones includes what it is called urban memory. Memory can be defined by individuals as the property of retaining and restoring information from the past. Each individual develops his own memory of the city, corresponding to the experiences with the places and depending on its social and historical context. Memory is, by definition, transmitted and therefore it's the transmission of various expressions from the city that allow a person to appropriate the urban heritage. The appropriation of urban heritage is important in the context of the preservation of city assets.

This study examines the complexity of the urban memory of human individuals and the difficulty to grasp its sense for decision makers who are engaged in urban policy. Based on the case of Baku city, the results from this study propose to draw attention to the awareness of the consequences of the misunderstanding of urban memory.

Keywords: urban memory, urban planning, heritage, conversation, oblivion

1. INTRODUCTION

In a context of globalized urban production, it is common to notice a dissociation between urban memory and urban project; some city districts are transformed into a space-museum, an enclave out of time, while others are destroyed and “Dubaised” (Dubaisation - the appropriation of the Dubai's model of metropolization, a mode of urban development where megaprojects led a main role.), allowing the rise to interchangeable places around the world. In this second approach, the city is considered by urban planners thought of in terms of its materiality. The urban form, literally “image of the city” (from Latin *forma*, mold, image, and from *urbs*, city) could be defined as the relationship between buildings and open spaces according to articulations and particular placement towards social, historical, political and geographical contexts.

However, the city not only consists of material elements but also of the immaterial, which includes what we will call urban memory. Memory can be defined by individuals as the property of retaining and restoring information from the past (translation from material of the Encyclopedia Universalis). Each individual develops his own memory of the city, corresponding to the experiences with the places and depending on its social and historical context. Memory is, by definition, transmitted and therefore it's the transmission of various expressions from the city that allow a person to appropriate the urban heritage. The appropriation of urban heritage is important in the context of the preservation of city assets.

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2. THE ROLE OF CITY PERCEPTION

2.1 The ways of memorizing a city.

Humans have always tried to grasp the memory of the city and toward this they have carried out the methods and tools, but also the heritage strategies.

Until the Middle Ages it was the mnemonic method, which was most commonly used among scholars. At the level of a human, based on the mnemonic method, the architectural heritage of the city was unconsciously recorded in his perceptual memory generally through the action of the eye. There would be an eye of the imagination, uncertain of the type of organ located in the brain, which allow us to both memorize and imagine (Figure 1) [1].

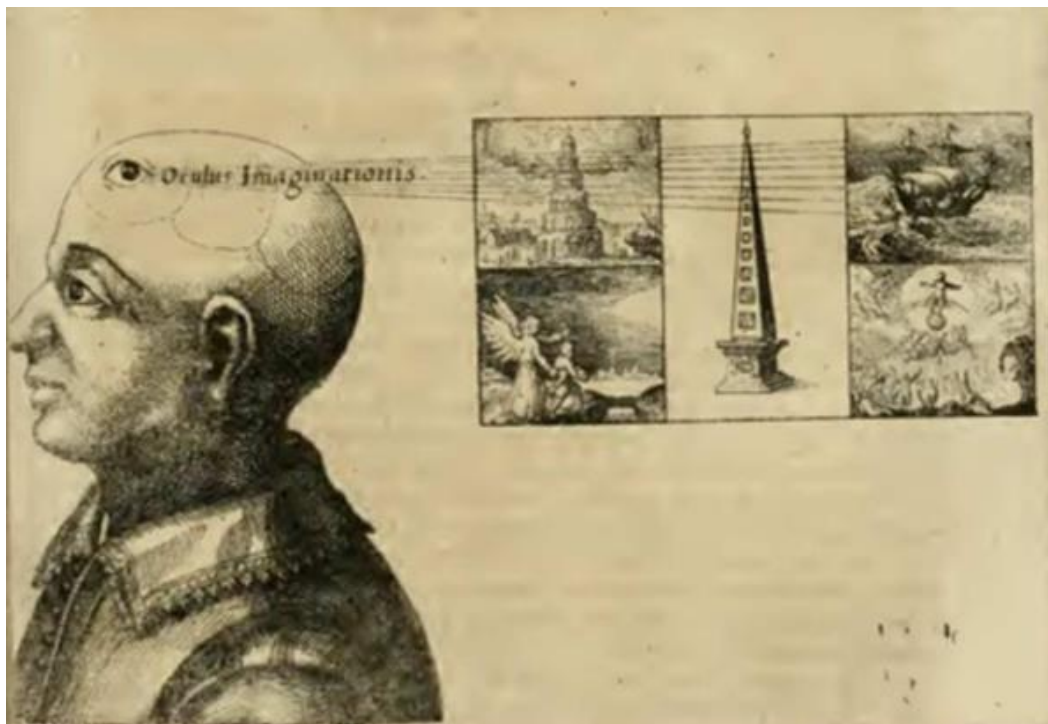


Figure 1. The Oculus Imaginationis (The Eye of the Imagination) as found on the title page of Tractatus One, Section Two, Portion Three of Robert Fludd's *Ars Memoriae* (Fludd, 1617).

This eye would allow us to grasp the spirit of the world, the spirit of the city, particularly characterized by the urban forms. Further phase is about internalization / memorizing these urban forms. Certain ancient Greek philosophers made memorization as practice, "l'ars memoriae" which could be cultivated by humans.

Furthermore, "l'ars memoriae", developed in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, demonstrates that there is a close relationship between the memory of an urban cultural community and the spatial forms that symbolize it. These spatial forms are perhaps individual buildings and are more complex elements (landscape); they form cultural landmarks, which supports identification. The individual buildings develop signs of recognition in the urban space, fix memories/perceptions in material realities (places), develop a functional and structural understanding of the city. Space therefore structures memory as well as perceptual/sensory experiences. Certain thinkers argue the memorization is conscious of the urban forms by individuals, considering that it results from the use of the city. There is also a heritage strategy to simplify the understanding of urban memory, which Aldo Rossi calls "theater of memory" [2] giving an example with the transformation of the theater of Nîmes (Figure 2, 3).



Figure 2. Theater of Nîmes with its Ionic colonnades and a remnant of the structure of the fortress.

Source: https://i.skyrock.net/6976/12776976/pics/3000480213_1_5_DQ2poFWR.jpg



Figure 3. The ancient arena of Theater of Nîmes.

Source: www.lin-a.com/gallery/france-gallery-nimes-architecture-temporary-urban-lin-architects/nimes-arena

With the fall of the Roman Empire, the city established new borders delimited by fortifications. These occupied a smaller territory than under the Roman city. According to S. Mazzella [3], the re-appropriation of the past on the basis of the aspirations of present allows the emergence of a collective memory of social groups. In particular, today many abandoned industrial areas are being rehabilitated into residential areas; the traces of the industrial past are preserved subsequently a collective memory emerges. This suggests that there are different types of city memories:

- individual,
- collective,

- social group memory
that could be activated through appropriate methods.

2.2 Distruction in the perception of urban memory.

Cities experience the phases of urban renewal, which is accompanied by the destruction of buildings. As one of the consequence, people struggle to grasp the urban memory. As urban memory is difficult to grasp by individuals due to destruction, some authors use the sensitive approach of describing the city as a human being [4]. It was used quite early on by authors such as Marcel Proust with Venice, Honoré de Balzac and Victor Hugo with Paris.

Likewise, this particular approach is reflected in the thoughts on the relations between urban form, psychology and memory that are possible to observe in the works of writers from antiquity to the nowadays (Quintilien, Aristote, Paolo Rossi, Francis Yates, Maurice Halbwachs, Sébastien Marot etc.). The most unique comparison between the urban form, psychology and memory is made by Sigmund Freud [5]. The last one compares the city towards a human being which is capable to possess own memory. He mentions different stages of development of the memory of the individual through the records of psychic impressions. The scholar compares the psyche of the human and a city, like Rome, and demonstrates that it is possible to perceive different urban eras in the same place. Freud believed that the conservation of the past time is possible only in the psyche of a human (“therefore, not in the city”). In this regard, Freud also attributes that obliviousness depends on an injury which avoids the conservation of memories in their entirety of the human personality or otherwise, as in our research, the conservation of memory in the city (“context of war etc.”).

For Freud, the persistence of all the past stages within the terminal stage is only possible in the psychic field; it is not possible in a city if we consider only the urban space in its materiality and considering that every city follows the same through phases of demolition / destruction. Urban space can't exist if all buildings and shapes are “side by side”. It invites us to imagine a city of Rome where the palaces of the Roman emperors “would still rise to their initial grandiosity like in the old days, where the battlements of the castle of Sant'Angelo would still be surmounted by the beautiful statues that adorned them before the siege of the Goths [5]. On the current location of the Pantheon, we would find today's Pantheon, as Adrian bequeathed it to us, as well as on the same ground the primitive monument of Agrippa; and this same place would still to support the church of Maria Sopra Minerva, as well as the ancient temple on which it was built, if we want to translate historical success in space, we are able only to do that by spatially placement buildings side by side.” [5].

Despite the functioning of the city, according to Freud, all past stages of the individual can be preserved in his psyche, as long as the brain still be unaffected. Everything that he experiences is recorded, even if it is not possible to remember all the decisive stages in the development of the psyche (the main positive or negative points that affect us, as in cases from shocking death that can lead to the depression or psychological illness).

The Freud's theory indicates that urban forms are charged with history and memory, even if a human personality couldn't perceive them in all their complexity. Preservation of psychological impressions is possible even if it has been attacked (traumas). Even if the city has suffered the phases of the destruction of the material heritage, the immaterial heritage survives (the ability to remember disappears and preserved parts of the urban heritage are the permanent records on the city's hard drive).

Assuming that the city possesses a memory, which is inscribed in and conveyed through urban forms, knowing that, the urban forms have accumulated over time. Urban memory influences the emergence of collective memory through the experiences of inhabitants and observers.

3. GLOBAL ISSUES IN URBAN MEMORY

3.1 Urban memory, associated from the disappeared forms.

Under certain circumstances, the destruction of urban memory can result in the changes in the social and physical environment (fires, wars, new urban projects etc.) which potentially create discontinuities in memory. Potentially, this sort of destruction creates a form of oblivion. Reflecting on “oblivion” as the destruction of traces of memory/urban forms, it occurs universally, it is important to understand the meaning of oblivion.

Sociologist Paul Connerton [6] defines seven types of oblivion that are not to be considered negatively and Bakalchev et al. [7] define each of these types of oblivion. Among these types of oblivion is repressive

erasure, that appears in its most brutal form in totalitarian regimes and which serves to deny a historical break or, on the opposite, to mark a historical censorship. Oblivion can be constituent of the formation of a new identity, where the highlighting of a set of shared memories involves equally shared silences. One of such cases is the St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Baku, which was exploded by the Stalinist regime in 1936 in an anti-religious act; later on, a Conservatory was built in its place. The destruction of a dominant form in the urban environment and the immediate reconstruction of a completely different building were intended to accelerate the oblivion of cultural and religious heritage.

The oblivion that results from planned obsolescence is specific to the consumer capitalist system where the preeminence of innovation produces a systematic devaluation of objects, memories and techniques of the past and an accelerated succession of new products.

The oblivion that results in a planned obsolescence is characteristic of the capitalist system of consumption, where the dominance of innovation leads to a systematic depreciation of the objects, memories and technologies of the past and an accelerated succession of new products. The oblivion that results towards to planned obsolescence is particular to the capitalist system of consumption where the emphasis on innovation produces a systematic devaluation of objects, memories and techniques of the past and an accelerated succession of new products. "Le mieux est l'ennemi du bien" ("the best is the enemy of the good") [8].

3.2 Disrupted perception of urban memory and loss of identity.

Opposite to what Freud argued [5], the different stages of the past could be perceived in the city. All the transformations which have taken place in a city (construction, destruction) are recorded in material and immaterial forms. Therefore, the city is the result of a complex environment, the material on the one hand with the ruins, and the immaterial, if we consider the buildings, which have not left visible traces (interim immaterial traces). Keeping in mind, for example, the ruins, which are sometimes built into ancient buildings (see figures 2-3 : stratification of the Nîmes theatre.) The American artist Robert Smithson is inspired by Freud's metaphor. After visiting Rome many times, he admitted: "My trip to Rome was an encounter with European history and took a terrifying turn" [9]. Robert Smithson wrote about the presence of multiple identities, an immaterial memory of the city linked to the different historical periods and their materialization in architecture. However, it is the difficulty of representation, which sometimes leads to this type of practice in urban planning "tabula rasa" ("destruction of historic buildings") — loss of identity for the residents. Theoretically, urban memory is transmitted through the urban form. The more diverse forms are in the city the better it reveals the richness of the cultural heritage of the people living in this city. Each urban form reveals the perception of citizens, their experience (daily movements), expression of the residents about their city.

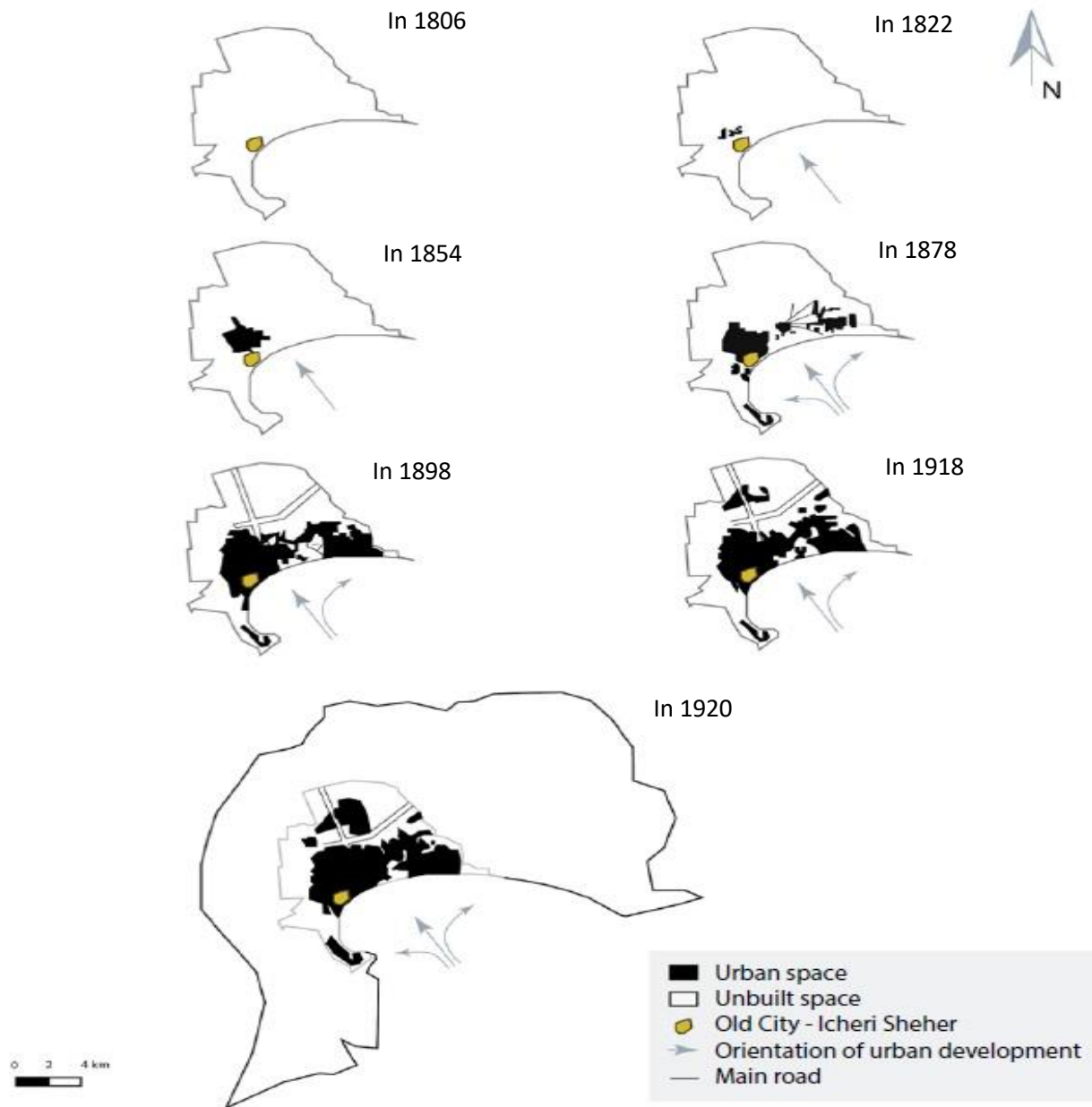
Baku is a city with thousand years of historical past, and currently is experiencing the profound transformations associated with major urban planning projects.

An analysis of the European experience demonstrates that the municipalities of the major cities are also implementing a policy of global urban development projects as well as urban renewal, albeit on a more modest scale than the municipality of Baku. During these projects, the disappearing (demolition of buildings) of the existing buildings is not common reality.

4. BAKU CITY'S FRAMEWORK OF HISTORICAL POTENTIALS

Our approach is based on the analysis of the urban form of a city at the crossroads between East and West, Baku as a Western city. "Baku has its own identity due to the various historical influences, which have been formed as the single entity; it is difficult to compare it with other cities. In fact, this city is quite well preserved and in many respects, it is unique historical city [10].

The English historian Simon Sebag Montefiore compares Baku at the beginning of the 20th century to a "mixture between the city of Baghdad in the Middle Ages, the Chicago of Al Capone and the Paris of the East" [11]. These multiple historical influences have enriched the urban identity of Baku city. Baku was indeed located on the Silk Road, and its location as a crossroads, between Europe and Asia, allowed for the development of an architectural heritage influenced by Zoroastrian, Ottoman, Persian, Sassanian, Arabic and Russian European and Russian cultures [11].



• 1854 European city - westernization of an eastern city, • 1878 Industrial centre, • 1920 Residential core in the north, • 1950 Soviet city, • 2020 Post-modern city.

Figure 4: Evolution of Baku's urban form throughout history.

Source: Tural Aliyev, 2022

The central historical core of Baku city is the Icheri Sheher. This most ancient city is situated on the shore of the Caspian Sea. Its area is only 22 hectares in size, and it contains hundreds of historical monuments, such as the Palace of the Shirvan Shahs, a mosque, public baths and caravanserais. Due to the number of monuments 4 of which have world importance and 28 of which are of local importance this Old City was classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000 [12].

One of the interesting observations of this place is that a collection of historical monuments has evoked by its urban structure, in the form of streets that are extremely varied and at the same time unified as a complex mechanism, which is correctly balanced to organize self-microclimate at all times of the year in line with this region location. The unique shapes of the broken street lines of the complex labyrinth are intuitively recognizable to local people. On the other hand, in the condition of the dry, subtropical climate, it works as a spatial structure that is capable to receive a strong wind energy from the Caspian Sea and able to transfer it to good aeration.

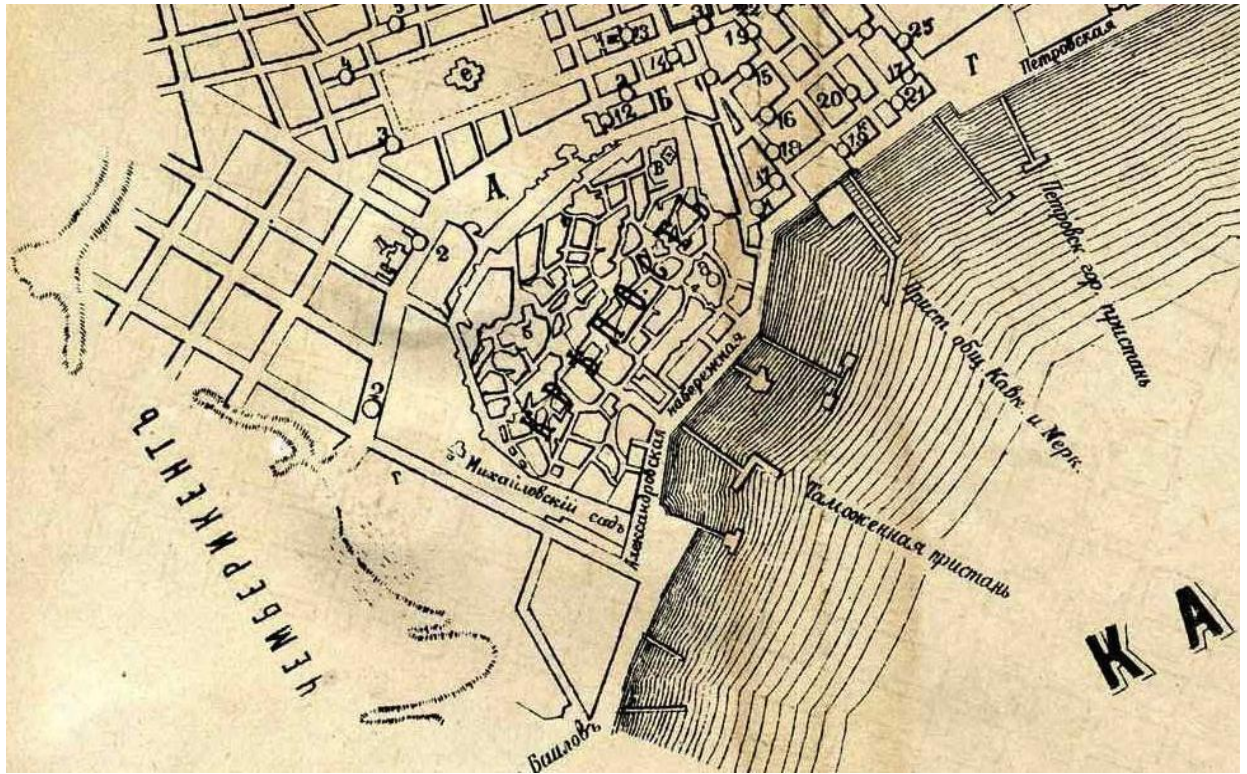


Figure 5: Plan of the ancient city of Baku, 1891 [12].

Source: <https://ourbaku.com/> - План города Баку (из справочника 1891г.

Despite the pressure of intensive real estate development and the contradicting tendency of the medieval districts from several European cities such as Paris and Prague, this historic district has been preserved as a coherent ensemble within the fortress walls.

The typical European quarter of that time is borrowed the styles of the Italian Renaissance and Hausmann, characterized by the presence of iconic buildings. The XIXth and XXth centuries allowed the city to form a place of new European style and fully keep the Eastern identity, which is possible to observe in the presence of eastern ornaments on the facades of Western type buildings (for example, the Palace of Ismailiyye).



Figure 5: The main facade "Ismailiyye palace" main façade, architect İosif Ploshko, Baku, 1908 – 1913.

Source: Azerbaijan National Encyclopedia, 2011.

The Caspian Sea coastline (1865-68) set the foundation for the amphitheatrical structure of the city, which is similar to Istanbul, Sidon and Algiers. {Resource online of Sh. Fatullayev-Fiqarov).

At the same time, the “Black City” was created *ex-nihilo* (from Latin meaning “creation out of nothing”) 2 km east of the European quarter. At that time, the city had become a major industrial center within the Russian empire due to the presence of oil resources, which attracted foreign investment. Around the periphery of this city, the monofunctional (industrial) districts development was accompanied by workers’ housing.



Figure 6: Korbin Kerber, Aerial photo, 1917

Source: Eve Blau, 2018.

The third period is the Soviet era (1920-1991) the city has not lost its medieval eastern and western identities, furthermore it has expanded and prospered on the basis of this urban identity. During the period of Soviet power, much attention has been paid to public spaces in the planning of the city, while the squares were planted a little due to the constant wind blowing from the Absheron peninsula and the arid climate. The presence of many public spaces was linked to hygienic considerations, but also to a conception of the common well-being and social cohesion that was based on an democratic approach. The grid of the "Black City" is orthogonal, and the building consists of large unified closed quarters, as in other Soviet cities blocks. The spaces representing the "Authority of the Soviet Councils" were monumentally emphasized, and their architecture environment borrows only certain traditional Azerbaijani ornaments. Certain places of the Orthodox cult, such as the Church of Alexander Nevsky, have also been destroyed and replaced by buildings with new uses.



Figure 7: Building of the Government House of Azerbaijan, Architects: Lev Rudnev, Vladimir Munc, 1936—1952.

Source: Azerbaijan National Encyclopedia. 2011.



Figure 8: The National Academy of Sciences, architect: Mikayıl Useynov, 1949-1960.

Source: www.azertag.az/xeber/Azerbaycan_Milli_Elmmler_Akademiyasi_metbuat_xidmetinin_melumati-1511559

The fourth period was characterised by the fall of the USSR and the change of land ownership (from communism to capitalism). During this period, many public spaces in the city centre disappeared and were replaced by residential buildings. In order to avoid the disappearance of recreation areas in Baku, new public spaces were created, this time in place of the slum areas and industrial landfills of the Soviet period. This strategy is accompanied by the reinforcement of urban inequalities and land speculation.

Since Baku's entry into the XXI century, it has been marked by an urban development influenced with the Dubai model, i.e., the gigantism and eccentricity of the constructions, extreme architecture, and decontextualized urban typologies such as the malls and commercial buildings. The aim is to attract investors and tourists through urban marketing operations. The new projects do not seek to preserve the pre-existing urban memory. Many sites are rebuilt or rehabilitated, contributing to the fragmentation of the existing urban form (the presence of wide boulevards and urban highways), all that to generate a profit.

4.1 Practice in planning.

Actually, much of what is occurring in practice of “today’s architects” leads to the tight placement of many incompatible forms, which supply the kitsch in architectural style. In this regard, the functionality of the city is also defeated. The pace of construction is so intensive that developers are forgetting about parking, local greenery, public areas, etc. The absence of public facilities has a proportional impact on the marketing of the city as well, the lack of which unknowingly affects the entrepreneurs.

The transition to commercial construction has managed to replace urban resources of greening and landscaping, in general by apartment houses and shops.

A visual analysis of Baku’s areas has shown that it is mainly apartments housing (12-16 floors) that are being built. This tendency provides the construction of commercial real estate as well. In fact, many public, inner yard, playgrounds of post-soviet residential housing are occupied by new high-rise residential complexes and irregular placement of garages, parking space. Consequently, this oversupply of residential complexes in the frame of inner area of Soviet’s yards contributes. Due to this development in the city, the urban planners are in fact faced with the urgent purpose towards decentralization of the city.

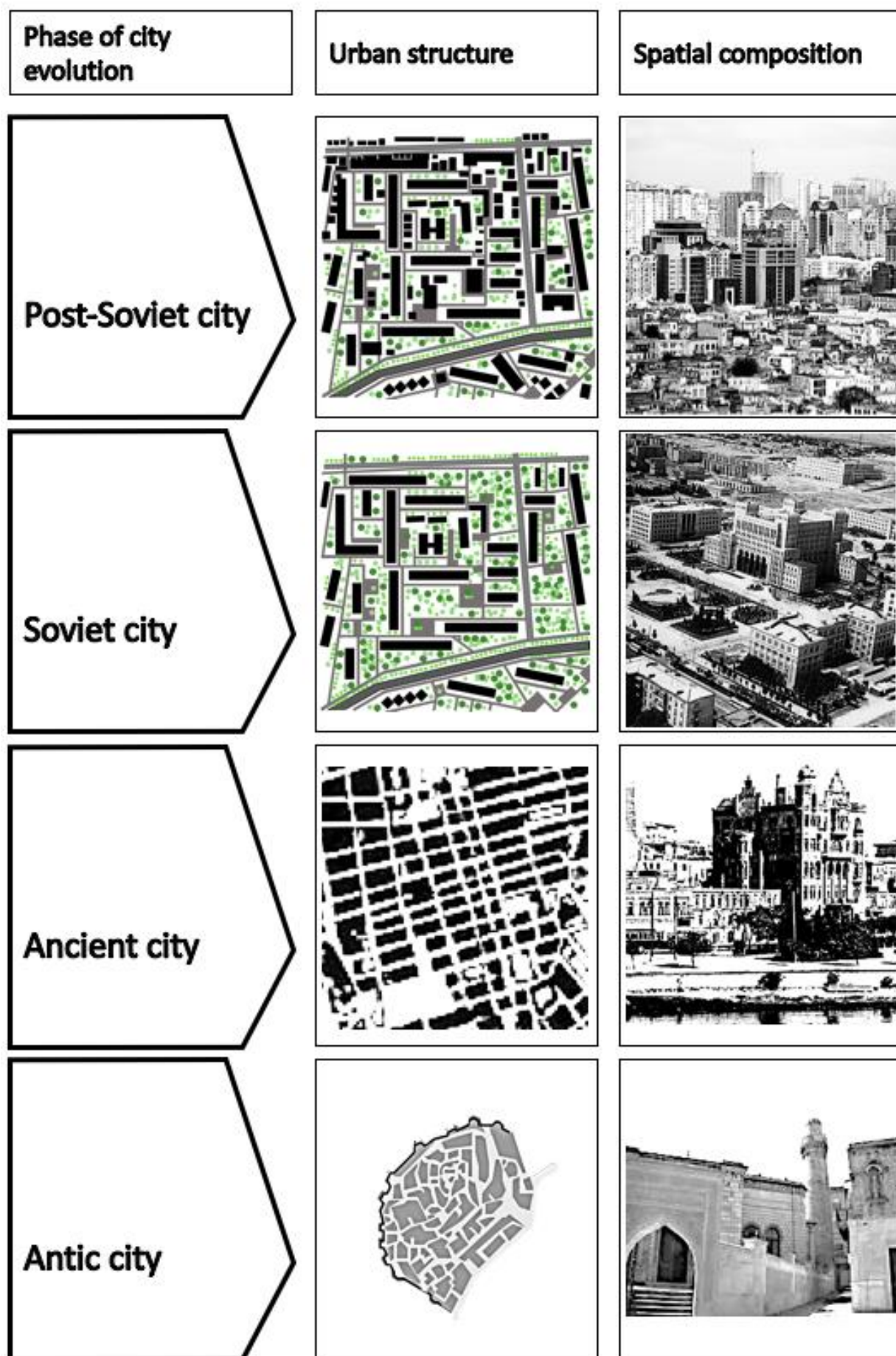


Figure 9: Graphical analysis of the evolution of Baku City: its structural and esthetical features
Source: Emir Huseynov, 2022.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Theoretical view

As the analysis in this article demonstrates, hiding urban memory does not produce positive results. From some perspective, the oblivion necessitates or relates the guilt in terms of action as well. All people normally are born with the capacity in one way or another to remember what they perceive during their lifetime. The place where humans have grown and lived is an inseparable part for them.

Psychologically, a person is in a constant search for associative links with the relatives and the dearest, initially inscribed for him/her as time spent in a happy environment with familiar people, objects, and visual connections.

It is a consequence of a person's habits and their structural and functional perception of a place. When a person's visual experience is lost, they lose what they could have used to support their connection with the past. And without awareness of the past, we cannot move forward. Because on a generational scale, going from point 'A' to point 'B' implies a route where the first place is fixed in order to stay on course, and suddenly not be back in the place where the whole journey began.

Architectural heritage carries with it the "genius (spirit) of a place". The spirit sustains people and shapes, the character and essence of places from their birth to their death. Architectural heritage is a trace of history in modern times. Consequently, in the case of Baku City, the architecture of the city is a mirror of the worldview understanding of the citizens. If the city of Baku is presented as a person with its different urban areas, it will have a different identity in its soul. Thus, architecture reveals to us how we should understand the identity of citizens living in Baku.

In case we save the "city spirit", the experience of life, the memories of the past by holistic way with the imagined future – it is up to us to define it.

As Frances Yates pointed out [13] buildings may be less reliable than they seem to us in terms of urban memory. The invisible consciousness warming in architecture (in the mind of people and architects) before it was created is much more powerful. Why should we actually experience the past rather than the future?. It will allow us to preserve our past, which determines our universal future.

Cities as visible political programs, as mirrors of the society and the ruling systems of the countries in which they are located [14]. How can we understand the changes in which everything is allowed? Can we still talk about architecture of the city in the sense of its continuity? Can we still describe the transformation of the city as an emancipation from a certain historic backwardness?

Aldo Rossi pointed out the double nature of the city through history: the city as a material artifact, an artifact structure built through time, and also the city as a collective conception which does not refer only to the real structure of the city but also the idea about it. To that effect, even in periods of decline of cities, it is possible to distinguish the "almost a typological characteristic, of an undefinable order" [15].

The concept of collective memory, which Aldo Rossi introduces in the discourse on the architecture, points out the complementary character of the image of the city composed of a dialogue between material and immaterial values, a synthesis of a series of values referring to the collective imagination: "One can say that the city itself is the collective memory of its people, and like memory, it is associated with objects and places" [15].

Aldo Rossi was the one that apostrophized the enigmatic thought about forgetting the architecture. In his book "A Scientific Autobiography", he posed the question about forgetting as an alternative title of his autobiographic work: "As I have said, Forgetting Architecture comes to mind as a more appropriate title for this book, since while I may talk about a school, a cemetery, a theatre, it is more correct to say that I talk about life, death, imagination" [16]. "Forgetting is also associated with a loss of our own identity and that of the things we observe; every change occurs within a moment of obsession" [3].

Forgetting means complete or partial, permanent or temporary loss of memories; inability to reproduce or recognize, reconstruct old memories [7].

5.2 Practical view

Restoration or destruction are the alternatives proposed to society. There is no single solution for every situation, each situation has to be analysed precisely in relation to historical, cultural, geographical and other factors.

But what seems to be important at the first, is to have all the necessary information about the value of the historical and cultural building or place. It provides an idea of historical interest and then we must think about the modes of intervention. [17] In the second phase, if the building or place has a historical and cultural value it's important to preserve or to keep it in a modern image. We also have to consider the

following point: preserving does not mean to attribute new function to the old building without any studies. Indeed, any building cannot admit any function.

“The ideal solution requires planning, the only one capable of identifying the equipment and services that a street, a district, an area, a city requires. Once we have the clarification, the concept of compatibility allows comparing needs to the available building.” [18] Or, if the intervention is needed, the mode of intervention does not mean the destruction of all that has been existing through the decades and build new ones. In order to preserve the heritage (patrimonial) dimension, should we leave its precedent function, which will remain in the memories of people? A question more relevant to Baku is, should we keep or modify the elements, which will remind us of the past (industry, harbor, historical inhabited locality or their living experience etc.) of certain places, parallel to the process of renewing?

As we described, the Baku’s different urban layers are a value, which creates unique architecture style, the entire districts should be functioning in continuity. In other words, in order to promote one, we shouldn’t destroy the other. There is a particular sense when all described layers have their “word” to say while representing the architectural heritage.

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