

PROCEEDINGS ARTICLE

Issues of Reconstruction of Moscow in Thematic Research Plans of the USSR Academy of Architecture for 1939–1941

Yulia Starostenko^{1,*}¹Scientific Research Institute of the Theory and History of Architecture and Urban Planning, Branch of the Federal State Budget Institution “Central Scientific-Research and Project Institute of the Ministry of Construction of the Russian Federation”, Moscow, Russia

ABSTRACT

This article is devoted to the practically unexplored period of Moscow reconstruction in 1939–1941 and the role assigned to the Urban Planning Institute of the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) Academy of Architecture in this reconstruction. The basis for preparing the article were documents of the Urban Planning Institute, identified in the Russian State Archive in Samara and in the Russian State Archive of Economics. Based on analysis of these documents, the most controversial issues of the reconstruction of Moscow in 1939–1941 were identified, as well as those problems that, according to the architects, hindered the full implementation of projects for the transformation of the city. Archival documents also made it possible to trace the changes that took place in the activities of the USSR Academy of Architecture during this period and contributed to the fact that the academy was involved in the reconstruction of the capital of the USSR. Thus, the materials of the article allow us to partially fill the gaps in the study of the history of the development of Moscow and the history of the activities of the USSR Academy of Architecture in this period.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Moscow reconstruction at the turn of the 1930s–1940s remains virtually unexplored to this day. As a rule, studies devoted to the Moscow reconstruction in the 1930s do not affect this period at all [1], or they consider only individual Moscow buildings built in 1939–1941 [2]. In the works devoted to Moscow and covering a more significant time interval, the period of 1939–1941 is also usually not particularly emphasized [3]. The reason is the well-established idea that the second half of the 1930s is the time of the implementation of the Master Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow in 1935, and not the time of a new stage in the development of the Moscow reconstruction project.

Meanwhile, the designated period was associated with the intensification of activities to develop a project for the reconstruction of the Soviet capital. The architects were engaged in the adjustment of individual planning solutions fixed in the scheme of

the General Plan for the reconstruction of Moscow in 1935. Based on the already accumulated experience, they discuss techniques for building main streets and squares that could ensure the simultaneous fulfillment of aesthetic and utilitarian tasks of reconstruction. A lot of attention during this period was paid to the design of residential buildings, which was due to the return to work on the planning of the new southwestern district of Moscow.

A special role in the study of these tasks was assigned to the USSR Academy of Architecture. After the large-scale restructuring of 1938–1939, the renewed academy, which received new leadership, name, charter and structure, was tasked with bringing the work as close as possible to the practical tasks of Soviet architecture. The consequence was a radical change in the thematic plans of the academy and its structural units. Topics related to the development of specific issues of Moscow reconstruction have become the key in the work of Urban Planning and Planning of Settlements Research Institute. Text and graphic

*Corresponding author. Email: ystarostenko@yandex.ru

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materials on these topics, preserved in the funds of the Russian State Archive in Samara (RGA in Samara), together with the documents of the academy from the funds of the Russian State Archive of Economics (RGAE), provide a unique opportunity to significantly expand knowledge and ideas about the prospects for reconstruction and development of Moscow that were outlined at that time.

2. TRANSFORMATIONS OF 1938 – 1939: FROM ALL-UNION ACADEMY OF ARCHITECTURE TO USSR ACADEMY OF ARCHITECTURE

The history of the Academy of Architecture, despite the available research [4], certainly requires more detailed study and reflection. While a detailed analysis of the academy's activities from its organization to the beginning of the Great Patriotic War is not included in the objectives of this article, it seems important to outline some points.

The first years of activity of All-Union Academy of Architecture, established in 1933 as part of the reform of architectural education, were very complex and ambiguous. In the period 1933–1937, which would later be called "organizational" [5], the direction of the academy's research work was largely determined by the range of interests of the specialists involved in its work and only partially interested the academy's leaders. The research offices of the academy experienced problems with everything: they lacked premises, there were problems with auxiliary materials, and some offices did not have managers for many months. Attempts to bring the research work of the academy closer to the Soviet architectural and urban planning practice by reorganizing its offices, undertaken in early 1937, did not lead to the desired results¹. The instructions on the revision of the thematic research plan for 1938, given for the same purpose by the Committee for Arts Affairs under the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR [6], under whose jurisdiction the academy was located, also failed to change the situation.

After the arrest of the rector of the academy M.V. Kryukov in early 1938, a long period of reorganization of the institution began. By the decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR of 11 May 1938,

1. The characteristic is given on the basis of studying the documents of the Academy of Architecture preserved in the Russian State Archive of Economics (RGAE) – fund 293, and the documents of the All-Union Committee for the Arts under the SNK of the USSR in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI) – fund 962.

V.A. Vesnin took the post of President of the academy² [7]. Some time later, the candidacies of two vice-presidents were approved: I.N. Magidin [8] and A.G. Mordvinov [9]. Despite the discussion that unfolded after that about the future of the academy and its offices, the reform of the academy was continued only a year later. On 13 June 1939, the Presidium of the All-Union Academy of Architecture was approved [10]. Two and a half months later, on 31 August, a new charter was approved, according to which the academy received a new name: USSR Academy of Architecture [11].

According to the new charter, the academy was considered as the "highest scientific institution in the field of architecture in the USSR", consisting of full members (academicians), honorary members and corresponding members. The former offices, except the Theory and History of Architecture Office, which due to its specificity could not conduct applied research, were reorganized into research institutes with experimental design workshops. As a result, instead of the Urban Planning Office since 1940, the Research Institute of Urban Planning and Planning of Populated Areas started its work with two workshops: workshop experimental design and urban planning, and workshop experimental design of objects of collective farm construction. Thus, in the new organizational structure of the academy, the idea of bringing its work as close as possible to practice received its first visible embodiment. At the same time, this idea increasingly reflected in the thematic work plans of the academy for 1939–1941: in the thematic plans of the Institute of Urban Planning, the number of topics related to the tasks of Moscow reconstruction increased, and these topics given increasing importance.

3. MOSCOW RECONSTRUCTION IN 1935 – 1939: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESOLUTION ON THE MASTER PLAN AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CITY

According to established ideas, after the adoption of the resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR "On the Master plan for the reconstruction of Moscow" in July 1935, the development of the Moscow layout project was completed and began works on the implementation of the layout scheme of

2. According to statutory documents of the All-Union Academy of Architecture, its head was to be called "president". Why M.V. Kryukov was the "rector" of the Academy is not entirely clear.

the capital. However, in reality according to various sources, the adoption of the Master Plan was considered by all participants in the process as a starting point for large-scale work on the detailed development of the city planning project. These works, which began actively in the summer of 1935, continued for several years, gradually losing their importance along with the attention of the country's leadership to this task.

The laid down concept of the resolution of 1935 assumed that by the middle of 1936, detailed planning projects for three key diametrical main streets crossing the city, a project for the reconstruction of Moskva River embankments, a project for the reconstruction of Moscow center, as well as a project for the planning of the newly annexed southwest territories to the capital would be developed. The review and approval of these projects was to be followed by their implementation with the parallel development of projects for the reconstruction of other main streets and territories of Moscow. However, as the documents show, this did not happen. The work done by the architects turned out to be useless to anyone ([12], pp. 224–225).

The chief curator of the Moscow reconstruction, the man who largely formulated this approach to the transformation of the city, L.M. Kaganovich left the post of head of the Moscow Party Organization at the end of February 1935. De facto, for about six months he headed the Arplan – Commission of the Moscow City Council and the Moscow State Committee of the VKP(b) on architecture and planning of Moscow – but since the autumn of 1935 he finally retired. The new party leader of Moscow, N.S. Khrushchev, was not interested in architecture issues, as was the chairman of the Moscow City Council, N.A. Bulganin.

As a result, in the period from autumn 1936 to spring 1938, the work of architects involved in the Moscow reconstruction project consisted of the detailed development of planning projects no longer for individual main streets and territories, but for the entire city territory. Instead of the original 1:10,000 scale scheme, a 1:2,000 scale city planning project appeared, consisting of 120 parts and in expanded form occupying a 120 m² area. Despite the increasing construction volumes, no consistent implementation of this project was discussed ([12], pp. 225).

The situation began to change only after A.S. Shcherbakov (in November 1938) and V.P. Pronin (in April 1939) were appointed to replace random people who headed the Moscow party organization and the Moscow City Council in 1937–1938 after the departure of N.S. Khrushchev and N.A. Bulganin, respectively. The Moscow reconstruction was included in the Third Five-Year Plan for the

Development of the National Economy for 1938–1942, which was approved in March 1939 at the XVIII Congress of the VKP(b). In the resolution on the report of V.M. Molotov, who spoke at this congress, indicated that the congress considers it necessary "to ensure the further development and reconstruction of Moscow and Leningrad in accordance with the adopted plans". In 1939, under the leadership of A.S. Shcherbakov began to function the Architectural and Planning Commission of the MGK of the VKP(b) and the Moscow City Council, or Archplan, a body close in its role to Arplan. The new structure, like the previous one, was engaged in the consideration of projects for the planning and development of main streets, and approved projects of specific buildings. The reorganization of the design business was carried out, as a result of which the positions of heads of the Planning Department and the Design Department were occupied for the first time not by party workers, but by architects D.N. Chechulin and A.M. Zaslavsky, respectively ([12], pp. 226).

Moreover, as follows from the documents preserved in the fund of the Urban Planning Institute of the Academy of Architecture, the new leadership of Moscow treated architects more respectfully than its predecessors. In the transcripts of various meetings, there are references to V.P. Pronin's long conversations with architects who held senior positions, in which he asked architects to put forward proposals for the transformation of Moscow [13].

4. A NEW STAGE OF WORK ON THE RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT OF MOSCOW AND THE PARTICIPATION OF THE URBAN PLANNING INSTITUTE OF THE USSR ACADEMY OF ARCHITECTURE IN 1940 – 1941

Information about the work of the Planning Department on the reconstruction project of Moscow after 1939 and before the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War in June 1941 is extremely fragmentary. The collected publications of that time suggest that this was a new stage of work on the reconstruction project of the city. The goals of this stage can be defined as follows: the adjustment of all previous developments in accordance with changes in legislation (for example, the construction of low-rise residential buildings began to be allowed in cities), the adaptation of previously proposed grandiose design solutions to the real construction possibilities and the detailed design of projects for the development of individual main streets and territories. Among these territories, the most

significant was the southwestern district of Moscow, annexed to the city by the decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and the Central Committee of the VKP(b) "On the Master plan for the reconstruction of Moscow" in July 1935. The project of the new district was presented in mid-1936 and was practically not developed until the inclusion of the Moscow reconstruction in the third five-year plan for the development of the national economy. At the same time, the highway scheme proposed in the Master Plan of 1935 was not revised. The adjustment of the route along the avenue of the Palace of Soviets became an exception. According to the scheme of 1935, it was supposed to diverge in two wide main streets from the square around the Palace in the direction of Luzhniki. Proposed at the end of 1939 the single-beam version of the avenue was focused primarily on minimizing the demolition of existing buildings along the route of the northern beam and in the space between the beams [14].

Meanwhile, the key problems of the reconstruction of the city, as it followed from the articles published in professional periodicals, were associated not so much with the development of specific planning solutions, as with the implementation in practice of those requirements, which by that time were considered integral components of Soviet urban planning. First of all, it was about such a concept as an "ensemble", about the development of the principles of building streets and squares of the Soviet capital. These issues have been covered more than once in the theoretical texts of Soviet architects, but could not be implemented in practice. Partially reconstructed streets of Moscow – 1st Meshchanskaya, Gorky St., Bolshaya Kaluzhskaya, etc. – were criticized for not meeting the required ideal. It was this circle of problems that the Urban Planning Institute of the USSR Academy of Architecture was supposed to solve.

While the transformation of the All-Union Academy of Architecture into the USSR Academy of Architecture was underway, the key activity of the Urban Planning Office was the work on the textbook "Fundamentals of Socialist Urban Planning", which began at the end of 1937 [15]. New topics in the research plan for 1939, formulated based on requirements of approximation to the practice of Soviet architecture, were considered as auxiliary allowing collecting and preparing material for the textbook. At the same time, many of these topics, such as "City streets, squares and embankments" and "City blocks", included theoretical and design parts. Within the framework of the project part, it was supposed to develop experimental projects of specific streets or blocks of Moscow (for example, a block for the southwestern district), which was carried out, but only partially [16].

In the plan of the newly formed Institute of Urban Planning for 1940, in addition to work on the textbook, a number of topics were included, among which was the topic "Reconstruction of Moscow". It assumed the development "based on the study of Soviet and foreign experience of the principles of development and improvement of streets, main streets and squares of Moscow", the development of "principles and approximate solutions for the development and improvement of Moscow neighborhoods with capital and low-rise construction", and the drafting the reconstruction of Sverdlov Square [17]. At the beginning of April 1940, the problem of designing the southwestern district of Moscow was singled out as a separate topic, which was becoming increasingly relevant [18]. In the plan of the Institute of Urban Planning for 1941, the topic "Principles of Planning and Development of the Southwestern Territories of Moscow" was already considered as the leading one ([19], ll. 29–30). The plan also provided for the development of the theme "Composition of the Center of Moscow", within which it was supposed to analyze "previously made design proposals and compositional solutions of the center of Moscow" and give suggestions "on the design of the center of Moscow" ([19], ll. 31–32).

Thus, the Research Institute of Urban Planning and Planning of Populated Areas was quite closely involved in the work on the reconstruction project of Moscow, especially considering the fact that the results of its work had to be transferred to the Planning Department and to the Archplan.

5. RESULTS OF WORK OF THE URBAN PLANNING INSTITUTE OF THE USSR ACADEMY OF ARCHITECTURE IN CONNECTION WITH THE RECONSTRUCTION OF MOSCOW IN 1940

The events of 1941 did not allow completing the research topics of the Urban Planning Institute, mentioned above. However, the surviving materials of the reports for 1940 make it possible to get an idea of how the research and design work was organized, as well as to understand the ways in which the architects – employees of the institute – proposed to solve the identified problems in the reconstruction of Moscow.

The first stage of their work was the collection and analysis of all available graphic and textual material related to the development of projects for the planning and development of streets and squares of the capital, as well as its southwestern district. The search for the principles of planning and development of main streets and squares was considered in 1940

as a key task, since the results of research in this area were planned to be used, among other things, for the development the experimental project for the planning of the southwestern district.

As a result of the analysis the architectural and urban planning practice and all the collected materials, the staff of the Urban Planning Institute identified a number of problems specific for the planning and development projects of Moscow main streets. Among them were:

- Lack of a key idea for the development of main streets based on the significance of a particular main streets in the city plan and knowledge of natural factors (for example, relief);
- Lack of developed projects of squares located on the main streets, and as a result, the lack of communication between the construction of main streets and squares;
- Lack of a compositional connection between the development of main streets and the development of adjacent blocks (mechanical arrangement of buildings along the red line), unresolved issues of the composition of the city as a whole;
- Insufficient consideration of hygienic requirements and social household tasks when linking the requirements of the street and the block [20].

In other words, all the mistakes in compositional solutions, and all the problems with the creation of ensembles were explained not only by the mistakes of architects, who took part in the development of specific projects, but also by the poor organization of the design system in Moscow, the inconsistency of the actions between all departments and organizations involved in the reconstruction.

Of course, staff of the Urban Planning Institute could not solve such issues. At the same time, the findings did not allow them to move beyond criticizing the existing solutions. They did not offer any alternative projects either, although the idea of such projects periodically arose. However, it did not receive broad support. Even when discussing the thematic work plan for the USSR Academy of Architecture for 1939, architect D.N. Chechulin noted that in absence of clear government instructions on the dimensions of Sverdlov Square, it made no sense to develop another experimental project of its ensemble. What was more valuable, in his opinion, would be an analysis of all previously completed projects, which the academy, as a scientific organization, could conduct and develop on the basis of this analysis certain recommendations for the development of the final project [21]. As experience has shown, this was a difficult task, since it was not possible to find the detailed principles of

designing main streets and squares in Moscow in the materials of the report.

Another way chosen when working with the material on the southwestern district, namely, the way of developing an alternative proposal based on the analysis and criticism of existing projects, gave a more visual result. The experimental workshop of the Institute of Urban Planning was offered not only a project for the layout of the district as a whole, but also a project for the planning and development of two so-called "group quarters" or "microdistricts" (neighborhood). In these projects, it was proposed to move away from the usual breakdown of residential areas into blocks with mandatory perimeter construction, which, of course, was a very bold proposal for that time. It was not possible to establish whether these projects were transferred to the Planning Department or Archplan, and whether they had a chance to influence the development of the southwestern district planning project, which was conducted by the Planning Department.

6. CONCLUSION

Summarizing everything stated in the article, it can be argued that during the study period, the Urban Planning Institute of the USSR Academy of Architecture was assigned a special role in the development of the Moscow reconstruction project; in a sense, the role of an alternative design center. The staff of the institute should help in solving a number of problems (primarily architectural and artistic), which became more and more obvious as the work on the transformation of the capital expanded. And although the revealed materials do not allow us to say that the tasks facing the Urban Planning Institute were fulfilled, but the same materials make it possible to significantly expand the understanding of both the reconstruction of Moscow and the work of the Urban Planning Institute of the USSR Academy of Architecture during the study period.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

This article was independently completed by Yulia Starostenko. The author's contribution to the study of the stated topic is to identify, analyze and introduce into scientific circulation materials about the work of the Urban Planning Institute of the USSR Academy of Architecture in 1939–1941, related to the Moscow reconstruction and identified in the Russian State Archive in Samara.

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