

NEW URBAN TOPOLOGIES

The Chisinau
and Minsk
Experience

FÄRGFABRIKEN
Center for Contemporary
Art & Architecture

This book is published, produced, and distributed by Färgfabriken, Sweden.

Färgfabriken
Center for Contemporary
Art & Architecture
Lövholmsbrinken 1
117 43 Stockholm, Sweden

www.fargfabriken.se

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ISBN 978-91-977274-8-8

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FÄRGFABRIKEN WOULD LIKE to thank all of the people and institutions that helped realize this book and the implementation of the New Urban Topologies Project.

Artist and researcher Jan Hietala contributed question formulations and a structure for the project.

Photographer and artist Xenia Nikolskaya shared her special contacts within the art world in the region, and helped with research before the project.

Thanks to the City Planning Office, the Office of Regional Planning, and the Royal Institute of Technology, all in Stockholm, and the Swedish embassies in Moldova and Belarus for their valuable commitment.

A special thanks to our partner the Swedish Institute for their collaboration and financial support that made the New Urban Topologies Project, including this book, possible.

Finally, many thanks to Gallery Ț in Minsk, Oberliht in Chişinău, and all the creative people, officials and organizations that participated in the discussions and workshops. This project would never been possible without your engagement, your free thoughts, and your knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

A large-scale construction site is visible in the background, featuring several tall yellow cranes and the skeletal frames of multiple multi-story buildings under construction. The foreground shows a muddy, uneven ground with some construction materials and a small puddle of water. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

NEW URBAN TOPOLOGIES

IN OCTOBER 2010 Färgfabriken in conjunction with its Moldovan and Belarusian partners Oberliht and Ÿ Gallery, conducted extensive programs on urban topologies in the capital cities of Chişinău and Minsk. The participants were municipal administrators, architects, urban planners, and students, among others. The aim of the initiative was to identify ways to strengthen positive cultural values and address some of the many challenges facing the two cities. Moreover, the intent was to create an open and free platform for groups and individuals that rarely meet. The programs were part of a larger project called New Urban Topologies, or NUT.

It has been more than twenty years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, which had established a barrier between the East and the West. The process of transformation fascinated us all and we followed the media reports intensely. But when the most dramatic events were over, our attention faded. Many of us became mentally and physically disoriented by the redrawing of maps in the years following 1989.

Färgfabriken's motivation to work as a free and independent cultural organization in places that may seem peripheral today is rooted in the fact that, as Swedes, we too live and work on the geographic outskirts. We see a need to establish contacts with organizations and individuals with whom we can exchange ideas and inspiration.

Färgfabriken is a Swedish center for contemporary art and architecture with an international approach and an experimental and process-based methodology. For more than a decade, Färgfabriken has been active in the fields of urban planning, sociology, and architecture. Färgfabriken believes that cities and urban culture are not only about physical planning—they also touch on issues such as transparency, democratic processes, social and environmental sustainability, and cultural development and identity.

In the NUT projects, we are using our so-called "Färgfabriken Method", which allows us to collaborate with different kinds of stakeholders and facilitate new

encounters. Färgfabriken aims to be a platform for a common discussion where the development of society is mirrored in a new kind of network. Our method challenges public and private spheres to create new visions through collaboration. In so doing, we lay a new foundation for communication between different groups and interests and for dialogue with the public. This, we believe, generates a melting pot for future strategies.

The results of the NUT programs will be gathered, analyzed, and shown in different contexts, as publications or in exhibitions. There is a great need among our collaborative partners for a method of executing projects and promoting ideas to politicians, property owners, developers, and an interested public. By making a complex process more accessible through visualizations, proposals, and stories about how each city could develop, we believe that more people will become interested in the future of their societies.

Around the world, people are curious about “the Swedish Model.” Sweden is seen as a country that has succeeded in laying the foundations for a more egalitarian society and extending participatory rights to all. But we also have experiences of failure. One such failure was our rapid transformation from rural to urban life: the new urban structure resulted in segregation and social divisions.

The NUT project enables Swedish planners, architects, and researchers to meet foreign colleagues who face similar challenges in different contexts. We believe that this strategy creates a unique chance to widen the discussion about our cities and their prospects for the future, both in Sweden and in the host countries. Our partners, in this case Oberliht and Ÿ Gallery, will gain access to an educational tool in the Färgfabriken Method that facilitates continued open dialogue and debate.

The initial implementation of NUT should be seen as a first step in a larger context, in which we will continue on to new regions and deepen the collaborations and processes we have started. What now lies ahead are further collaborations with countries in the former Soviet Union, the Balkans, and the Middle East—regions now undergoing rapid development. At this writing, in February 2011, we have just witnessed several tumultuous weeks in the Middle East, and we see connections to what happened in Eastern Europe about twenty years ago.

At this very moment, a young generation is making new demands on the right to participate in the development of their societies. These tendencies are visible in many other parts of the world. We believe it is urgent to initiate an exchange of experiences with those areas. The ambition must be to dare to create new strategies and concepts.

This publication builds on two projects that were carried out during a few intense days in Chişinău and Minsk. NUT is about getting a quick

orientation in a new environment and sharing the experiences and thoughts of the people in the host community. Together we visit a broad spectrum of different sites. Among them are places that are not usually shown to foreign visitors and sometimes even unknown to the local inhabitants. Together we explore obscure, hidden spaces both mental and physical.

A cryptic installation of rusty sculptures on the outskirts of Chişinău tells the story of a corroding Soviet past; the tall fence around the neighboring gated community reveals the growing divides in the society. Our partners in the host communities choose these kinds of images with great care. Without their ideas and determination to formulate new strategies and to share their understandings, the New Urban Topologies project could never have been realized.

Stockholm, February 28, 2011

Joachim Granit, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, *Färgfabriken*,
and Thomas Lundh, PROJECT DIRECTOR,
New Urban Topologies

TOPOLOGY

The word topology derives from Greek, a compound of “place” and “study”. Used in mathematics and cartography, it describes the spatial properties of objects and the relation of different points in a terrain; distances between these objects and sites play a lesser role.

THE WORK STRATEGY

FÄRGFABRIKEN HAS DEVELOPED a work strategy for the New Urban Topologies project. In each city, Färgfabriken joins forces with a similar organization. In this particular project we collaborated with Oberliht, the Moldova Young Artists Association in Chişinău, and Gallery Ÿ, a center for contemporary art in Minsk. Färgfabriken also works with the local governmental planning and preservation authorities, as well as the Swedish ambassadors and their offices. From Sweden, we invite participants from the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), the City Planning Office, and the Office of Regional Planning, all in Stockholm. When the project begins on site with seminars and workshops, local independent architects, artists, undergraduate and masters students, university faculty and researchers are also invited.

THE NUT WORK STRATEGY IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR PARTS:

1. Firstly, Färgfabriken hosts a seminar together with its local partner. As an introduction, Färgfabriken presents an alternative image of the Swedish society and its planning processes. Following this, the Swedish representatives give short lectures on the work of their institutions, including urban planning, political processes, and educational systems in the Stockholm region and in Sweden. The lectures are followed by similar presentations by representatives from the host cities. This part of the project is mainly an exchange of experiences and is open to the public, as well as people invited from each partner's network of contacts.

2. Secondly, we take an excursion by bus through each city. Here, possibilities and problems are highlighted in order to generate questions and themes for the upcoming workshop. The purpose of the tour is to show a wide spectrum of what the city in question is today. As a result, the participants get to see many sites that are normally not included in similar architectural excursions, which usually only show recent high-profile projects.

3. The third part of the NUT project is a workshop. Here participants with various backgrounds form several groups, each working with a particular theme. Färgfabriken and its local partners formulate these themes in advance. They are chosen on the basis of the seminar lectures, the informal discussions with and topics suggested by the local participants, and the issues highlighted and discussed throughout the bus excursion. During the four-hour workshop, each group is assigned to develop a topic as they find appropriate and thereafter come up with concrete suggestions for the future of the city in question. In keeping with their role as facilitators, one or two of the Swedish representatives are included in each group. Their task is not only to join the process but also to offer ideas and facilitate the progress of the workshop.

4. The fourth part is the presentation of the workshop results. Sketches, drawings, texts, photos, models, and other materials produced within the project are shown, supported by an oral presentation. Each talk is followed by time for questions and discussion. Later the results are shared with the public in exhibitions and a publication that summarizes the complete project and the ideas from the cities.

ON CHISINAU AND MINSK

CHISINAU, FORMERLY KISHINIOV, is the capital of Moldova and is located along the Bîc River. The city has 598,400 inhabitants (2008) and is the major industrial center of the country, especially important for light engineering and the manufacture of measuring equipment. Wine making, flour milling, and tobacco processing are notable among the city's agriculture-related industries. The city is the cultural center of Moldova, with a university founded in 1945 and several other institutions of higher education.

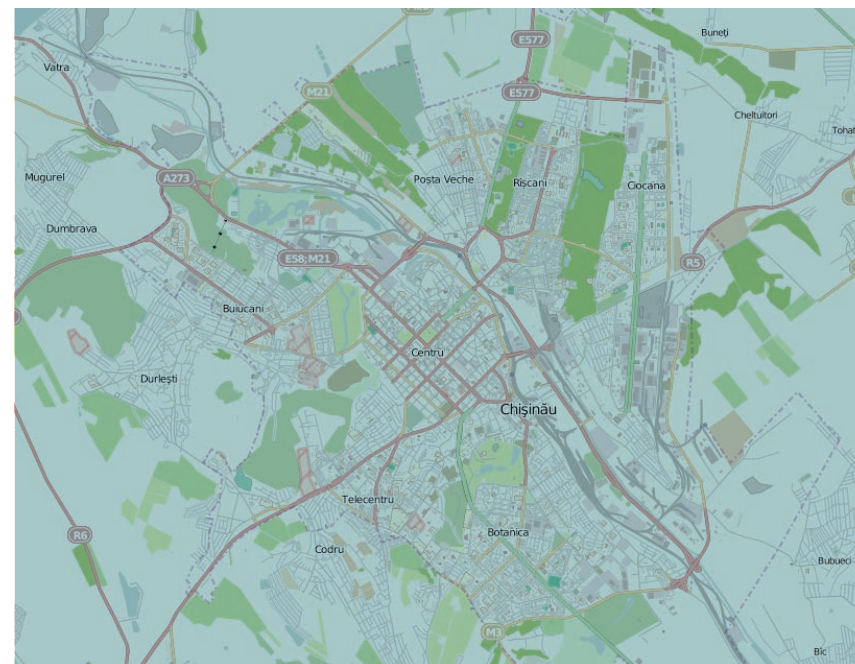
The first documented reference to Chişinău dates from 1466, when it was under the rule of the Moldavian prince Ştefan III. After Ştefan's death, the city fell under the control of the Ottoman Turks. Gradually Chişinău's trading importance increased, though the city suffered severe

destruction in the Russo-Turkish War of 1788. In 1812, Chişinău was ceded to Russia along with the rest of Bessarabia. It was henceforth known by its Russian name, Kishinyov.

Following the First World War, it was included in Romania as Chişinău, but it was given back to the Soviet Union in 1940 with the rest of Bessarabia and became the capital of the newly formed Moldavian S.S.R. Heavy damage was inflicted on the city in the Second World War, but Kishinyov was rebuilt after the war.

Economic policies imposed during the Soviet era brought significant changes to both the countryside and cities. The pace of urbanization was dramatic, in part because Moldova was the least urban of all the Soviet republics. Industrialization spurred the growth of large and small cities in every part of the republic, but nowhere more than in the capital, Chişinău. With the collapse of Soviet authority in Moldavia in 1991, the Romanian-language version of the city's name once more came into official use. After independence, the population of Moldova became even more urban, with continuous migration from the countryside to the cities. By the early 21st century, over forty percent of the population resided in urban areas. Chemicals from agriculture and industrial emissions have contributed to severe environmental problems.

Moldova is a unitary parliamentary republic with one legislative body. The president serves as the head of state for a four-year term. The president shares executive power with the Council of Ministers, which is led by a prime minister designated by the president and approved by the parliament. The country is bordered by Ukraine and Romania and has a population of 3,941,000 (2010). Nearly half the population is Moldovan; there are also large numbers of Russians and Ukrainians, especially in Transdnistria, the self-proclaimed republic located on the eastern bank of the Dniester River. Annual GDP per capita is 1830 US dollars (2008). Life expectancy at birth is 66 years for men, 73 years for women (2007 est.).



MINSK, BELARUSIAN MANSK, is the capital of Belarus and located on the Svisloch River. The city has 1.8 million inhabitants (2010) and is the leading administrative, cultural and industrial center of the country. The manufacturing industry includes the production of machines, transportation vehicles, electronics, and consumer products. The city is also a major educational center, with the Academy of Sciences of Belarus, a university founded in 1921, and numerous other institutions of higher education.

First mentioned in 1067, the city was passed to Lithuania in the 14th century and later to Poland. With the second partition of Poland in 1793 Minsk came under Russian power. The city has suffered many disasters, including frequent destruction by fire, occupation and damage by French troops in 1812, German occupation in 1918, Polish occupation in 1919–20, and during the Soviet advance in 1944.

Nevertheless Minsk steadily increased in

importance, first as a provincial center and later as an industrial center. In 1919 it became the capital of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus and remained so until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The large Jewish community in Minsk was systematically killed during the German occupation of 1941–44. The city itself was almost completely demolished in the course of the Second World War. Subsequently rebuilt, Minsk grew in population faster than any comparable Soviet city in the period 1959–89, with the number of its inhabitants more than tripling. During Soviet rule, industrial growth also contributed to a steady increase in the proportion of Belarusians living in urban areas. By the early 21st century, nearly three-fourths of the population resided in cities. The Chernobyl accident in 1986 caused extensive damage to the environment, and forty percent of the country is estimated to be contaminated by radioactive emissions.

Belarus is a republic with two legislative houses. Its president is the head of state and effectively the head of government. Since independence, Belarus has retained close ties to its most dominant neighbor, Russia, and the legacy of Belarus's Soviet past also continues to manifest itself. The country is bordered by Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia and has a population of 9,457,000 (2010). The population is mainly Belarusian, with Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian minorities. Annual GDP per capita is 6060 US dollars (2008). Life expectancy at birth is 65 years for men, 76 years for women (2008 est.).



SOURCES:

Encyclopædia Britannica Online, February 2011.

Nationalencyklopedin Online, February, 2011.

Länder i fickformat: Moldavien, Utrikespolitiska institutet, Stockholm, 2009.

Länder i fickformat: Vitryssland, Utrikespolitiska institutet, Stockholm, 2009.

BOOK STRUCTURE

AS EACH CITY has its own unique conditions, the program and results of NUT will differ from one site to the next. Nevertheless, it turned out that the same kind of overall themes were critical in both Chişinău and Minsk. The five themes that make up the following chapters are based on the main concerns expressed in both cities: CITIES OF HISTORY, ARCHITECTURAL AIMS, ON PUBLIC SPACE, SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE, and EXCHANGING IDEAS.

Some of these themes were the basis for workshop groups; others were strongly articulated in discussions and presentations. The book's thematic chapters include presentations from seminars, bus excursions, and workshops. In each chapter the reader will also find interviews with participants conducted throughout the span of the visits, as well as shorter freestanding statements and comments on the presentations. The book also includes essays written by contributing authors in retrospect.



FROM OUR PARTNERS

CONTRIBUTING ESSAY THROUGH JOINT FORCES

Anders Öhrn, PROJECT MANAGER, and Daniel Gustafsson Pech, PROGRAM OFFICER, *the Swedish Institute*, Stockholm

THE SWEDISH INSTITUTE (SI) is a public agency that promotes interest and confidence in Sweden around the world. SI seeks to establish collaboration and lasting relations with other countries through strategic communication and exchange in the fields of culture, education, science, and business. SI has been working extensively with culture and creativity as an area of dialogue and collaboration in Eastern Europe since the early 1990s. The overall aim has been to enhance openness, transparency, and mobility via mutual exchanges and partnerships. New Urban Topologies investigates, elaborates, and develops themes that are central to Swedish society. City planning is an area in which Sweden—like many other countries—is constantly looking for new, creative solutions to meet the challenges of growing cities and new urban landscapes. By bringing together artists, architects, city planners, opinion-makers, civil servants, and decision-makers in Sweden, Moldova and Belarus, exciting new ideas and visions have surfaced. We hope that the results will be lasting and that this dialogue has only just begun.

CONTRIBUTING ESSAY THE CHANGES CONCERN US ALL

Ingrid Tersman, SWEDISH AMBASSADOR TO MOLDOVA, Chişinău

CITY PLANNING is perhaps something we all take for granted, but it requires careful thought, foresight and consultations. Changes to our cities will concern all of us city-dwellers for many years to come. In our case, in Stockholm, we have learned that it is crucial to involve the people concerned. Today we do this in an elaborate participatory process. There are areas in Stockholm today undergoing change that have raised considerable debate and where discussion is ongoing. We all have to live with any changes made to our cities for many years to come. This is a challenge for the planners to think far ahead and an opportunity for our citizens to get involved in influencing the outcome. I want to underline the importance of strengthening Swedish-Moldovan relations in the field of urban topology. Our embassy is very pleased that Färgfabriken, the City of Stockholm, and the Royal Institute of Technology could visit Chişinău to share experiences on city planning from Stockholm.

CONTRIBUTING ESSAY A VALUABLE EXCHANGE

Stefan Eriksson, SWEDISH AMBASSADOR TO BELARUS, Minsk

I AM VERY PLEASED that this first Swedish-Belarusian project on architecture and urban planning is starting today. In my view, these topics should be of interest for the participants from both Stockholm and Minsk. Belarus is probably the only former Soviet republic that has preserved and maintained Soviet urban planning and building traditions. At the same time, it can't avoid the challenges of present-day urbanization, such as traffic congestion, a shortage of parking, or the loss of green space. Swedish urban planners have been rather successful in addressing these issues, as well as engaging broad groups of society into the process of decision-making on urban planning. I believe this opportunity to exchange experiences will benefit all of us. For their effort in bringing us together, I'd like to thank Färgfabriken and Gallery Ÿ, the City of Stockholm, and the Royal Institute of Technology, as well as Minskgrado, Minsk Proekt, and the other Belarusian state urban planning institutions.

CONTRIBUTING ESSAY OBERLIHT: MOLDOVA'S YOUNG ARTISTS

Vladimir Us, PROJECT DIRECTOR, ARTIST, AND CURATOR, *Oberliht*, Chişinău

FOUR STUDENTS FROM the Art Institute, now known as the Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts in Chişinău, founded Oberliht Association in 2000 in response to the monopoly situation created by the former Union of Artists of Soviet Moldavia. The Union, starting in 1991, shut down all programs that supported art academy students and young artists at the time and excluded them from participation in the official exhibitions organized by the Union.

At the very beginning, the Oberliht Association represented a collective of young artists grouped around the studio of Veaceslav Fisticanu, a teacher at the Art Academy in Chişinău. Gradually, the association evolved into a platform that allowed interested artists, curators, and cultural workers to initiate and carry out projects like workshops and exhibitions with the participation of young artists, thus addressing their needs, as well as a variety of issues such as public space, the built environment, representation, community projects, and networking.

The Oberliht Association aims to contribute to the creation of the kind of attractive environment needed for the professional development of young artists and for international collaborations and partnerships in

Chişinău and across the region. Our greatest challenge as an organization so far has been to keep this platform going as one of only a few alternatives available in Chişinău's institutional landscape helping to build an independent art scene here. The desire to connect our local art scene to the world's cultural landscape drives us to keep this window open.

All the activity of the Oberliht Association is based on voluntary work, which in fact proves its community involvement and follows the principles of self-organization and non-profit activity. There are just a few international programs that independent cultural institutions from Moldova can apply to, which makes it difficult to carry on with those activities that we wish to make permanent.

Given these conditions, we have had to rely on a relatively new program for Moldova called European Voluntary Service to complement our missing human resources, and with the help of these international volunteers, we are trying to develop our research and artistic projects. Unfortunately this has not been enough to enable us to initiate and produce large-scale projects that would in turn influence the existing cultural policies at the local and national levels, although they need to be changed urgently.

Chişinău needs platforms and hubs of creativity and critical thinking about contemporary culture, as well as our political, social, economic, or built environment. We are trying to be such a platform, such a creative hub. On the other hand we try to collaborate with and give visibility to local grassroots initiatives that are tackling different issues relating to the city of Chişinău, thus giving voice to the citizens' point of view.

Issues of urban planning and development from the architectural point of view are an increasingly important part of our projects, occupying greater space and demanding more of our attention. This is because urban planning and architecture play an important role in shaping public space in the city, and thus fostering or diminishing social cohesion, increasing or decreasing opportunities for the citizenry to express their will.

Our interest is in discussing who is shaping our public space and why. Is the population involved in this process? And how did this process evolve during the last two decades of never-ending transition from a state socialist model to a market-driven capitalist system? Through our projects, we try to establish an interface between local and international art scenes, trying to connect them in a more coherent way. So far we have conceived all of our local activities in a global context, and everything we do is translated into a foreign language of international importance whenever possible. However, we put great emphasis on projects that address local issues and educate young artists from Moldova.

Our partners are small to mid-sized organizations, as well as artists' initiatives and collectives from Moldova, as well as from the region and other countries. Together with these partners we are trying to build an international network.

The New Urban Topologies project came at a good time for us. It gave continuity to our efforts by fostering the development of previously established but still loose relations with the administration in Chişinău. So far our aim has been to maintain our established links and to make the city and public more aware of the various initiatives and collectives that are dealing with issues of the urban environment in Chişinău.

Each project like NUT is a new occasion to focus on the city and the social, cultural, political, and economic aspects of its development—and on the possible consequences of that development for the lives of those living in Chişinău. This process encourages analysis and raises awareness of our immediate surroundings.

NUT offered a short but intense time frame for exchanging experiences and collaborative work between local and international participants. The project has also contributed to the existing pool of knowledge and experience by bringing together laymen and professionals from different fields that are engaged in similar issues.

CONTRIBUTING ESSAY GALLERY Ÿ: FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

Anna Chistosserova, DIRECTOR, Gallery Ÿ, Minsk

THE OPENING OF Gallery Ÿ became one of the most impressive events for the country in recent years, considering the lack of venues for exhibiting contemporary art pieces. Ÿ is the only Belarusian letter that can't be found in another language. It is a graphical and semantic symbol of native culture for us. Immediately after the opening in October 2009, the gallery drew the attention of not only professionals but ordinary visitors as well. The main aims of the gallery are to support the art market in Belarus, to hold art and curatorial educational programs, and to search out and support young artists. Through these strategies we seek to form a critical environment in the field of Belarusian contemporary culture.

The gallery includes an exhibition space and a bookstore of modern Belarusian and international literature. Under this one roof, we are becoming the most active communication platform in the Minsk intellectual community. We host a continual series of art project presentations by Belarusian and foreign authors, literary readings, concerts, debates, and contemporary art lectures.

The gallery is established as a for-profit commercial organization. That makes it easier for us to work in Belarusian conditions but more difficult to be involved in big international projects. Our main sources of funding are local partners and businessmen. The Swedish Institute, the Goethe Institute in Minsk, and cultural foundations and organizations under European and U.S. embassies in Belarus provide further financial support for our projects. We emphasize active participation in international art projects, holding long-term educational programs for art managers and curators with the participation of lecturers from Western Europe and Russia. One of our main interests is our involvement in the international art process.

Implemented in October 2010 together with Färgfabriken, New Urban Topologies became the first urban studies project for us and was, according to the participants, a great success. Before the project, urban studies had been the business only of government organizations involved in city planning and the design and development of urban space. The project helped unite local officials, intellectuals, students, and private design firms.

The project resulted in a frank dialogue and an effective workshop. We were pleased to note how many of the participants were drawn to new art spaces and the display of art in public places—exactly the issue we are interested in as a contemporary art organization. It provided a great lesson for us in workshop organization. We hope that the urban space proposals formulated during the workshop will be implemented in our city.



CITIES OF HISTORY

CHAPTER 1: CITIES OF HISTORY

ALTHOUGH BOTH HAVE long and eventful histories, the cities of Chişinău and Minsk are in very different conditions. At this moment, preservationists in Chişinău are struggling to save its many old structures that are threatened by new building projects or prolonged neglect. In Minsk, however, there are few old buildings to save, as most of them were destroyed during the Second World War. While some were rebuilt after the war, most were replaced by modernist architecture.

Regarding these specific conditions, New Urban Topologies in Chişinău addressed concerns about the preservation of the city's many monuments. The participants also discussed the possibilities of inserting new architecture into the old urban environment. They argued that these modern structures need to fit appropriately with the old ones, but that this doesn't necessarily mean they should be built in a historical style.

As the City of Minsk is already engaged in rebuilding and renovating its oldest historic structures, the concerns there were rather focused on the preservation of the architectural heritage from the early Soviet era. Minsk has a unique ensemble of classic Soviet architecture from the 1950s, and voices were raised to bring attention to this neglected heritage.

The reconstruction of buildings that have been destroyed is not a foregone conclusion. There remain questions as to which particular buildings and areas should be brought back, which more recent structures should be demolished for the sake of the old, and for whom this architectural nostalgia is intended. In Chişinău, there were proposals for demolishing highrises from the Soviet era in order to recreate an old historical street pattern. In Minsk, the city center and some churches on the outskirts of the city have been brought back to life, while many old districts, such as the Jewish quarter, seem to be gone forever.

This discussion of what should be saved also leads to the issue of the mainly abandoned and decaying old industrial plants that are located in both city centers. Can and should these modernist structures be saved, and if so, what can these large complexes be used for?

CHISINAU WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

"City of History—Looking Into the Future" brought up concerns about the preservation of monuments and the restoration of old street patterns in the city center.

MINSK WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

"City of History—Looking Into the Future" focused on heritage preservation, the renewal of industrial areas, recapturing the past, and the values and identity of Minsk.

INTERVIEW

TIME WILL SHOW US THE WAY

Vladislav Ruta, SENIOR EXPERT, *Department for Historical and Cultural Heritage Protection and Restoration, Ministry of Culture, Minsk*

You are an expert at the Department for Historical and Cultural Heritage Protection and Restoration in Minsk. What is it that you are facing right now in your work?

European towns like Kaunas in Lithuania were from the very beginning of their existence adapted for private capital. This meant that the ground floors were designed for shops and various services, while people lived on the second floor. But when Minsk was rebuilt in the 1950s after the Second World War, this did not happen. Minsk was rebuilt strictly by the book, politically correct, which meant no provision for private shops or services on the ground floor. That is why the main challenge today is to refurbish these buildings by transforming their ground floors. You know that politics can be seen in architecture, depending on the era. And we have a lot of politically correct buildings from the Soviet times.

Why is it important to insert private shops in residential buildings?

That is the policy that is pursued by the City; the transformation of the ground floors of the buildings into commercial premises is to be implemented to upgrade street life in the historical city.

Doesn't this mean that you have to damage your urban heritage to some extent?

On one hand we would like to preserve our unique Stalin époque style. It only existed for fifteen years, from 1947 to 1957. Our main street, Independence Avenue, is now being nominated for UNESCO heritage status. We hate to destroy what we have, but life shows that we actually have to find ways of making new entrances to these buildings or modifying their ground floors.

You work with preservation, but you also rebuild old structures that have been gone for years.

That is true, but this is not all we deal with. We are also in charge of new construction projects that are located in the historical center and in the so-called protection zones. Those buildings have to comply with specific rules; they cannot stand out from the general profile of the historical center. This is the policy that is adopted today. On the other hand, there are precedents around the world for playing with contrasts. In England, there are examples where they decided to have the old and the new at the same time.

Are these architectural contrasts something that you are considering here in Minsk?

I am an architect, and I think we must come to this thinking as well. But not now, not today. We understood too late the importance of preservation. Because we have preserved so very little, it is hard to take this step to play with the contrast between old and new. I used to work in the State Restoration Department—we were about eighty employees in this organization—and I participated in restorations all over Belarus. We were very few architects because it is a very narrow field, and we started with restorations only in the beginning of the 1980s.

How did it work before that?

Everything that was old had to be demolished and erased to the ground in order to clean the space. Here in Minsk, there was an idea of having an open space starting from the main avenue and extending down to the river Svisloch. This would entail erasing a lot of old buildings in the upper old town, including some churches.

I thought that most of the old buildings were demolished during the Second World War.

In photos of Minsk taken by German soldiers and pilots, you can see that eighty percent of the city was destroyed by the bombing, but many of the stone buildings remained. So it was not as awful as they normally say.

But did they continue to tear down buildings even after the war had ended?

Few people paid attention to the architectural monuments, because these are usually churches, places of worship, and the churches were not official. Buildings usually got a new purpose: there is an old mansion in the center of Minsk that became a military registration office, and in Soviet times it was unthinkable to drive away the military people from a historical building. But now they are going to renovate and restore it.

Who was in charge of the rebuilding of Minsk?

There were architects from St. Petersburg invited to plan the city. Because the city was so badly destroyed, it was of no great importance for them. The new buildings that were erected were full of emotion. The victory was mirrored in the architecture: you can sense this feeling of celebration in it. With all negative attitudes to the Stalin era, at the same time you can see the elevation of a people who had conquered their enemies in war in the architecture. People wanted to build an ideal city.

If we move ahead, Minsk has many old industries that now are in a state of decay. Are these structures considered for preservation by your department?

The industries will never become our heritage. They are utilitarian, built only for one purpose, not to be adored or admired.



In other cities, like New York, old empty factories are transformed into apartments.

Like lofts. I know, I lived in New York for one year and worked with restoration. So I have my heart close to these questions. But no, we don't have any such examples of turning industrial plants into lofts here in Minsk. Unfortunately, the constellation of architects that we have today and our government, I think it is difficult for them to grasp this idea, this new idea of transformation. But you can find such examples in Moscow, where a whole block of an old building is given to artists and designers.

You cannot see this happening here in Minsk?

Frankly speaking, I don't think we are ready for that. I like it very much myself, many people like this idea, but how would we implement it? Our architecture is not bold or courageous. Maybe it comes from our mentality. You will find bold ideas in other regional centers, but not in the capital.

So what is the mentality here in Minsk?

Reserved, cautious. The Belarusian who crosses borders will become a Chagall or a Sikorsky or a Malevich. But our mentality is not bad. Belarus is a buffer zone, a transition corridor between the two mentalities, the western and the eastern.

But it does seem like something is happening now, doesn't it?

Well, you are here holding your workshop.

What do you think about this initiative?

Everything depends on you. If you come with ideas, it would be possible to rock the boat.

As an architect, what do you think about urban development in Minsk?

Frankly speaking, there has been a lot done to improve the residential stock. But outstanding projects are hard to find—we don't have the Vilnius or Moscow level in architecture. I was at the opening of the Swedish bank in Vilnius, Swedbank. That is a phenomenal building, very beautifully done. There is a skywalk between the two new structures in order to preserve the old street. Unfortunately we don't have this approach here.

Maybe it will come.

Certainly, but it takes time. Time will show us the way.

SEMINAR PRESENTATION SUN CITY OF DREAMS

Artur Klinau, ARTIST, AUTHOR of *The Sun City of Dreams* concept, *Design and Production Architecture and Planning Bureau*, Minsk District Committee of Architecture, Minsk

I WOULD LIKE to share my ideas on how Minsk can be turned into one of the biggest tourist centers in the world. As there are very few tourists coming to Minsk, about ten to seventy thousand, we—a group of enthusiasts—are offering an action plan. If we implement it, we can guarantee that a million tourists will come to Minsk on an annual basis. One million tourists would bring around half a billion U.S. dollars. The first part of our plan is called the "Sun City of Dreams;" the second part is called "Close to Europe."

It is clear that for tourists to come here, we have to have some facility or place that everybody would like to see. And there is a unique object that you will not find anywhere else in the world. We call it the Sun City, a metaphor for an urbanistic ensemble that was implemented in every city in the former USSR. You can easily find pieces and fragments of this Sun City in practically any town in the former USSR. But nowhere was this ideal city implemented as fully as in Minsk.

This unique Sun City could be a reason for Frenchmen, Japanese, and Germans to come to our city. But in order to make this work, we must first spread awareness of these urbanistic ensembles. This should have been done years ago, and we are losing time while new projects are being launched in which skyscrapers of metal and concrete are replacing elements of the Sun City. Allowing skyscrapers to appear in the Sun City will naturally destroy the very image of this urbanistic ensemble.

For this project, we need new hotels, restaurants and museums. The visitors would not only learn about this utopian idea, but also the history of how it originated many years ago in Europe and how it was implemented in these territories. A broad public campaign has to be launched to promote Minsk and the Sun City. If you go to a European gas station today, you will never find a guide to Minsk, and we want to change this.

The second part of our program is called Close to Europe. As the first part is designed for visitors from Western Europe, this part is for our neighbors to the east, predominately the Russians. Minsk can become a place where Russians feel closer to Europe. In order to achieve this, we need to renovate our old city and improve our nightlife. Carrying out those two projects—attracting tourists from the West and the East—will allow us to keep and preserve the Sun City as we know it today. Furthermore, the citizens of Minsk will also benefit from the new cultural infrastructure that comes with the growing number of tourists, such as contemporary art galleries. It is my opinion that these two projects shouldn't be just the concern of a few of enthusiasts, but a matter of state.



COMMENT

I wonder if Artur Klinau thought of the citizens of Minsk and if they associate themselves with the kind of concept he promotes. Basically he wants to sell the Soviet heritage and attract tourists in order to bring money to the city. Rather than this, can't we see tourists as a critical group that can bring some changes to the local context? I believe tourists can be a cultural resource as they are bringing different viewpoints to your city. That is how a city can grow.

Vladimir Us, PROJECT DIRECTOR, ARTIST, AND CURATOR, Oberliht, Chisinau

COMMENT

If the Sun City concept, showing Minsk as the Stalinist model city, would be just a small part of the city, it can be a good tourist thing. For instance, in Lithuania they have a park with Lenin statues, and in other Baltic states they show old airport bases for people that are interested in the communist heritage. The issue is that it might not be so fun to be known as the state that was the most communist-oriented. It depends on what you want. I think a city must have several different things to offer, because tourists won't come just to see the communist heritage. It is important to think about a city's profile, and here Minsk really has an opportunity to start fresh and think new.

Cecilia Lindahl, REGIONAL PLANNER, Office of Regional Planning, Stockholm



EXCURSION PRESENTATION THE BLACK BOOK OF CHISINAU

Ion Ștefăniță, DIRECTOR, *Agency of Inspection and Restoration of Monuments*, Chișinău

OUR AGENCY is a state institution that has existed for four years. But it was only a year ago that we really started to work. In the past year, we have already managed to research the historical center of Chișinău. We have also inspected twenty-five of the country's thirty-two districts. The result is *The Black Book of Chișinău's Heritage*. In the spring of 2011 a report on monuments throughout the entire country will be published.

The problem was that during the twenty years since Moldova's independence, no state institution has dealt with this issue. What we did in one year, nobody had done before us during those twenty years, which makes the picture very sad. Now we are in the process of informing the public about the destruction of our monuments.

A monument is defined by its architectural value and must have an age of at least fifty years. If we speak in numbers, seventy-seven historical monuments were destroyed during these twenty years in the center of Chișinău. Thirty-two of them were destroyed in the last four years, from 2006 to 2010. Our publication shows the initial appearance of the monument and what we have today instead of it. We have identified 155 monuments where interventions have changed the original image of the building; an attic installed above the top floor is one example. Also there are seventeen buildings that are slowly decaying because of neglect by those in charge of their maintenance.

We want to bring your attention to the fact that every monument is in danger of disappearing. Our aim in the future is to put a sign on every building of historical importance saying that this is a monument protected by the state. It is the state's responsibility to put these inscriptions and plates on the buildings. When we put this text on a façade for the first time, there was an incident involving the police. Finally it was resolved satisfactorily: nobody was injured and nothing happened.

By going to different parts of the republic and Chișinău, we got to know the real situation. Therefore, we have launched a campaign to collect funds to be invested in the monuments. The present budget for restoration of monuments is five million lei, which is approximately 300,000 euros. For this amount, we have only managed to restore one single monument.

Our agency wants to revitalize the historical center by restoring every part of it. For that we need a huge budget, and we hope we can get the funds in the future. I want to stay optimistic. In ten years or perhaps twenty, I hope that all the remaining 184 monuments in Chișinău will be restored to good condition.



EXCURSION PRESENTATION SUBTERRANEAN LEGENDS

Maxim Cuzmenco, ARTIST AND FILMMAKER,
Chişinău Subterranean Map, Chişinău

THIS BUNKER is close to the 1960s Rîşcani district. There were hundreds of bomb shelters built in the 60s, but today most of them, like this one, are closed. It is a forbidden place with traces of a bygone time. The whole residential area is interconnected to allow tanks to hide and circulate in the narrow sidestreets without being seen from the main streets.

Many city legends are related to these underground bunkers and corridors. One myth we have says that a laboratory for nuclear and microbiological research is located somewhere here. Nobody knows the exact location, though. Another legend speaks of tunnels that connect Chişinău and the city of Cricova, as well as Chişinău and the airport. It was done for the military, but now it is closed and no one knows where the entrance is. Some bomb shelters under government buildings, however, are still in use.



INTERVIEW

A GRANDFATHER'S DESIGN

Vera Sysoyeva, ARCHITECT AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR,
*Urban Planning Department, Faculty of Architecture, Belarusian National
Technical University, Minsk*

Your grandfather, Georgiy Sysoyev, was one of Belarus's most famous architects. He grew up in St. Petersburg, but decided to work in Minsk. How come?

My grandfather was a soldier in the army that came to Minsk in 1944 after the Nazis. After seeing the ruins he decided he would come back to rebuild the city. He finished his architectural education in St. Petersburg and then came here with his young family to work in the 1950s. At that time, Minsk had a shortage of architects, and he was immediately given some very important building projects to design. I think he did it well.

His first works were in a classical style; afterwards, he continued the path of his master architect, Iosif Langbard, who built Minsk before the war. My grandfather later became the main architect of the Minskproekt Institute, which meant he was part of the group responsible for most of the building projects during the 1960s and 70s in Minsk. It included the second part of the Independence Avenue (Nezavisimosti Avenue), and the slab housing blocks named Vostok that you see near the new library. In 1968, he was one of the architects awarded the State Prize of the

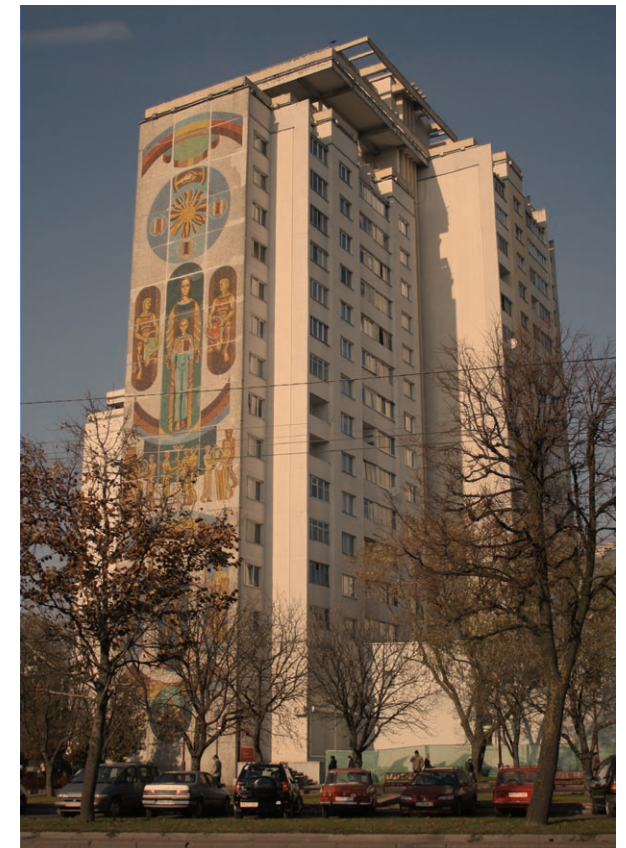
Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic for the design of Independence Avenue.

What were the main challenges in your grandfather's time?

First and foremost, the task was to build a new avenue that could represent the revival of the city. The next task was to design as many residential buildings as possible. The result was large-scale slab buildings, but my grandfather decided that even industrial housing must be individual. And he had real difficulties with this.

Why was this individualistic design a problem?

He was called to the communist party committee. They told him that they had received an anonymous paper where they could read that he had put some decorations on facades—created mosaic “icons”—and that this was not a Soviet style. My grandfather defended his idea and said that even ordinary apartment buildings must have an artistic image, since they are made for Soviet people with beautiful souls.



What do the architects of Minsk face today?

Now it is not the social demand as much as the demand of particular investors. And this is a big problem, to my mind, because it might destroy the image of the city. I think that it is good to realize someone's idea, satisfy one person's needs. But architects can also take an active role and educate the investor in a way that makes his demand more suitable for the general public and the needs of society as a whole.

In your opinion, what are the urgent needs for the future?

I believe the industrial housing we built in the 1970s will pose a problem for several decades. The environment is getting worse and worse there, but we still continue to build such districts. Sooner or later society will not be satisfied with that sort of environment. I think it is time to develop another kind of housing, such as semi-detached or single-family homes. Now these typologies are a privilege for the most prosperous inhabitants, but I think this is also the ideal home for the majority. Unfortunately, we don't have such proposals.

WORKSHOP PRESENTATION FOR A VIBRANT STREET LIFE

IN MINSK, the group that focused on the prospects for their historical city named their proposal "The River of Time," a metaphor for the flow of history. As a case study they chose a large, old, red-brick industrial complex around Oktyabrskaya Street in central Minsk, where there are almost no workers today. Their motto was, "The old gets to live again."

The participants identified several historical monuments, including the plant of the October Revolution dating back to the end of the nineteenth century and residential buildings from the 1920s, with architectural elements from the Stalin era in empire and renaissance styles. They proposed to transform the entire industrial site into a multifunctional area for growth and development. The aim was to create a vibrant street life with room for creativity and meeting places. A mix of cultural, business, and residential spaces, along with public transport and paths for bikes and pedestrians, would be vital for the new neighborhood. The group wanted to insert more green space and a park, and extend the river by widening it and constructing additional watercourses that could be used for personal transport.

While some participants suggested a minor tramline through the area and old-fashioned horse carts, others proposed a new railway station to be



housed in the historical buildings. The old structures would not only be beautiful shells, they argued, but also protect the surrounding areas from noise and pollution from the railway.

All participants wanted to save the old industrial buildings. Some suggested a transformation of the plant into lofts for young people and students. New architecture in the form of hotels or business centers placed nearby would make a contrast to the historic structures. Others proposed putting new skyscrapers with luxury apartments on top of the existing old buildings. This, they argued, would help to preserve the historic structures.

COMMENT

Many of the people we met were too young to have experienced life in the Soviet Union, but they talked a lot about it. Compared with Poland and the Baltic states, for instance, they seem to think more about how it was during the Soviet era in Belarus.

Cecilia Lindahl, REGIONAL PLANNER,
Office of Regional Planning, Stockholm



STATEMENTS

CHISINAU SOVIET HERITAGE

BOULEVARD DACIA was created for what was going to be the only visit to Chișinău made by Leonid Brezhnev, Secretary of the Communist Party at that time. The street was built from the airport to the center of town. His visit on October 10, 1975, celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Moldavian SSR. At the end of the boulevard are the gates that mark the entrance to the city. The Boulevard Dacia is lined with buildings that are typical of socialist architecture, with a lot of social spaces adjacent to the living areas—a new kind of urbanism at the time.

Vladimir Us, PROJECT DIRECTOR, ARTIST
AND CURATOR, *Oberliht*, Chișinău

I AM WORRIED about the state of the gates that you see when entering the city. Earlier, their surrounding environment was a green field, which was a very effective image. Now they have started to build in the green areas. These buildings can be well or badly constructed, but they go against the logic of the fields and the gates.

Why do you have this concern?

For me, the gates do not represent anything special; I am actually very cynical them. But I appreciate the concept of the entrance to the city. I suppose that this kind of intervention would not be possible in other European cities, like Stockholm.

Is it anyone trying to protect this concept?

Perhaps only I see it this way. And as civil society doesn't have any power here in Moldova, my particular opinion doesn't mean anything. I am not naïve enough to fight windmills.

Nicolae Ischimji, ARCHITECT, Chișinău

I LIKED LIVING in the Ciocana district. My building had nine floors. I think it is quite comfortable there. They have their own kindergartens, schools, everything concentrated in one area. Also they have walking tracks through the houses. But now I live very close to the center of town, which is very comfortable too.

Alexandru Lozinschi, URBAN INVESTIGATOR,
Chișinău Ecological Map, Chișinău

I USED TO LIVE in a highrise from the 1970s. There were often problems with the elevator: it broke and you got stuck in it. There were nine floors and two elevators. Sometimes the lights went out in the building.

How was that for you?

I am not afraid of darkness. I was scared of getting stuck in the elevator.

But when it is dark it is no problem. Well, it can be when you come home, but we have the same situation now. I live in a five-story building from the 1970s, and we are without light quite often.

Gabriela Nichifor, ARCHITECTURE STUDENT, Chişinău

THIS BUILDING IS a kind of town gate: you see it when you come from the airport. But up close it doesn't look so good. I do not think it was ever renovated since it was built in the 1970s. I think most people own their apartments nowadays. In the process of privatization of the buildings in the 1990s, you could buy your home very cheaply. Even if they did not have to buy, many did. I would say that 95 percent of the people in Chişinău own their apartments, probably in this building too.

But can everyone really afford this? What if you are 20 years old and want to move away from your parents?

That is a problem, because the prices have increased extremely since the year 2000. Today you have to pay around 30,000 euros for a typical two-room flat.

Maxim Cuzmenco, ARTIST AND FILMMAKER,
Chişinău Subterranean Map, Chişinău



INTERVIEW

WE HAVE TO ADD SOME COLOR

Victoria Tozlovanu, ARCHITECTURE STUDENT, Chişinău

What are your thoughts on the 1970s residential buildings in Chişinău?

As a citizen I believe that they are very suitable from the point of living. Today's architects are not making proper use of space. What they do is construct pointless buildings, mostly commercial centers.

What is it that you appreciate about these old structures?

They were constructed logically, with common sense. The size of the apartments is small but sufficient. Also, these buildings have been standing for forty years. Even if they are run down, they are still usable in comparison to the new architecture that is quite damaged already after a couple of years.

But if you judge these 70s housing complexes as an architect?

Speaking as an architect, they are boring. Everything is common, as the communists were. When people from other countries visit and ask us to show them something, we have nothing to show. It is

blank, it is one color, and it is all over the city. I think the architecture affects the mood of the people. When colors catch your eyes, it puts you into a certain position. Seeing these brown or dark-colored buildings during wintertime, you don't want to work, you don't want to do anything.

How can we change this?

I would like to reconstruct these old buildings, because the cultural value lies in the historical parts. Nowadays people only want new architecture, but I think this approach is quite wrong. We need to combine the old parts of the city with the new ones—to insert something that could link them together and make the city interesting to live in.

In what way could this link be designed?

Firstly, we have to do research about these old structures. Then we must figure out how to build new structures that have something in common with the old ones in detail, in ornaments, or in furnishings. These buildings are a face of the city and you have to face it. It is stereotypical, so we have to add some color. We should keep the style of the 70s buildings, but perhaps add something, and what that is depends on the building.

Why is it critical to preserve the Soviet architecture in Chişinău?

The city has a face, and you want to show that face in the best light. When somebody comes to your city you also want to be proud of showing its history.

STATEMENT WHO HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY?

Mohamed El Abed, REGIONAL PLANNER,
Office of Regional Planning, Stockholm

I wonder if the renovation and restoration of modernist housing blocks is a question on people's minds here in Chişinău. In Stockholm, we know that we are confronting a giant challenge in renovating and renewing our residential areas from the 1960s and 70s. When I see these blocks it feels like we are dealing with details while these buildings are falling apart. Seeing these buildings makes me think of the endless discussion that we also have in Stockholm: Who has the responsibility? And who should be involved in the renovation—the tenants, the landlords, or the government? It is a huge investment that has to be done. In Sweden, the renewal of our 60s and 70s housing projects is a national challenge. At the Office of Regional Planning, we see this an opportunity to combine sustainable living and create green jobs for the tenants. I learned that these blocks in Chişinău are condominiums—so the question of who should renovate them is also valid here. The facades are obviously decaying, but it would be interesting to visit a few apartments and see if they are renovated or in the same bad shape as the facades.



STATEMENT CREATIVITY TO LEARN FROM

Bojan Boric, ARCHITECT AND EDUCATOR, *Urban Planning and Design*, *The Royal Institute of Technology*, Stockholm

It is impressive that there are so many layers of history here in Chişinău. The Soviet-era residential buildings are one of the interesting aspects: even if they are pretty old concrete structures, it looks like there are a lot of informalities in them. People are building their own rooms, or making their own building extensions. I think this creativity is something to learn from, and that this could be a model for other cities. If we allow people to express their own ideas and wishes with different spaces and colors, these transformations could change according to the next family's needs.

STATEMENT AN OLD MISTAKE

Niklas Svensson, CITY PLANNING STRATEGIST,
City Planning Office, Stockholm

Today, many regret that the Klara district in Stockholm was demolished in order to make space for a new city center in the 1950s and 60s. In the search for change there is a risk that cultural-historical values that explain the city are lost. I am a little bit worried, because it seems like they might not preserve the value of their structures—their history—here in Chişinău. I don't want them to make the same mistake we did in Stockholm.

EXCURSION PRESENTATION

THE ETERNITY MEMORIAL

Virgil Paslariuc, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR specializing in modern history and culture in Moldova, *Moldova State University*, Chișinău

THE OFFICIAL IDEA was to bury all the people who fought and died for Chișinău during the Second World War beneath this monument. In all the cities of the former Soviet Union, you find these kinds of memorials. We were the last to get one, and it was a ritual place during the Soviet era. Constructed as a sanctuary, the Eternity Memorial was meant to leave an important mark in the history of the Soviet people and the Moldavians. On the plaques you have the names of those who died. The eternal fire is an important element for any type of Soviet monument, as is the obligatory military guard. During the Soviet era, even students were guarding this place—it was a part of their patriotic education. I stood here one day myself.

After a while, new traditions appeared. Newlyweds would bring flowers and leave them here to pay homage to those who died. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the paradigm for this place changed, and it became a kind of leftover. But it remained, even though nobody cared about it. During the Transnistrian war in 1992, the Transnistrian authorities stopped the flow of gas, because it goes through Transnistria, and Chișinău didn't have gas for fire. But the fire here at the monument wasn't affected because it has an autonomous system. So during the six months the city was without gas, people came here to cook.

The communist party that came to power in 2001 restored this place with public funds from the national and local budget. New parts of the monument were built, such as the surrounding banquette hall. This makes it look a bit bizarre, like a cemetery. But we still have the raised rifles. With its twenty-five-meter height, the Eternity Memorial has become a new kind of sanctuary.

COMMENT

This monument doesn't represent anything for me. It is just a cemetery. I was raised in a different time, and I don't have feelings for the Soviet past. But when I pass it I guess it is strange to see this monument with guns, since we now live in a peaceful era. Still, you can meet old people here that sit on the benches. They have these memories from the past.

Alexandru Lozinschi, URBAN INVESTIGATOR,
Chisinau Ecological Map, Chisinau

COMMENT

The Eternity Memorial is a part of our background and is important to show as a mark of the Soviet era. I find it very problematic that public money was recently invested in it, which now reinforces the idea of militarism in a public space.

Vladimir Us, PROJECT DIRECTOR, ARTIST,
AND CURATOR, Oberliht, Chisinau





WORKSHOP PRESENTATION BRINGING BACK THE STREETS

Nicolae Ischimji, ARCHITECT, Chişinău

BEFORE THE 1950s, there was an old system of streets in the center of Chişinău. This grid was not straight, but complicated, very specific and unique. There was something precious about it. After the Second World War the street system was destroyed by the construction of a large boulevard that cut right through the old street pattern. Since then, this boulevard has divided and segregated the city.

I propose a reconstruction of the old street system. This cannot be achieved in one day, but step by step

over a period of time. First, we need to find alternative routes for car traffic. Second, we need to prepare the residents who live in the nearby blocks and the inhabitants of the city through meetings, with communication and dialogue.

Marking the locations of the old streets will be the next step, by putting out signs with their names, painting their former stretches on the facades or inserting green pedestrian pathways where they once were. After this, the modernist blocks along the boulevard will not be renovated. These blocks are very gray and unpleasant structures that are close to death and must be allowed to die. In time they will decay on their own.

When these buildings have disappeared, we need to invite architects to create new buildings and new blocks. The streets will follow the old pattern, but the buildings can look contemporary—that will be up to the developer. What is important is the restoration of the old street system, and that there are a variety of expressions in the city's architecture.

Those streets were the heart of the city. We want to make them pedestrian and for public transportation. Today people feel depressed, because the car is seen as more important than the citizen. The cars are even allowed to park on the sidewalks. It is not the buildings of a city that are important, but the space in between. This is not a revolution but an evolution, and it must be founded on public opinion.



ARCHITECTURAL AIMS

CHAPTER 2: ARCHITECTURAL AIMS

AS IN MOST cities worldwide, politicians, architects, and city planners in Chişinău and Minsk struggle to find appropriate designs for the new architectural structures that are to be built. Are the nineteenth-century blocks with their vibrant street life a model to imitate, or should the monumental modernist highrises sprouting up in cities like Dubai and Las Vegas be the model for the future? And can the new buildings interact in a better way with the historic parts of the city? According to the NUT participants, they certainly can. The question is how.

Perhaps there should be more diversity within the new architecture, some Moldovan participants argued. This could be arranged with open architectural competitions, which, according to the participants, do not take place in their country at the moment. This strategy could be used to support a more diverse architectural scene in Chişinău and to include a new generation of young architects. Students should also be encouraged to participate in international competitions.

Without any doubt, the new urban designs will influence the way inhabitants and foreign visitors alike will perceive the two capitals. One must decide which values the cities should promote and aim to be associated with. Many participants, in Minsk as well as Chişinău, discussed this particular issue. The difficulty was trying to decide whether the trademark of their hometown should be its historic structures, contemporary landmark architecture, or perhaps something else, such as great public parks or environmentally friendly and energy-saving architecture.

CHISINAU WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

“City of History—Looking Into the Future” brought up concerns about the renewal of industrial areas, the adaptation of new architecture, and the values that could be strengthened in order to promote Chisinau.

MINSK WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

The topic “Livable Spaces” addressed issues such as street life, green space, recreation areas, and diversity in architecture and city planning.

CONTRIBUTING ESSAY CHISINAU CHALLENGES

Nistor Grozavu, DEPUTY MAYOR, City of Chișinău

How would you describe the present urban planning situation in Chișinău?

Currently Chișinău has a General Urban Plan, PUG, approved in 2004, in which the main directions of development are determined until the year 2025. This year, in 2011, we will start the work in making corrections to the existing plan. The purpose is to optimize the proposed solutions and to adapt it to current socio-economic conditions.

We have also recently finished a Historical Center Urban Area Plan, and it is now up for public debate. There is an ongoing effort to develop a new Register of Monuments of Local Importance. The City is also finalizing the General Transport Scheme—both for Chișinău as a whole and for the Historical Center separately.

What are your greatest challenges ahead?

Chișinău has inherited a relatively good urban plan, but it has some drawbacks. Firstly, the city needs a strategy more aimed at extending urbanization by developing the land around its periphery. We have an extensive road network, but with an automobile capacity that is below contemporary international standards and a shortage of parking in both residential areas and commercial centers. We need to continue building out Chișinău's unfinished road network, especially cross-town connecting roads and roads that bring traffic into and out of the center of the city.

Our overly centralized network of thermal power supply results in high heating costs due to heat loss in the network.

In addition, Chișinău has an unresolved issue of municipal solid waste recycling and city sanitation and a water treatment plant that has already far exceeded its capacity. Therefore we are working on the modernization of the sewage as well as building solid waste processing plants. Another important task is the restoration of the Valea Morilor lake and recreation area.

I would say that the greatest challenge is getting approval for implementing the expansion of the automobile road network and beginning to invest in maintenance and reconstruction of that network, particularly where poor road conditions cause dangerous hazards at major intersections. It is also important to upgrade the public transportation system in the city.

For these reasons, we need to adopt an approach to urban planning geared toward greater density, efficient use of all available land within the existing urban fabric, regeneration where possible, optimization of the transportation network, and upgrading of our municipal infrastructure.



Many buildings in the historic center are in very bad condition. What are your plans for them? Should they be restored or replaced by new, modern structures?

After the adoption of the register of monuments of architecture, art, archeology and history, we will have a clearer situation. Currently, the basic concept is to preserve our heritage, to restore and save the buildings most in need of repair. There are no plans to replace them with modern buildings.

Many new buildings in Chișinău are built in the same style as the new residential development Coliseum Palace. What are your thoughts on this sculptural modern architecture? Does the City promote this approach?

The new buildings outside the historic center will be built in contemporary style with nuances of local and national style, unlike the Coliseum Palace. The style will be adopted after public debate and consultations with experts in the field.

In the center of Chișinău there are industries that are hardly used today. What are your plans for those?

All industrial buildings in the area bordering the Bîc River will be demolished. In their place we will build commercial or recreational destinations. The best preserved, however, might be preserved and converted for recreational, cultural, and commercial use. Industrial buildings in other areas will be converted for uses of benefit to the public, reorganized into other types of businesses. In areas near residential neighborhoods, housing will replace the industries.

What are the possibilities for the citizens of Chișinău to be involved in the planning process?

All citizens of the city have the opportunity to participate in urban planning through various methods. All urban decisions are public and may be approved only after public debates and discussions.



WORKSHOP PRESENTATION COMPETITIONS AS SOLUTIONS

WHAT IS THE IMAGE of the city today and what could it be tomorrow? In Chișinău, the workshop participants came to discuss the integration of contemporary architecture into the local context and what kind of values new architecture can bring about. The group stated that the architectural situation is a big problem in Chișinău and Moldova at the moment, as there is no clear or definite organization for the future. A lot of buildings are not very rationally constructed, and the contemporary architectural context is not being analyzed, they argued.

The participants suggested that competitions could be one way for the city to receive a new, fresh architecture. Open public competitions would allow young architects to have a part in this development. No groups would be excluded, which they underscored as a very important point. As far as they knew, there are no open competitions at the moment in Moldova. They also noted that the Moldovan students don't participate in international competitions.

Another suggestion was to integrate the architecture of Moldova in an international context. At the moment, everything that is built is very traditional, according to the group. They said it is like their new architectural forms are derived from the 1960s, and that it would be great if architects favored contemporary design instead.

The participants pointed out the tendency in international contemporary architecture to construct buildings with a deeper connection to the environment. In Chișinău, however, the new structures have no links to their surroundings, the participants said. Hopefully the way we organize our future urban space can change this old disconnected approach, the group concluded.



THE COLISEUM PALACE

Launched as Chisinau's first premium-class residential complex, the Coliseum Palace opened on October 10, 2010, with a spectacular light show. The 45-million-dollar structure has 260 apartments and was designed by ARD Group. The Moldovan architecture firm has a number of buildings in Chisinau in its portfolio, but is also involved in projects in the United Arab Emirates, Russia, and the Ukraine.

STATEMENTS

THE COLISEUM PALACE

FOR ME, there is no urban planning in this project. It is just to put a building somewhere. The placement of the building pays no regard to the view from the square toward the park, and it doesn't communicate with its surroundings. It is probably an extremely good example of a gated community. I was told that this is the most expensive place to live in the whole of Chişinău, which puzzles me. In Stockholm this location would have been wrong for those who can afford it. If you pay that amount of money in Stockholm you want to live in the center of the city, and you don't get that central city feeling here.

Niklas Svensson, CITY PLANNING STRATEGIST,
City Planning Office, Stockholm

AS A NON-ARCHITECT I like the look of this building. I also appreciate that it is not in the historical center of Chişinău, since I work with monuments in the city.

Ion Ştefăniţă, DIRECTOR, *Agency of Inspection and Restoration of Monuments*, Chişinău

I DON'T LIKE this building; it does not fit the landscape or the surrounding buildings—it is too modern and too smug. I would rather see the park from here. In the historical center of Chişinău there are some more buildings that look like this, like business centers and cultural centers, and they look awful.

Anatolie Juraveli, HISTORY STUDENT,
Squatting Movement, Chişinău

WE SOMETIMES CALL this “turbo folk architecture.” I have never been inside these apartment blocks. I heard the price for the units is 1100 euros per square meter, which is the most expensive we have in the city. They are trying to promote the apartments now by organizing twice-weekly live jazz concerts on the roof, among other things. During the Soviet times and in the 90s it used to be a public space—more precisely it used to be a market with a merry-go-round and other types of entertainment for children.

Aliona Balan, PH D STUDENT in Administrative Studies,
Chişinău Ecological Map, Chişinău

AS AN ARCHITECT I don't like this building. It is stupid architecture, this attitude. What is most problematic, though, is the land use, which is not professional. I would never choose to build on this site. It is too close to the park.

Juliana Zaharova, ARCHITECT, Chişinău

I'VE SEEN THESE kinds of buildings: they are present in every part of the world now. The problem is not only how they look but also what they are doing for their environment—how they react to the place and why they are there in the first place. This complex is not the only one; I believe they are going to build another one in front of it. So it seems like whoever invested money in this is also vulnerable. It is more the result of a certain liberty in terms of how you can use the city, but it is a liberty that is not really productive—it doesn't produce quality for the general public. I believe it does the opposite.

Bojan Boric, ARCHITECT AND EDUCATOR, *Urban Planning and Design*, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm



INTERVIEW

NOT GOOD FOR LIVING

Vadim Drazhin, MEMBER of the *Belarusian Union of Architects Board*, HEAD of *Tapas Project*, Minsk

As an architect, what kind of design course would you propose for the city of Minsk?

Minsk is a European city and should follow European and world tendencies in architecture. We have a lot of local architecture, but the quality of most of these designs is not good. There is a lot of stylization and postmodernism, which is completely discredited in contemporary architectural society. Yet many architects in Minsk still use this style, which is very bad.

What tendencies do you see in Minsk's residential architecture?

The residential architects think that their clients should live in villages or small castles. They create old-fashioned decorated boxes that don't have anything to do with modern style. I believe that architecture should be interesting, and that is achieved by a combination of plan and volume without any decoration. That is the goal of architecture and it should be the goal for architects.

And your thoughts on the large-scale suburban areas?

Here we have a problem with all-too-few typologies and designs. We have nineteen-story buildings and

nine-story buildings, two types that architects choose from, which means that every residential area looks like every other. Sometimes you get lost, because there is no individuality in these places. There is also a lack of services and social infrastructure. In my opinion, new areas must be built and planned through a combination of the state and the private sector. Now, ninety percent is built by the state.

What do you propose instead?

I would like to see two- and three-story townhouses with small gardens, since I believe that is what most families want. Twenty stories are good for offices, but not for living. People should live on the ground. At my office, Tapas Project, where I am CEO, we design residential buildings of maximum five or six stories, and it works well.

INTERVIEW

WAITING FOR THE BIG PROJECTS

Vlad Moldovan, ARCHITECT, *Governmental Industrial Design Institute Industrial Project, Ministry of Construction and Regional Development*, Chișinău

You are an architect at the Institute Industrial Project. Tell me about your work.

When I started I had fewer industrial projects to design, like factories, than I had imagined. But soon we got lots of medical buildings to design, and right now I am finishing a church on the side. We had a lot of institutes in Moldova after the Soviet Union collapsed, and we still have them under the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development. The only thing the state can do nowadays is to change the director of the institute; in every other aspect we run like a regular company.

That is a good job that you have.

Actually, it was supposed to be a good job but we have had a really bad political situation for more than two years, and in that time I haven't been able to design any big projects. Big projects need political stability, and we haven't had that for a long time. So what we do is only small things, like small plants, medical structures, and renovations. What was planned to be big didn't happen. I am waiting for the political situation to be straightened out, so I can go back to the big projects.

STATEMENT

A HOME OF ONE'S OWN

Cecilia Lindahl, REGIONAL PLANNER, *Office of Regional Planning*, Stockholm

There were very few single-family houses in Minsk, and the few we saw were not in compliance with the zoning plan. Many people we spoke to dreamt of having a house of their own. But this is very expensive, and people said that it was not easy to get one if you did not know a bit of construction yourself. The big apartment buildings are really enormous: imagine that over a thousand families live in a single one. It is like a living factory. I guess you would feel quite anonymous if you lived in one of those buildings: you are just a part of a big structure. For a city to be attractive to different kinds of people and to international investment, it is important that there be different kinds of housing options.

SEMINAR PRESENTATION
MAIN DIRECTIONS
FOR MINSK

Aliaksandr Akentieu, HEAD, *General Plan Workshop Minskgrado*,
Belarusian Union of Architects, Minsk

BELARUS INHERITED the Soviet system of planning, and that system is to this day very centralized, with the state taking a large responsibility. We are a young country with old heavy industries that we are looking forward to modernizing. Minsk is a planned city with a historic center. Due to the fact that the city of Minsk is located in the geographic center of the republic and the center of the Eastern European land mass, it has excellent communications with the rest of the country and with other foreign capitals.

When discussing the connectivity of the city, we consider different levels of tasks we have to fulfill: the national level, the regional level, and the district level. Regarding regional development, we have seven sectors as well as five belts: the central belt, the intermediary belt, the middle belt, the intermediary belt, and the peripheral belt.

At the district level, we are developing a single document called the General Plan for Urban Development, which contains three parts. One part is descriptive, with different variables stipulated for the city. The



second part contains all proposals and applications for the implementation of different projects. The third part contains laws and regulations, including directives that have to be reviewed or specified in making local plans for specific developments and projects. There are four functional zones in the city's development plan: housing zones, industrial zones, environmental zones, and public zones. On top of that is a transport infrastructure element, a sort of framework for all zones.

Minsk is a unique city that, despite having an ancient history is very new, having been rebuilt sixty years ago. Our socially oriented economy can be seen in how our residential areas were built. About 1.5 million of Minsk's two million citizens live in its so-called "bedroom communities" with all the needed social benefits and facilities. Those areas have always received state support.

Thanks to its wide avenues, the city is very well interconnected. Our city is probably the most compact capital city in Europe, with the exceptions of St. Petersburg and Moscow. To date, there are quite a number of industrial plants located almost in the very center of the city, and the state subsidizes these businesses through low tax rates. Our future task will be to provide for these businesses to be relocated to the outskirts of the city. We have three huge industrial nodes: in the west, the south, and the southeast. This results in a lot of traffic going through the center of the city. In fact, shipping vehicles comprise seventy percent of the city's traffic. The west and southeast parts of the city are also very heavily

burdened by traffic, as a result of the industrial nodes that are located there.

We always keep nature in mind when planning our city, a similar approach to the one that exists in Stockholm and Sweden. We have a lot of forests and one river, the Svisloch. In order to provide parks and smaller ponds, we have created man-made canals that connect to the water reserves within the city.

At present I would say that our two main priorities are housing and traffic. Regarding residential developments, we are very actively trying to attract investment from private citizens of the republic. As to the traffic situation, during the past decade we have witnessed an increase in personal cars by 5 to 7 percent annually. That is why we now are discussing the possibilities of building huge parking lots in addition to the development of our transportation infrastructure in general.

COMMENTS FROM LOCAL PARTICIPANTS IN THE AUDIENCE

You have mentioned the personal car. Can you say a few words about the rail traffic in the city?

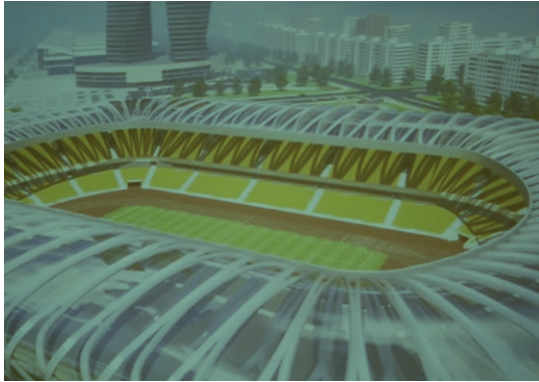
We are planning to introduce a broad electric light rail system for the citizens. Today we have heavy freight rail traffic going through the city. We are planning to relocate this heavy train traffic to the borders of the city.

Is the city planning to create bicycle lanes?

We have built one bicycle path along the riverbank that is twenty-six kilometers long. The citizens of Minsk voted for this means of transport, which is very widely used throughout the country but not in the regional centers. We will do our best to install bicycle lanes in all recreational areas. We are also developing plans to narrow car lanes in the streets to provide space for bike lanes.

Our Swedish visitors are very proud of Stockholm being a green capital. Why are the green areas in Minsk diminishing with every new general plan that is launched?

The planners are not party to the negotiations between the investors and the decision makers. In every individual case there are certainly reasons for the decisions that are made. The problem is that we are following the general trend in developing available land, rather than trying to renovate or make use of the areas that are already built up. Because we have this very compact city already, we are making use of available green and open spaces. I believe this question will have to be addressed in the future.



SEMINAR PRESENTATION

MINSK PROSPECTS

Michail Gauchfeld, CHIEF ARCHITECT of *Minskproekt Institute*, VICE PRESIDENT of the *Belarusian Union of Architects*, *Committee for Architecture and Urban Planning*, *Minsk City Executive Committee*, Minsk

LOTS OF NEW projects proposed by our architects can attract investors to the ongoing process of developing the city of Minsk. We continue to develop our Independence Avenue, adding a number of developments along Dzerzhinsky Avenue. This expansion includes adding commercial and office space in the city center. However, you can also see new residential buildings and other types of buildings in areas adjacent to the main avenue.

Unfortunately, because of the global financial and economic crisis, which affected Belarus as well, the development of some of these sites along the avenue might be delayed by two or three years. Our plans include a so-called student village close to a new medical university, a complex for the existing university, residential areas, and hotels for the 2014 World Ice Hockey Championships in Minsk.

Behind the ring road, the city has approved proposals for a soccer complex, a high-rise business center, and an international convention center. We need to find an investor for this project before it can be implemented. Here in Belarus we have private design firms and workshops run by private architects who are capable of designing and building such complexes.

However, public agencies carry out most of the design work. What we have today is a development of design expertise from the Soviet era.

INTERVIEW

THE CITY AS A SYSTEM

Ebba Högröm, ARCHITECT, RESEARCHER, AND EDUCATOR, *Royal Institute of Technology*, Stockholm

I have been working in China, teaching urban planning at the university level. The presentations on Minsk reminded me a bit of the way Chinese urban planners and developers talk about planning and city development.

What is similar?

They have these rational planning models, which they consider scientific and objective. It is very based on zoning, from the big scale to the small. In Minsk they talked about five rings, districts, neighborhoods—a very systematic and rationalistic way of thinking. Behind it there seems to be an assumption that with better technology and more social science models, the world would be better, and good planning is an important tool in all this.

In your opinion, how does this affect the city?

Bottom-up views from the citizens, and views that take in social and cultural issues of the everyday lives of people, seem to be forgotten in a rationalistic planning paradigm. It is a systemic analysis of society



—the city as a system, which does not really take into account that the city is basically a lot of people doing things. The people are seen as a homogenous mass that you move around and plan for.

What would be the opposite?

To step down from the role of the planner as expert. To acknowledge local and personal knowledge and work together with a mutual learning approach based on communication. That would be to realize that there is more diversity and conflict, and that everything doesn't fit into an all-encompassing general plan in the same way. Instead, the city could be connected in various ways, with more diversity between places, and also a bigger focus on the everyday life of the people. This is not an easy task for planners; it needs a lot of listening and pedagogic skills, I think.

WORKSHOP PRESENTATION TRANSFORMING THE KIROV PLANT

IN MINSK, the workshop focusing on the topic “livable spaces” decided to address the massive unused Kirov machine manufacturing plant on Krasnoarmeyskaya Street and the industrial area surrounding it. Their aim was to find out what would happen if one inserted a “livable” area into the city—with a smaller scale, a combination of public and residential development, and recreation and green space.

The participants concluded that the Kirov plant is very unattractive for the people who live in the area today. However, the group did not want to demolish the existing building but instead turn it into a center for sport activities, contemporary art, social facilities, and housing for students and guest researchers from other parts of the country. By doing this, the team



members hoped to attract a young and engaged generation of academics, artists, and designers.

New pedestrian streets, green areas, art galleries, and playgrounds would also draw other Minsk citizens to the site, such as young mothers with their children. The aim was to create a neighborhood with a secluded feeling, free from through traffic, and with its historic character preserved so that people would come to the site and stay for certain activities.

The two existing subway stations were to be used as nodes for a looping pedestrian street, and a new bridge over the Svichloch River would connect the stations. In order to separate vehicular traffic from pedestrian activities, the group proposed an insertion of underground parking. To complement the converted industrial building, the group proposed new buildings of between five or six stories at the lowest end and fifteen or twenty stories near the train stations.

CONTRIBUTING ESSAY

A LIVABLE CITY

Ludvig Elgström, PROJECT LEADER, *Strategic and Planning Department, City Planning Office, Stockholm*

THE CITY OF MINSK is indeed quite a remarkable place. The whole city was bombed into pieces during the Second World War, and this seems to have left an architectural vacuum in the subconscious minds of Belarusians. As a consequence, the whole inner city was reconstructed during the 1960s to mimic the look of the inner city in the nineteenth century.

The rest of Minsk has quite another finish to it. The comprehensive planning seems to be heavily influenced by the thought of zoning and divided land use where workplaces and industry are separated from housing. It is an ideal of the modernist era, a car-dependent society of residential bedroom communities with buildings devoid of decorative details around windows or along the roofline.

We have those kinds of areas in Sweden, too. They were the result of “the Million Program,” a political effort to build a million apartments in just ten years that was launched in 1965 in response to a shortage of affordable housing. They were to be built in the modernist style popular at the time. Many of these areas are similar to those in Minsk, though the plans often accommodate the irregular terrain of the natural landscape.

Large portions of the urban structure in Minsk are composed of those huge apartment blocks where the human factor, to my mind, seems to be missing. During our visit, our guide told us that each area was planned with the inhabitants' needs in mind, which includes access to schools, healthcare, and basic amenities. Still they seem to lack the public and recreational facilities that make a place livable. This notion was the foundation for the theme within my workshop group.

We named our project “The Livable City,” and chose topics such as human scale, recreational needs, and public spaces. We selected a current central industrial area as a case study for the livable city. This focus on a specific place turned out to be unfavorable to the discussion, since the participants got stuck in situational problems. In retrospect, I think a more general discussion about land use and what the populace need, rather than the actual architecture, would have been more fruitful.

The planning practice in Minsk seems to be based on a harsh economic reality formed by the political situation, where the goal is a lot of low-cost housing to accommodate the huge influx of people from rural areas. Architectural extravagances are out of the question, as that would mean public spending on something without a physical value. It is important to keep in mind that the standard is a lot higher in the new housing districts



than in many rural areas, which means the city is providing an increase in the general housing standard of the country.

But how do you solve the question of livability in these new developments? It is indeed a difficult question, and one that to some extent corresponds with the development of Sweden's Million Program areas. Today these districts are largely unattractive to Swedes, and great efforts are now being made to increase their popularity and to improve the quality of life for their residents. These efforts consist of introducing small-scale buildings to vary the cityscape and also to improve the quality of public space. Not least are the social efforts invested in the areas, with better schools and public services.

Since there are so many of these buildings in Minsk, I believe they affect the design of new projects and might also influence future ways of thinking. Imagining various interventions similar to the ones planned and implemented in Sweden, the revitalized areas would probably become highly desirable and eventually exclusive as prices rose to meet the increased demand. This introduction of exclusive housing could deepen existing divisions in Belarusian society. It is difficult to predict the consequences of urban change.



ON PUBLIC SPACES

CHAPTER 3: ON PUBLIC SPACES

WHERE DO WE MEET in our cities? Where can we find recreation, come across new people, stroll, and discuss? Open spaces that are free for citizens to access and enjoy cannot to be taken for granted. In many cities, the public squares and parks are shrinking, in others they were never built. Whether this has to do with private interests focused on profitability, political strategies aiming for security, or a city planning system more focused on buildings than the spaces between them, the trend is worrying many citizens, architects and urban planners who see a need for urban spaces that are available to all.

In Chişinău, the New Urban Topologies participants pointed out a lack of meeting places and an absence of spaces for contemporary art and youth culture in their city. They wished for places where people of different backgrounds and ages could meet. They argued that the creativity of the city's inhabitants should be engaged in creating these new city spaces. With plazas now being used as parking lots and large parks in need of restoration, there are many challenges; but there is also great potential for the development of public space in Chişinău.

In Minsk, the situation is different. Here, there are many well maintained parks and restored historic squares in the city center. What the NUT participants saw a need for in Minsk was a livelier street life, both in the center of the city and in its mainly residential outskirts. As in Chişinău, many participants also saw a need for spaces for creativity such as contemporary art and cultural venues—places that are in short supply at present.

CHISINAU WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

“Public Space for People” addressed issues such as the lack of gathering places, the absence of venues for contemporary art and youth culture, the creation of an inclusive city where people of different backgrounds and ages can meet, and the potential for making use of the creativity of the city's inhabitants when addressing these shortcomings.

WORKSHOP PRESENTATION PIATA MARI ADUNARI NATIONALE

In Chişinău, the workshop discussion on public spaces started with a small central square now occupied by cars and led to the case of the main public square in the center of Chişinău, Piaţa Marii Adunări Naţionale. The participants reflected on the nature of public spaces in Chişinău and discussed future scenarios for the new kinds of public spaces the people of Chişinău would like to have. Each person in the workshop was asked to describe, in drawings and words, a mental picture of the existing square and its immediate surroundings and then to sketch an alternative drawing with text that describes how the space could be transformed.

The team members concluded that the square today is very monumental, empty and uninviting—a space of politics, monuments, control and security. They noted that it was built for speeches and parades during the communist era. The government building at the head of the plaza was constructed in the 1970s. Although it is the main square of the city, the group argued that it looks more like a big lake of asphalt.

The participants also perceived the square as a space that is difficult to access because of the wide roads in front of and around it. It was also stated that any sort of protest is not allowed and that only the government stages the cultural events that occur in the square. These events only taking place on major holidays and celebrations. The participants were also bothered by the presence of the commercial billboards that could be seen from the square.

The subsequent discussion and sketches presenting alternative proposals for the plaza reflected the need for making it more public and allowing diverse public functions and cultural events that could happen more

spontaneously and whose organization would include Chişinău's citizenry. Some of the suggestions for a future Piaţa Marii Adunări Naţionale were a bike parking zone, a corner for musicians, playgrounds for children, a café, a speaker's corner like the one in Hyde Park, a picnic area, and free wireless Internet service. The main objective was to keep the square active and to make it comfortable—a place where people would like to stay.

One idea was to have a website for the square where anyone could submit an idea or proposal. A moderator would make sure that the events were not political or commercial but cultural. Electricity and colored boxes would be provided for the events. The boxes would help to structure the space in different ways, depending on whether a stage, tables, or benches were needed. The team members emphasized that this transformation could be made in all of the city's squares with similar conditions.





STATEMENT PLACES FOR PEOPLE

Cecilia Lindahl, REGIONAL PLANNER,
Office of Regional Planning, Stockholm

In Minsk, as in Stockholm, there is a discussion about public meeting places and green areas. There is no green space between the city's blocks, not enough parks and other places where different people can meet and spend time. People explained that the old architects only wanted to have buildings everywhere, and now they think only of attracting investors, so they still build only big buildings rather than a pattern of moderately scaled buildings interspersed with green space. Having many meeting places makes a city more attractive and is important both for the people that live there and as a way to attract tourists and other visitors.

CONTRIBUTING ESSAY SQUARES FOR PUBLIC LIFE

Bojan Boric, ARCHITECT AND EDUCATOR, *Urban Planning and Design, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm*

ONE MAY CONCLUDE that the main public square in Chișinău today defines a mental and spatial boundary between the citizens and the state. This square is a space filled with tension and a zone of separation and distrust rather than a space of dialogue and openness. The issue of public space reflects the nature and degree of democratization in every society. To allow citizens to become protagonists in public life by occupying important urban spaces more freely, and to allow them to use those spaces in a variety of ways, would be a great step toward defusing social tensions and developing democracy in Moldova.

A great example of a public square that allows for public expression and a diversity of uses is Zocalo in Mexico City. Like Piața Marii Adunări Naționale in Chișinău, Zocalo is the main public square in the center of the city. It too is surrounded by government buildings, such as the federal district buildings and the national palace, as well as the city cathedral and other national symbols. The space is extremely monumental but it's treated as an open stage for free public expression. It is used as a venue for cultural activities, folklore performances, all sorts of political protests, and commercial activities. It offers a great mix and diversity of content that has helped it become a great tourist attraction and a place for people to experience the culture and life of Mexico.

The workshop participants in Chișinău expressed a particular animosity toward any form of commercialization. However, my belief is that in order to encourage greater integration between the public and private realms of society, and more openness and communication, it is also important to include a certain level of commercialization in public spaces. This could be achieved by allowing public markets, vendors, and billboards in the plaza. For example, the billboards may in fact be used to promote the cultural and arts communities, and the commercial actors could also become sponsors of cultural events and other activities. The presence of free wi-fi Internet access would also encourage the use of this open space.

CONTRIBUTING ESSAY THE CHIOSC PLATFORM

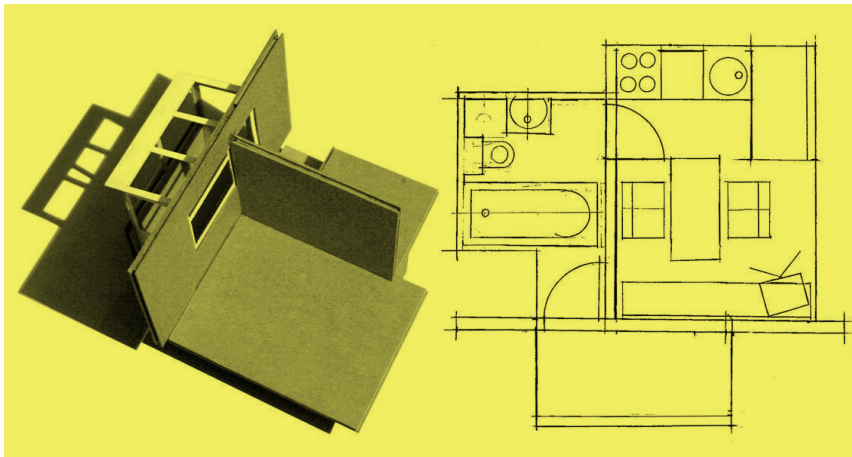
Rebecka Gordan, EDITOR, *New Urban Topologies*, Stockholm

LIVING IN A CITY with few public meeting places and hardly any spaces for contemporary art, performances, public talks, or independent film screenings, two curators from Moldova and Croatia decided to take matters in their own hands and change the situation. They selected a small public square occupied by parked cars in central Chişinău—the one that spurred the discussion among the New Urban Topologies workshop participants. The aim was to create an “autonomous space for the dissemination of cultural information.”

In the fall of 2009, the two initiators, Vladimir Us, founder of Oberliht, and his collaborator, Nataša Bodrožić (based in Zagreb), launched the Chioşc project. The venue they had imagined had now taken the shape of a concrete structure, a functional replica of an apartment with the basic components of a typical socialist home: a kitchen, a bathroom, a living room, and a balcony.

Flat Space, as the structure was named, was designed by Moldovan visual artist Ştefan Rusu. His point of departure was an interest in the limitation of private space by socialist society standards—a shortage that still represents a strong visual element of the contemporary urban and social landscape of Chişinău. To capture this fact, transparency was an important feature: the Flat Space apartment had no external walls.

Today Chioşc is an interdisciplinary platform for a wide range of renowned as well as marginalized initiatives, from the local to the



international level, for manifestation, meeting, sharing, and exchange. It offers visibility to artists, curators, and cultural workers operating within the public domain.

Volunteers regularly print announcements and tape them to the concrete wall, making the venue also a billboard for cultural events. Recent exhibitions, workshops, and film screenings have targeted issues such as the Moldovan recycling industry, post-socialist utopias like Havana and Miskolc, Hungarian video art, and the playgrounds of Bucharest.



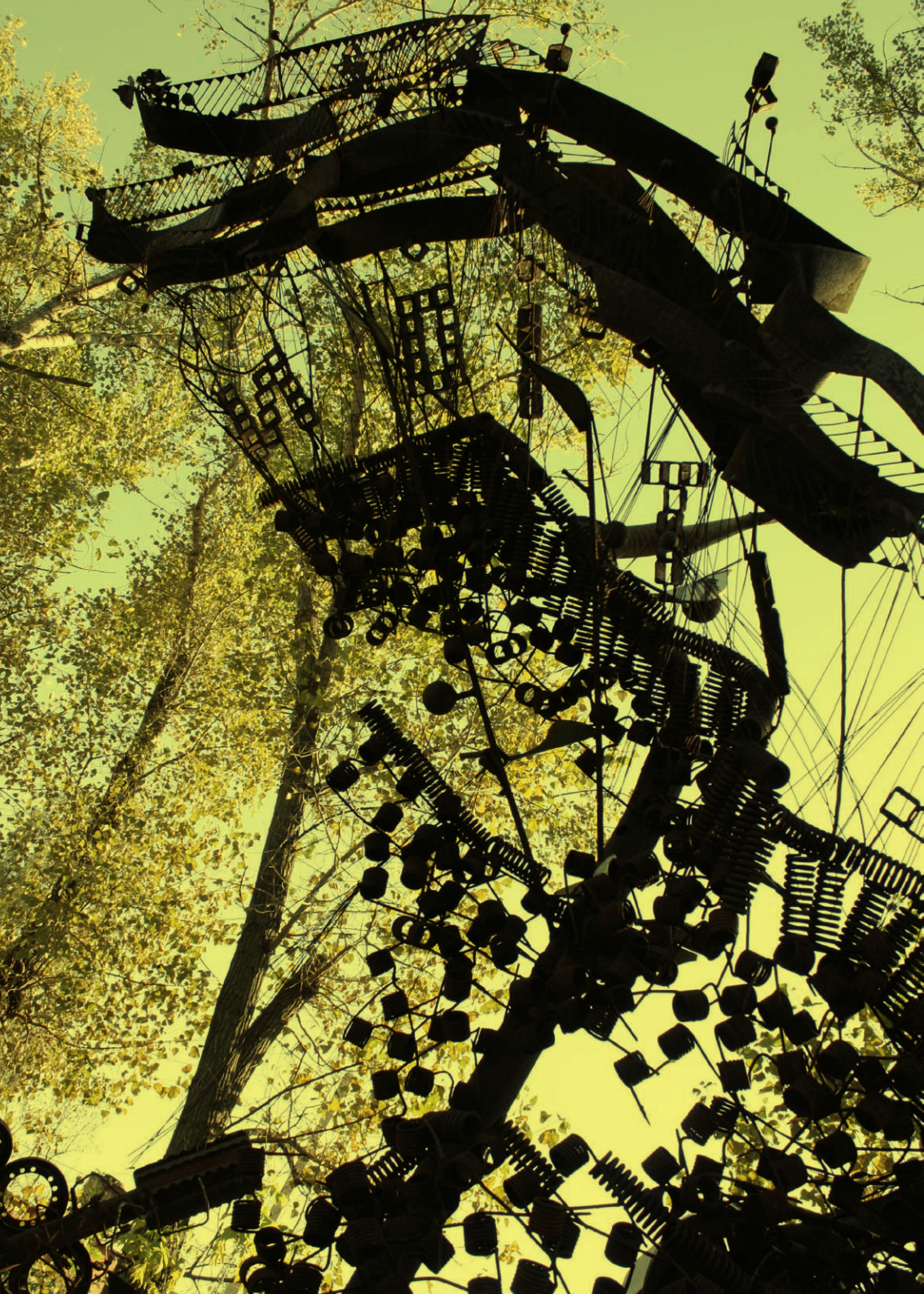
EXCURSION PRESENTATION TEN YEARS OF STREET ART

Vadim Iacovlevici, ARTIST AND COORDINATOR, *Oberliht*, Chişinău

GRAFFITI CAME TO Chişinău in the late 1990s, when several festivals took place under the city's bridges. Under this particular bridge, all the paintings were allowed to remain. Today it is more popular to make stencils in the old center or upper sectors of the city.

Nevertheless, this place remains a meeting point. When somebody very cool wants to give an interview, they come here to the train tracks under the bridge. I do animations and comics, and I have never painted here. But I am glad this place persists, that we have this space. It is ten years of graffiti, and it is still there.

Graffiti and street art are important for our cities. They color them, which are their main purpose. Street art can also be political or social, but



not all graffiti is like that; sometimes it is only decoration. In my opinion, it is not about creating something beautiful, but making something out of devastated places.

Because we have a lot of abandoned places in our historic center, we also have a lot of street art there. The government is taking some things down, but not all. I don't think people would be interested in a legal wall especially for graffiti. When you do something, you think of a concrete space so you can create your art relating to the space.

How has the street art evolved here in Chişinău?

It was more enthusiastic when it started. It was political, not because of the message but because of the act of making it. Now I think it needs to have more concrete messages.

EXCURSION PRESENTATION RUST & CO

Nicolae Ischimji, ARCHITECT, Chişinău

THE SCULPTOR VALERIU Moscov and I created Rust & Co in 1985. Some consider it a sample of iron sculptures, an exhibition. But for me it is more about organizing space. During the Soviet era this place did not belong to anybody; it was a forest. Currently the City owns the place, which creates a conflict in preserving it.

The material of this sculpture is garbage from industrial plants that we gathered close to this place on our bicycles during the summertime. It came out as a collage, the ideas appearing on the spot. Dante Alighieri inspires one sculpture: it is Purgatory, the entrance to hell. The letters are in Latin, but when we did this, the official language here was Cyrillic.

Regarding the title of the work, Rust & Co, it is an expression of a system that becomes rusty over time. It is an ironic comment on bureaucratic systems in general and the Soviet one in particular, since I grew up in this system. I hope that one day this bureaucratic organization will soften or die—that it will become more democratic.

I did this out of respect for my country. Now the exhibit is twenty-five years old, but it is still applicable to our society. The bureaucratic system is the same and nothing has changed. When bureaucracy softens or disappears, this ensemble should turn to rust by itself, without people's intervention.

This explains my attitude to art: I believe it should be temporary. It is shown—and then it ceases to exist.

INTERVIEW

THE VERY FIRST SQUAT

Stanislav Grosu (SG), MEDICAL STUDENT, and Anatolie Juraveli (AJ), HISTORY STUDENT, *Squatting Movement*, Chişinău

Centro Culturale Sociale 73 is the first squat in Chişinău for public purposes. How did this project begin?

AJ: A friend of mine from Bucharest told me about squatting in Europe two years ago. I had never heard about it. But after that I looked on the Internet and learned about how they create cultural centers in abandoned buildings. We thought, why not doing it here in Chişinău? We have a lack of cultural spaces here.

What did you want to achieve?

AJ: The aim was to create a place for artists, musicians, and creative activists in the socio-cultural field to do their work without the necessity of money. It was also meant to be a place for any interested people to spend time and enjoy culture and one another's company.



How did you find this building?

AJ: We just walked around in the summer and explored the urban area. In Chişinău there are a lot of abandoned buildings, so it is not so hard to find one, but this one was in better condition, having a door and windows. It is on Mateevici Street 73, which is why we called it Centro 73. We began squatting here on August 5, 2010.

At that time it was in very poor condition. It was dirty, had a big hole in the living room floor, and was filled with a lot of garbage. I think homeless people had slept here in the winter. With the help of a larger group of people, including international volunteers from Germany, Finland and France, we had a big "squat clean up," when we repaired the floor in the main room and cleaned the chimney. We still don't have electricity; we use car batteries for music, for example, and light from candles.

What sort of events are you organizing here?

AJ: Different cultural and social happenings. We wanted to make a place where people could meet, listen to good music and show their art. The first event we had was a workshop on sexism; today there will be a release of a cultural magazine here. To go to bars and drink beer, as we did before, doesn't interest us anymore.

There are plenty of empty buildings in the center Chişinău. Why hasn't anyone done this before you?

AJ: Either they don't know that it is possible, or they are skeptical of this idea. They might be afraid of the police. This squat was sort of a test, because here in Moldova people don't know anything about squatting. They don't even know of this word "squatting."

SG: It is the nature of Moldovans. The Soviet Union was very bad for us. The country was very poor and still is. So people are very reserved—they can't even imagine how to occupy a building they don't legally own.

This is a monument, but what more do you know about the building?

AJ: We think it was built in the beginning of the twentieth century as a villa for rich people. The Soviets modified it and added more rooms. The upper floor has four rooms, two little ones and two big. We don't use the two apartments downstairs.

What does the owner say about you staying here?

AJ: This is a private property. The owner wants to demolish it, but he shouldn't be able to because this is an architectural monument. Still, he is waiting for authorization from City Hall to destroy the building. He knows that we are here, but he doesn't seem to care.

Have you had any trouble with the police?

AJ: We've had the police here many times. That is why we decided that all the steps we take should be made public. Here in Moldova, only public opinion and mass media can help you.

SG: The attention from the cops and media came when we put the

stencil on the wall, saying that this is a monument protected by the state. I remember we stood about two hours outside with the police, and we also called the media. The message was sent that the Mateevici building is scheduled to be destroyed.

AJ: But the first time it was the security man from the building next to us, which belongs to a very rich guy in Moldova, that brought the criminal police, from the narcotics division. We tried to explain the project, that we are artists and that the project is about urban exploration and abandoned buildings. When they hear the word artist, it is more acceptable.

Do you see any problems with this, doing something illegal?

AJ: No, our conscience is clean. The building was not being used—why should a building stand empty if you can use it?

SG: This is the idea of squatting: staying in a place that does not belong to you and trying to make something good of the time you are there.

How do you imagine the future of this center—can you make it legal?

AJ: Here in Moldova we have a law saying that if you stay in a building for fifteen years, pay the taxes and take care of it, it can be legally yours. Now we want to do everything, from workshops, talks, jam sessions, and poetry readings to food service and dance nights.

SG: We don't have a big future plan for this, we're simply trying to do as many things as we can during the time we have.

What are the reactions from the neighborhood?

SG: Today we met the people that used to live here during the period of 1952 to 1964. They told us that the resident before them was a Romanian general. They had been here in the beginning of the summer when it was very dirty, and they were very impressed by the work we'd done fixing up the house and cleaning up the garden.

Talking about the past of the building, you suspect there is a secret basement under the building, don't you?

AJ: Well, we don't know for sure, and we don't know where the entrance is. But we know that the KGB killed or deported rich and intellectual people in Chișinău, and that it was here in the historical center these people lived. When KGB troops occupied parts of Romania and Bessarabia—now Moldova—in the 1940s, there was a lot of terror. After the war, adults and children were found in basements with holes in their heads.

For me and Stas, this squatting is a real trip. We met a lot of people, we saw the police, and learned about the history of this area and the things happening here right now.



A FEW WEEKS AFTER THE INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED CENTRO 73 HAD TO SHUT DOWN. THIS IS ANOTOLIE JURAVELI'S DESCRIPTION OF WHAT HAPPENED:

In the beginning of December the owner's building company put a fence around the building and put out some guards. The door was broken, some of our things were stolen. We stayed in the squat for some days, the press came, but we couldn't control events there anymore. We decided to abandon it, but not to give up the fight against the demolition of this monument.

So we protested—caused a huge scandal. The situation came to the attention of the public. In the end the owner changed his mind, and now he will renovate the building and make some sort of restaurant there. So we won! We saved a monument. And now, with the warm weather returns, we'll squat another building...



SUSTAINABLE INFRA- STRUCTURE

CHAPTER 4: SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

LIVING IN A CITY often means being on the move—through the subway system, in a private car, on foot or on a bicycle. But how do we structure our transportation infrastructure, what forms of transportation should it serve, and what locations should it connect? Do we need more highways or parks? Should all districts thrive, or can some be left as bedroom communities?

During the New Urban Topologies workshops in Chişinău and Minsk, the issue of sustainable infrastructure was discussed from two viewpoints: the green and the social. Seen from an ecological and environmental perspective, the participants discussed alternative green public transportation systems, including aerial cableways and bike lanes, but also the prospects for urban farming and local food production, recycling, and the possibilities of reducing pollution and cleaning up rivers and lakes.

In Chişinău, the participants suggested a renewal of the areas surrounding the presently polluted Bic River, introducing new boardwalks and transforming some disused industrial plants. They suggested moving the manufacturing to more defined industrial sites on the outskirts of the city. In the Moldovan capital as well as in Minsk, the issue of shrinking public green areas was also a significant discussion thread. In Chişinău, some participants were also worried about the asbestos that is found in many old buildings.

Discussing sustainable infrastructure from a social perspective, the NUT participants saw a need for extensive connections within the transportation system that would make the daily commute easier for the city's inhabitants. New decentralized train lines and bikeways would also contribute to thriving new nodes for culture and workplaces outside the city centers.

In Minsk, the participants proposed a high-speed rail line that could bring inhabitants from isolated satellite cities closer to the central city. But they also underlined the importance of renewing these remote areas with better social, cultural and transportation infrastructure and interconnecting them. The aim was to give the inhabitants more attractive, walkable communities.

CHISINAU WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

"Ecology of Resources" focused on the protection and development of Chisinau's widespread greenbelts and parks, the prospects for urban gardening, the reduction of pollution, and the creation of environmentally friendly and energy-saving architecture and transportation systems.

MINSK WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

"Sustainable Mobility" targeted alternative means of transportation, the issue of how to create a healthy city, local production, and decentralized connections within the transportation infrastructure.

WORKSHOP PRESENTATION IDEAS FOR MINSK'S BEDROOM COMMUNITIES

IN MINSK, the participants focusing on the subject of sustainable mobility discussed social infrastructure as well as transportation infrastructure. It was stated that the two existing subway lines and the commuter railway lines function well. However, it was also asserted that many people are isolated in bedroom communities on the outskirts of Minsk.

The group proposed a high-speed rail system that would bring commuters into downtown from the outskirts of the city and from its satellite towns. A third subway line running from north to the south could also be created, as well as a subway line beneath the second inner-city ring road. The new line could intersect with the other subway lines at several points.

New parking lots were proposed for strategic sites where commuters could hop on the subway and continue into downtown. This would avoid traffic congestion at rush hour, the participants concluded.



A ban on private cars in the historic center was recommended.

Traffic could be decentralized by relocating some industrial facilities to Minsk's outskirts. Presently, these industrial complexes separate the center from the rest of the city. A better transportation infrastructure between the suburban areas was perceived as a necessity. The team members underlined the importance of renewing the remote bedroom communities.

In those areas, community centers and cultural venues could be inserted. Modern industrial developments could provide work opportunities. This would create attractive nodes outside the city center. The participants said that "community center" was a new term for them but embraced the concept of local centers for people who reside in the neighborhoods.

Moreover, the need for environmentally friendly transportation was also pointed out. One suggestion was to promote the use of bicycles, which are very common in Europe but not particularly popular in Minsk, according to the group. Further suggestions were electric cars, an aerial cableway, and a Zeppelin from which tourists could get a spectacular look at the city.

In order to create a healthy city, its architecture should also be designed in sustainable way, according to the workshop group. One idea was to have gardens on the roofs of residential buildings, another to put wind power turbines on top of skyscrapers, since the winds in Minsk are rather strong.

STATEMENT ROADS FOR BICYCLES

Elena Doroshkevich, ARCHITECTURE STUDENT, Minsk

I am from the city of Baranovichi in the west, but I've lived in Minsk for the past five years for my architectural studies. In my opinion, we have enough practice in town planning of the kind that exists in the outer districts of Minsk. There you can already find bright examples of this style from the 1950s and 60s—usually twelve-story buildings with social facilities such as schools and shopping centers.

The new residential areas that are to be built seem to be in a more modern style, closer to the needs that we have today. This is good for now, but in the future we need more changes, an advance in our architecture. Of course, we still need different social centers, shopping centers, and maybe hotel complexes.

It is also good for our country to preserve enough forests and green places. This is why I think that we must widen our system of different parks and squares in Minsk. Doing so, we could earn the European Green Capital award, like Stockholm did in 2010. It would also be cool to design different bicycle roads for people. Today we have a problem with parking, as there are so many cars.

STATEMENT PLANNING FOR CARS

Cecilia Lindahl, REGIONAL PLANNER,
Office of Regional Planning, Stockholm

In Minsk, we saw big residential developments with no green areas and no nearby workplaces. Everyone who lives in these developments has to commute, either in their own car or by public transportation, which causes congestion on roads and overcrowding in the public transportation system. They had three ring roads, but planned for two more in order to accommodate more cars. We talked about planning for more diversified areas with a mix of apartments, service, workplaces, and green areas.

WORKSHOP PRESENTATION HOW TO PROTECT RÎSCANI PARK

IN CHISINAU, the group that focused on the ecology of resources came to discuss the relationship between green spaces and their surrounding areas and whether or not they interact. Rîscani Park, located in the northeast part of the city, was picked as a case in point. The team members proposed that this green space should be preserved and further developed into an area that the city's inhabitants can use and be proud of.

Today only parts of the park are utilized. At the same time, a variety of buildings, including private homes and restaurants, have started to appear in the park. This made the team members worry that more and more of the park grounds will disappear in the future.

The team members agreed on the idea of trying to leverage major economic forces to develop the park and its surrounding areas. The recommended strategies included constructing a protective border around the park made up of eco-friendly single-family homes, a constructed wetland for water treatment and urban fishing, barbecue spots, a special park day, and a new meandering road crossing the park, which would connect neighborhoods and constitute an attraction in itself.

The affluent people living in the private homes and the tourists visiting the park would function as the “guardians” of the park, the group argued. The villas would have solar panels and gardens on their roofs, which would help promote Chişinău as a green city. An official park day would also increase people's attention to the values of the natural environment.

The team members noted that it is very hard to get from one neighborhood to another across the park. A new road would tie the districts together. They named it “the Fantastic Road”—a meandering tree-lined boulevard. The curves would slow down car traffic and make way for bicycles and skateboards on a designated path. The participants hoped the road itself could be an attraction for tourists. Since the number

of bicycles is increasing in the city, the group argued that the citizens think more about health and ecology today. Cycle tracks could also be inserted all over the park.

The workshop group concluded that Chişinău and Moldova are not very well known sites today. In this regard, some central values that could put Chişinău on the world map were discussed. The city has been known for its large amount of greenbelts and parks. At present, pollution and many centrally located industrial areas make it hard to market the city as sustainable and “green.” Therefore, the group came to the conclusion that Chişinău could be internationally promoted as “the Forest City.”

COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

So you want to sell public space, like a park, to private people?

Anatolie Juraveli, HISTORY STUDENT,
Squatting Movement, Chisinau.

I understand his frustration, I don't think this guarantees that someone else will not take another step and go further. This strategy could lead to even more new construction as other rich people are inspired to follow this development.

Bojan Boric, ARCHITECT AND EDUCATOR, Urban Planning and Design, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm.

We need a strategy. Maybe this is not the right one, but if we leave the park as it is a transformation will happen anyway. Not doing anything is not the answer.

Niklas Svensson, CITY PLANNING STRATEGIST,
City Planning Office, Stockholm.

I am surprised by they way you perceive this. It is your park. Somebody took some parts of your park and you agree to let others to do the same. It is surprising for me. You are young people and you have to resist that, but you just agree.

Juliana Zaharova, ARCHITECT, Chisinau.

What would you say if I made a hole through your apartment to reach my neighbor on the other side? This public space is our space, and society has restrictions for using public spaces. We shouldn't pay attention to the irregularities that happen daily. The Ciocana district doesn't have to be connected to the city center. I say: take the center out of the city center and spread it around to create other centers.

Nicolae Ischimji, ARCHITECT, Chisinau.



CONTRIBUTING ESSAY CONNECT THE CITY!

Niklas Svensson, CITY PLANNING STRATEGIST,
the City Planning Office, Stockholm

IN STOCKHOLM, today we have a development strategy aimed at a denser and more connected city. If you look at the map of Chişinău, you see large residential areas sprawled over a large part of the city. They are like many small cities aggregated into one. Chişinău feels just as divided as Stockholm, so there is a great challenge here for both cities.

Since the two cities' structures are so similar, I think we have a lot to learn from each other. How can we facilitate movement between neighborhoods? How can we connect the district in a more distinct way? And how can we create this change without destroying valuable park grounds? These are the questions we must deal with.

Discussing the relationship between Chişinău's green spaces and the areas that surround them,



whether they interact or not, we decided to work with one particular area in my workshop group. We agreed upon the strategy of leveraging economic forces to develop the park and its surroundings. The economic perspective was crucial to the idea of saving the park and developing it into something the people of Chişinău could use and be proud of.

The group had a very analytic discussion, and we talked about the strengths and weaknesses of the area. Is the park used today and in what way? Making use of these kinds of questions, we could soon spot where to develop and where to preserve. The analysis led to all sorts of solutions, such as cleaning the water for urban fishing, providing places to barbeque, and discouraging littering in the park.

Because Chişinău has many separated districts, we decided to insert a new road crossing the park—the kind you can find in Central Park in New York and in other big parks around the world. To keep it from becoming a highway and destroying the values of the park, we proposed a meandering route. If the design were to become “fantastic,” the road itself could have value as an interesting and useful component in the park’s development. This is also why we decided to name it “the Fantastic Road.”

CONTRIBUTING ESSAY A GREEN PROFILE

Mohamed El Abed, REGIONAL PLANNER,
Office of Regional Planning, Stockholm

A LONG TIME AGO, Chişinău was known as a green city. Today almost all of its green spaces have been built over, replaced by roads and industrial development. In my workshop group we worked on creating a profile for Chişinău as “the Forest City.” We thought it would be better to use “forest” instead of “green,” since the latter is connected to a clean city without pollution, which is not what the city is today. I believe that Chişinău can make use of a profile as a “forest city” as a way to attract tourism, which in the long run would protect its green spaces and create jobs. This profile could also make the citizens and the government more protective of the green spaces. In Stockholm we are very proud of our green areas. They have become permanent parts of the city that cannot be exploited. To many workshop participants, our idea of “protecting through commercializing” seemed very radical.



EXCURSION PRESENTATION

POLLUTED RIVER, DRIED-OUT LAKE

Alexandru Lozinschi, URBAN INVESTIGATOR,
Chișinău Ecological Map, Chișinău

THIS IS THE BÎC, the most polluted river in Moldova. In the year 2003, all of the fish in this river died, and in 2008 the river almost dried out. It is the only river that crosses the city, and a project is planned that could make this a place for entertainment and sports, but we don't know if it will ever be realized. There are approximately forty companies and industries by this river that pollute it. We have a clean water standard in Moldova that the Bîc does not come close to meeting. We get our drinking water instead from the Dniester River and from a number of wells. The Bîc is completely lifeless because of the pollution.

If we move to the Valea Morilor Park, we find a muddy field, which was a lake when I was growing up. They called it Komsomol Lake because it had been constructed very quickly with the help of komsomolets, the youth division of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It became a

very attractive site for the city, attracting many people for swimming, kayaking, and other sports.

A few years ago they said they would clean the lake, and then they emptied it. After a while we heard rumors that somebody wanted to develop the site, to build new buildings in the middle of a new lake. I don't know what is going to happen, but I hope that we will have water here again in a few years.

WORKSHOP PRESENTATION

LET'S BUILD A CABLEWAY

HOW CAN WE PRESERVE the green areas and historical districts of Chișinău and at the same time bring the city into the future? This question inspired some of the workshop participants in Chișinău to come up with an innovative proposal: to build an aerial cableway. This would solve the transportation problem and save the green areas of the city. An aerial tram would also be an interesting attraction for tourists and a great brand-building feature for Chișinău.

Because the Moldovan capital is built on seven hills separated by valleys and lakes, the cableway would connect disparate districts and provide spectacular views. The group noted that Chișinău already had a funicular during the Soviet era, which is now partly destroyed. This meant that the proposal had its roots in the history of the Moldovan capital.

In trying to make Chișinău a greener city, expanding public transportation is one of the pieces in the puzzle. Discussing sustainability and ecological tourism, the group concluded that there still are a lot of obstacles to overcome. One is the fact that many industries are located by the riverbank in the center of town. The team members suggested that these plants—unused to a great extent—would be moved to industrial zones on the city's outskirts.

EXCURSION PRESENTATION OLD-FASHIONED URBAN GARDENING

Aliona Balan, PH D STUDENT in Administrative Studies,
Chişinău Ecological Map, Chişinău

IN THE LATE 1980s this large green meadow was designated as the site for a new sports stadium. Now the years have past, and you can see that nothing has changed. There were a lot of proposals and investors involved, but it seems like they all gave up.

Today it is no man's land. People say that it would have been impossible to build a football stadium here anyway, since the site is waterlogged by two springs. Instead, many would like it to be transformed into a park.

We have a little street here where people live called Bulbocica. Unfortunately, the inhabitants cannot sell their houses or build an access street. They are not allowed to because of the uncertainty of this situation. As in many other ex-Soviet cities, we can still see some traces of urban gardening here. People have their own gardens, where they grow vegetables and keep chickens and other livestock.

When I was young, I remember there were old women growing tomatoes and potatoes between our housing blocks in the city. Today most of these ladies are gone, and young people wouldn't do this. I also don't think it is very healthy to eat food cultivated so close to heavily trafficked roads.

In other cities, like New York and Stockholm, young people are growing food on their balconies and rooftops. Do you think that your generation might take up this new trend of urban gardening?

I've heard about that, and they can do whatever they want. I don't think it will happen here.





EXCHANGING IDEAS

CHAPTER 5: EXCHANGING IDEAS

AS OUR CITIES undergo rapid transformations, the nature of these changes depends on who sets the guidelines. In many development projects, only one or a few stakeholders are involved. During the New Urban Topologies project days, the participants discussed possible outcomes of urban change, assuming the inclusion of a range of stakeholders and their different perspectives. Whether the focus is on preserving monuments, formulating a new master plan, or finding ideas for better transportation systems, different voices will inevitably add to the primary discussion, the participants concluded.

It is important to emphasize that the NUT project that took place in Chişinău and Minsk was itself based on collaboration and interaction among various stakeholders. All were interested in the future of the same city, but many of them had never had a chance to meet or discuss together before. As a result, the final proposals were based on varied experiences—from private and public sectors, from different countries, and from such diverse groups as public officials and ordinary citizens, teachers and students, professors and practitioners.

Most NUT participants believed that an exchange of ideas would make the process of urban development more thoughtful, and therefore better. In both cities there was a desire to include the opinions of citizens. This could mean a participatory process for larger planning projects, but also on a smaller scale when renovating a façade or reorganizing a public square, for example. Exchanges could be arranged between foreign universities or institutions, between private and public architects, or between different departments within the city government that rarely meet.

MINSK WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

“Exchanging Ideas” included topics such as global versus local, urban strategies and urban education, and how to include the opinions of the local population when developing a city.

WORKSHOP PRESENTATION INDIVIDUALITY IN A GLOBAL WORLD

IN MINSK, the participants who discussed the exchange of ideas decided to look at the city from the different perspectives of citizens, experts, and decision makers. To start with, the diversity and individuality of Minsk's architecture was discussed from the viewpoint of the inhabitants.

The group concluded that just as people paint their detached houses, the residents of anonymous multi-story buildings also have a desire to add individuality to their homes. These residents normally paint their balconies in different colors, put glass windows around them, and create new structures attached to the facades.

This changes the exteriors of the buildings radically, and makes them look very chaotic from outside. Antennas and satellite dishes are installed. Everybody wants to show that their home is occupied, that there are people living inside. The team members concluded that this is a part of the mentality of the Belarusians and their culture—they are creative by nature. Therefore, the group suggested that the City should provide unfinished structures that the people could build out using their own creativity.

The participants said they saw a conflict between the points of view of residents, experts and decision makers. The main problem, as the group perceived it, is that there are two realities from which you can look at Minsk. On the one hand, the city could be seen as a postcard or a business card that serves as a branding tool. On the other hand, the city could function more for the individual inhabitants and their needs.



In order to find a common ground on which the two worlds can come together, the group proposed a tool that would bring the two visions more in line and bring the two sides to the negotiation table. When the two views came together, a seedbed for dialogue would emerge. The team members named the tool “a common dance,” visualized by a joint sketch of people dancing and holding hands.

Aiming to find a place for Minsk in the global world, historical monuments as well as contemporary landmarks would be taken into account. The group underlined the importance of presenting reality from the point of view of the decision makers as well as of the inhabitants.

This would encourage those in power to implement not only the good things they think would benefit the city as a whole, but also what serves the demands of the population on a daily basis. This could be convenient pedestrian zones, places for social contacts, or the opportunity to plant a flower under your window.

In this platform for exchanging ideas, the group also saw a critical role for architects and urban planners: they are the ones with the ability to facilitate this crucial dialogue.

CONTRIBUTING ESSAY NEW MEETINGS AS FUEL

Ebba Högström, ARCHITECT, RESEARCHER AND
EDUCATOR, *Royal Institute of Technology*, Stockholm

WITHIN THE THEME “Exchanging Ideas,” we started to discuss individuality and housing in our workshop group. Stories were told of how people created their own space in front of their apartments by adding flowerpots, and how to deal with a neighbor if your tastes differ. Good or bad? Disturbing the architecture or disturbing my view? Do people have bad taste? Who are the people? Are they different from us (architects and planners)? Am I the people?

There were a lot of narratives of everyday life situations in Minsk focusing on the gap between a powerful few and those without legitimate power. The new national library was one, the newly built sports arena another, and the reconstruction of the city’s historic center was a third.

We talked about planning in general and planning in Minsk. The Minsk way of planning was considered to be a top-down approach. History was as simulated, faked: the “reconstructed” buildings downtown were never there originally. Who owns the rights to history? Whose history is it? There were also stories told about the differences between what was planned and what was built, about the difference between conceptual space and material space. It seems that the city is content with planning, and pays no attention to whether the plans are realized or not.

Earlier on, a chief planner had told us about the planning situation in Minsk. He described a linear and rationalistic perspective. One ring road, two ring roads, three, four ... bicycle lane... “If we just continue like this everything will be in order and the needs will be taken care of.” Different opinions, complex contexts, and competing rationalities were not mentioned. This is the positivistic and rationalistic view of society: “It can be fixed with better methods and evaluations.” This view can be found in a lot of countries, organizations, and research communities, in democratic as well as autocratic countries, at univer-

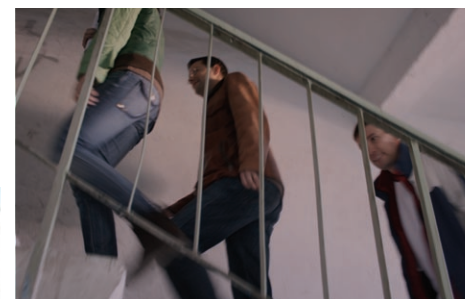
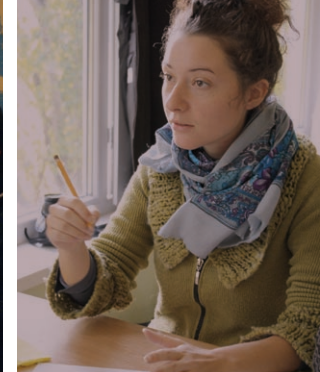
sities and at urban planning offices. There is a lot of criticism of this model today, and a lot of projects are underway that try to use other planning approaches—by theorists, planners, architects and artists—and in my opinion this is a really interesting movement right now.

The workshop we did is part of that movement, contributing to all these attempts to change methods of planning and communication. But we have to remember that we who came from Sweden just popped into the Minsk situation for a few days. We have to be humble about it. Still, in spite of that, the benefits of doing this are that we (researchers, teachers, practitioners, and students) meet one another and have an opportunity to discuss important things, in this case socio-cultural processes and power relations. There is power in encounters of people, though change is not instantaneous. Even small events can fuel processes that might make a big difference later on.

STATEMENT A VERY IMPORTANT DISCUSSION

Alexandru Raevschi, ARCHITECTURE STUDENT
AND ARTIST, Chişinău

This project has created very interesting perspectives. First of all it is developing our abstract thinking. The discussion is very important because these problems are not analyzed very well in the Moldovan context. The reason for this is that the mentality and the thinking remain Soviet: ordinary people here have a tendency not to analyze, not to look more concretely at the situation of our city and of our country. Another important and sad point is that our country is not so developed at the moment. We had good agriculture in the past; now we have no industry and no agriculture.





INTERVIEW

WE NEED INTERACTION

Yana Golubeva, URBAN DESIGNER, Minsk

In your opinion, what has been most successful in the urban planning of Minsk?

To rebuild the city that fast after the Second World War—that was a great achievement. After the war the inhabitants had around five square meters per person to live in, they had to share rooms, and the City provided mass housing and social infrastructure.

The problem is that we still continue to build the same districts, the same big scale without public spaces and uniqueness, even though we are not in that difficult situation anymore. Today 1.5 million people—which is two-thirds of our population—live in those kinds of apartments.

So what is the biggest challenge ahead?

We must figure out how to turn away from these big districts to something with a more human scale, where the residents can also act and influence the design of their neighborhoods. There is a need for local centers where people could gather, rent spaces, organize markets.

Minsk is this kind of modernist-type city that people move through but don't have a lot of spaces to stop and interact.

Do you see any tendencies pointing toward a change?

I worked in the Minsk urban planning department, Minskgrado, after finishing university. I continued as an urban planner in architectural offices in Moscow and London for some time, where I did my master's studies.

With my experiences, I cannot see a change coming in the official institutions here in Minsk: they're still the same as they were in the Soviet times. Most of the people in charge have the same kind of ideas about how things should work.

Another aspect is that there are a lot of industrial plants that manufacture the pre-fab elements for these housing blocks, and they are interested in continuing to do that. Moreover, I believe we have a problem with the inhabitants: they don't know that they can get something else.

There is no such thing as public funds or public associations where you can talk about these questions or learn about different actions one can take. We miss these kinds of things—everything is very strict in our society. All the rules were set in the Soviet times, and they still continue to be the same.

Could you express these thoughts when you worked in the Minsk urban planning department?

I could, but when you work in an organization like that you are in a system. And the system asks you to perform what is a part of its policy.

You heard the artist that presented the Sun City concept at the seminar. He has been talking about his ideas for ten years already, and nothing has happened. He is a part of the public, so he can talk about it, but he cannot do anything. That is the problem.

As there are more and more young people coming into all the organizations, I think things are changing, but very slowly. I think change might come with another generation, maybe in fifteen years.

Some of the visiting participants at the seminar criticized the Sun City concept for forcing people to be proud of your Soviet history. What do you think about this?

I think people are proud of this architecture of the 1950s because it is something unique to Minsk. In general, people are proud of our city. It is a good city in general: everyone has their own flats, and there are a lot of green parks. It does not have any really big problems.

What would you show someone that came and visited you?

I would show them the 50s architecture of the Soviet times. But I think for tourists the districts on the outskirts are also very interesting, even from the 60s and 80s. The central city is unique because it has a mixture of styles in architecture, different types of buildings and parks. The outer districts lack this blend. I think that the main thing our city is missing is this kind of mixture—and spaces for discussion.

Are there any seminars within the architectural associations that encourage people to gather and discuss?

Oh, no. The Belarusian Union of Architects is very official. They don't try to.... Actually we don't have a lot of people from the older generation that would initiate a discussion. Those in charge don't really start a new discourse.

What is your opinion on this gathering that we have here today?

I think these kinds of workshops are very important for our younger generation of planners. Not all of them get the chance to go abroad or have the knowledge about planning in other European cities. At the moment they might not do much, but imagine in ten years—they will be responsible for much more.

You cannot change the thoughts of the old generation; they were brought up in a different time. But what you can do is give the young people the opportunity to think differently.

INTERVIEW

I WOULD LOVE MORE DETAILS

Vera Sysoyeva, ARCHITECT AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR,
Urban Planning Department, Faculty of Architecture,
Belarusian National Technical University, Minsk

What do you think of these three days that Färgfabriken organized?

Frankly, I was very enthusiastic about the program as soon as I got it—all the topics were very interesting to me. In the end I was a bit overwhelmed. Unfortunately, the time was limited. The presentations were very promising, but too short for me in order to come to any conclusion about the way planning is done in Sweden. But I liked the topics of the Swedish speakers, and I really need to get deeper into these practices. Because foreign urban planning is very badly represented in our educational system, I had been wondering about other methods of planning.

What is lacking in the Belarusian educational system?

We don't have urban marketing at all. We have spatial model planning and regional strategies, but no mechanisms for implementing these policies on the city level. So I was wondering how to do this, and I would love to get more details.

What do you think about the workshop?

It reminded me of my student days when I participated in the European Architecture Students Assembly. I liked the informal manner of the discussion. We try to do something like this in our department, but the students still feel very formal, and the atmosphere is quite different. Here you were able to create a very good environment for the discussion—I liked it.

Are similar projects sometimes organized here in Minsk?

I think this is the first time in the last five years architecture students have experienced this kind of gathering. No, it's very seldom that we have an event anything like this.

STATEMENT

IN SEARCH OF COOPERATION

Michail Gauchfeld, CHIEF ARCHITECT of *Minskproekt Institute*,
VICEPRESIDENT of the *Belarusian Union of Architects, Committee for*
Architecture and Urban Planning, Minsk City Executive Committee, Minsk

As a representative of the Belarusian Union of Architects, which brings together approximately one thousand participants, I would like to offer cooperation with similar organizations in Sweden. This would allow an exchange of views, ideas, and plans, as well as mutual visits in the future. I would like to ask for your assistance in providing information for the decision makers and the citizens of Minsk regarding our green areas, which must be preserved and kept. They were formed by the hands of architects and have been a part of our city for the past sixty years. We need to resist a business community that wants to build in these places.

STATEMENT

A SPECIAL SITUATION

Anna Chistosserova, DIRECTOR, *Gallery Ÿ, Minsk*

The seminar we just had is very special, as our gallery hasn't worked with representatives from official organizations before. I am so happy that people really posted questions and that they are open for discussion. About eighty percent of us here represent official institutions; the rest are private architects and independent artists, historians of architecture, and representatives of educational institutions. It is really interesting to see all these people together in one place.

CONCLUSION

A photograph showing three people from behind, walking along a set of railway tracks that recede into the distance. The person on the left is wearing a light-colored jacket and a blue scarf. The person in the middle is wearing a dark coat and carrying a bag. The person on the right is wearing a dark suit. In the background, there are industrial buildings and trees under a clear blue sky.

THE URBAN FUTURE

PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE

A hot topic in the New Urban Topologies project 2010 in Chişinău and Minsk was the approach to market forces. At present, new construction projects threaten many landmark buildings and parks in Chişinău, while public squares and sidewalks are habitually used as parking lots. In Minsk, the participants feared a shrinking of green spaces and historic buildings, as these are under threat of replacement by new developments such as hotels and office buildings.

The discussions on the protection of public space in the cities were enthusiastic and at times heated, and many of the workshop participants expressed an animosity toward commercialization. That animosity is probably the result of rising market forces and the grab mentality that emerged during the rapid transformations that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, some other participants saw an opportunity to use market forces for the good of the city's inhabitants. Investors could be educated in new architectural strategies and the business community could sponsor cultural events.

AN ATTRACTIVE CITY FOR WHOM?

Another issue that came out of the NUT discussions was that the path to making a city attractive to its own citizens might go hand-in-hand with the path to making it appealing to foreign visitors. A city needs cultural centers as well as improved infrastructure. These are both vital issues to consider in attracting tourists and enticing young people to stay in the city instead of emigrating. In Chişinău, a market value was traced in a proposal for a new "Forest City" identity as a way to draw tourists. This profile would also mean protecting green spaces for the city's inhabitants.

On the other hand, many participants argued that the city first and foremost should be developed for its own citizens, not visiting foreigners. In Minsk, the team members argued over whether or not the 1950s Soviet architecture was a reasonable way to attract tourists to the city. While some Belarusians asserted that this heritage is unique in Europe, some Swedish and Moldovan participants questioned whether highlighting Minsk's Soviet history really would be good for its inhabitants.

TRANSPORTATION AND ENVIRONMENT

In both capitals, the NUT participants expressed the need to develop their public transportation systems. Minsk has a subway, and a broad new electric light-rail system is to be introduced—a necessity, according to the team members. Since the conditions are not right for a subway in Chişinău, the solution that came out of the workshop was to invest in a system of aerial cable cars. This could also promote the city's green profile.

In Chişinău, officials and planners are finalizing a new general transportation plan. The city needs a modern public transportation system as the exhausting commute on old buses persuades many of the city's inhabitants to drive.

In Minsk, the planning strategies are systematic and centralized. Several ring roads have had a profound impact on the city, creating bedroom communities on its outskirts. Even though similar districts are visible in Chişinău, this pattern of development has not been built to the same extent or at the same monumental scale as in Minsk.

The participants in Minsk also seemed more worried about their rapidly growing residential areas than their colleagues in Chişinău. Their main concern was the preservation of the historic city center where many old structures are threatened by prolonged neglect. In both cities the participants expressed a strong concern for environmental issues, such as the pollution of rivers and the impacts of large, centrally located industrial plants.

EXCHANGE AND EXTENDED DIALOGUE

Another issue that came up within the framework of these NUT projects was a curiosity among the participants about planning processes, political structures, and educational systems in Sweden and other countries. Repeatedly, students, planners, architects, and officials expressed a desire to learn more about the strategies behind the planning of Stockholm and the way the Swedish political and educational systems work. In Minsk a concern was expressed about the city's lack of urban planning programs at the universities.

One may also conclude that many participants had a strong desire for an extended dialogue between citizens and decision makers and for greater transparency within processes of architecture, city planning, and urban design. In Chişinău the participants wished that stakeholders such as the Agency of Inspection and Restoration of Monuments, as well as the inhabitants, would be consulted more often by those in power regarding

master plans and construction projects in the city.

In Minsk, the planning process and educational system was said to be structured in a hierarchical, rational, and top-down way. Most Minsk participants expressed a desire to see these systems transformed to allow more dialogue and greater transparency. A desire for international collaboration was also articulated, among both students and professionals.

THE FUTURE AS WE SEE IT

NUT is based on the creation and transmission of contacts. It is therefore important that we keep the lines of communication open after the conclusion of the project. We will follow up with exhibitions, seminars, and presentations of this book in the host cities. Here Färgfabriken plays a critical role in providing a forum and a physical space where exhibitions can be held and discussions can continue.

The road is not paved yet, but the process of following up with and getting feedback from the project participants is under way. New contacts have started to sprout among students, professionals, and teachers in Stockholm, Chişinău, and Minsk. In collaboration with the Swedish Institute and our Swedish partner institutions, Färgfabriken will put its energy into return visits as well as new trips and projects to other regions and cities. Our aim is a New Urban Topologies project that grows organically with people, projects, countries, cities, and ideas. The goal is new visions for the future of our societies.

WORDS ON NUT

I thought that the work was great from the group and that we touched on very important stuff.

Ebba Högström, ARCHITECT, RESEARCHER, AND EDUCATOR,
Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm

I would like to thank the organizers of New Urban Topologies for giving us the opportunity to work together.

Vera Sysoyeva, ARCHITECT AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, Urban
Planning Department, Faculty of Architecture, Belarusian
National Technical University, Minsk

The bus tour even included new places for us. I had no idea about the underground bunkers. The Swedish people helped us see the city from other points of view and take us out of our everyday routine. This project gave us new ideas of how to change our city.

Victoria Tozlovanu, ARCHITECTURE STUDENT, Chisinau

I think that NUT was a good way to start a co-operation and a great experience. Many people were interested to talk about various subjects and to exchange ideas. It is great that it is possible to organize a workshop and so openly discuss various questions.

Cecilia Lindahl, REGIONAL PLANNER, Office of Regional Planning, Stockholm

The city is not only architecture. It is human relations, flows of information, subcultures, and many other things. That is why we are coming here from diverse fields with different kinds of knowledge.

Vladimir Us, PROJECT DIRECTOR, ARTIST, AND CURATOR, Oberliht, Chisinau

I think the seminar presentations were very useful. We got perspective by taking a closer look at Stockholm.

Aliona Balan, PH D STUDENT IN ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES, Chisinau Ecological Map, Chisinau

I would like to thank Färgfabriken for allowing us to have these several hours outside of our usual program. You took us out of the quotidian routine in order to think about these issues. This has been an occasion to share my experiences as a professional, but also to listen to other people that are not professionals but are thinking about the environment.

Nicolae Ischimji, ARCHITECT, Chisinau

I think that it was a good idea to get together, Swedish architects and our architects. It was a good chance to compare various problems in different countries and cities, and it was a pleasure to talk to a variety of people and share ideas between teachers, students and architects. Yesterday I went on the bus tour, and I saw Minsk with other eyes, so for me personally it was also very interesting.

Katerina Zhukovskaya, ARCHITECTURE STUDENT, Minsk

It is a very good idea to start thinking about the city. The workshop was very productive, I would say—especially working with different kinds of people.

Alexandru Raevschi, ARCHITECTURE STUDENT AND ARTIST, Chisinau

List of Participants

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Swedish Embassy in Moldova

Ingrid Tersman AMBASSADOR

Natalia Sicora ASSISTANT TO THE AMBASSADOR

Swedish Embassy in Belarus

Stefan Eriksson AMBASSADOR

Ales' Lukavenkau COORDINATOR for Information and Culture

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Vadim Iacovlevici COORDINATOR, ARTIST

Diana Arosio ARTIST, VOLUNTEER

Maud Revol CULTURE WORKER, VOLUNTEER

City of Chişinău

Nistor Grozavu DEPUTY MAYOR

Moldova State University

Virgil Paslariuc ASSOCIATE

PROFESSOR specializing in modern history and culture in Moldova

Agency of Inspection and Restoration of Monuments

Ion Ştefăniţă DIRECTOR

Ministry of Construction and Regional Development

Vlad Moldovan ARCHITECT, Governmental Industrial Design Institute Industrial Project

Romanian Cultural Institute

Petre Guran DIRECTOR

Chişinău Ecological Map

Aliona Balan PH D STUDENT in administrative studies

Alexandru Lozinschi URBAN INVESTIGATOR

Chişinău Subterranean Map

Maxim Cuzmenco ARTIST, FILMMAKER

Squatting Movement

Anatolie Juraveli HISTORY STUDENT
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Students

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Victoria Tozlovanu
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Gabriela Nichifor ARCHITECTURE
STUDENT

Artists

Alexandru Raevschi ARCHITECTURE
STUDENT, ARTIST
Ruxanda Stefanov ARTIST

Swedish Participants

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Vera Halvarsson SWEDISH CITIZEN
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Committee for Architecture and Urban Planning, Minsk City Executive Committee

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Michail Gauchfeld CHIEF
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Vadzim Hlinnik ARCHITECT AND
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www.fargfabriken.se
www.si.se
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www.bntu.by

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IN OCTOBER 2010, Färgfabriken, in conjunction with its Moldovan and Belarusian partners Oberliht and Ÿ Gallery, conducted extensive programs on urban topologies in the capital cities of Chişinău and Minsk. The participants were municipal administrators, architects, urban planners, and students, among others. The aim of the initiative was to identify ways to strengthen positive cultural values and address some of the many challenges facing the two cities. Moreover, the intent was to create an open and free platform for groups and individuals that rarely meet. The programs were part of a larger project called New Urban Topologies, or NUT. This project will grow organically with people, projects, countries, cities, and ideas. The goal is new visions for the future of our societies.

FÄRGFABRIKEN is a Swedish center for contemporary art and architecture with an international approach. For more than a decade, Färgfabriken has been active in the fields of urban planning, sociology, and architecture.

