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RESPONSIBILITY OF THE UNION OF ARCHITECTS FOR SUSTAINING THE LOCAL VISUAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITY OF KRASNOYARSK AS A PROSPECTIVE CULTURAL CAPITAL OF EASTERN SIBERIA

Abstract: *Krasnoyarsk has a rich and significant cultural and architectural history (since 1628), embodied in its architectural monuments and urban environment. After the fall of the Soviet Union with its well-defined visual and mental ideology (J. Charley), Krasnoyarsk, like many Russian cities, seems to have developed erratically. Additionally, the link between society and the built environment has been lost. However, the preservation of cultural layers is of importance (C. Abel; P. Emmons) and one of the key elements needed for national consciousness and a sense of national belonging (V. Putin, decree of 2009). The Krasnoyarsk office of The All-Russian Union of Architects had the rights and responsibility for the formation of a comfortable and relevant architectural environment and interactions between the environment and society during the Soviet Union period; however, currently, it is, in fact, fragmented and has lost its rights. Moreover, this Union is gradually dying as an institution and should be reinvented, according to current needs of society (New Institutionalism, Meyer, Rowan). Thus, the main question of the article is: how could the Union of Architects return the prerogative for identification and sustaining of the local visual and cultural identity of Krasnoyarsk, acting as a connector of the society and the built environment? Using elements of historical-correlation research (L. Groat, D. Wang), relying on case studies of existing approaches around the Western World and the existing theories of urban power distribution (Domhoff, Mossberger, Stoker, etc) along with instruments of participation (Hofmann, Lee, etc.), the initial work called Agency of Identity (D. Belova, MA thesis, Sheffield, UK, 2017) was aimed to develop the scenario of programme implementation for the Union of Architects as an Agency of Identity ('Mapping Controversies', Yaneva). Finally, the preliminary strategy was developed to provide the Union with the scenario of empowerment. This could become a social experiment, potentially used for future research.*

Keywords: *cultural identity, the role of architect, community, new institutionalism, power distribution, mapping controversies, city identity, identical structure.*

Introduction and research context

The city has a rich and significant cultural and architectural history (since 1628), embodied in its architectural monuments and urban environment. A considerable amount of literature has been published on the architectural history of the city and its architects. However, there are relatively few historical studies of the key features of the historical Identity of the city and the past and future role of architectural society in the formation of a 'meaningful environment' (Franz, 1994). Thus, a clear design description of visual Identity as well as studies of the issue of the role of architect for this Identity are required.

The history of Russia has been characterized by a series of revolutions and crashes of ideological systems, followed by identical crises. After the fall of the Soviet Union with its well-defined visual and mental ideology (Charley, 2008), Krasnoyarsk, as well as many of Russian cities, seems to have developed erratically both in terms of structure and visual environment.

Currently, a quite chaotic environment has become a fact: random, uncontrolled patterns, materials, and textures against the background of ‘Khrushchev blocks’, unacceptable density and industrial neoplasms today are parts of its history, its reflection (Fig. 1, 2). The further extensive growth of the city can be proved by the expenditure of a masterplan and statistical predictions of the construction industry. Therefore, a system and Agency for flexible masterplan and design regulations are required in order to anticipate significant social and identical problems.

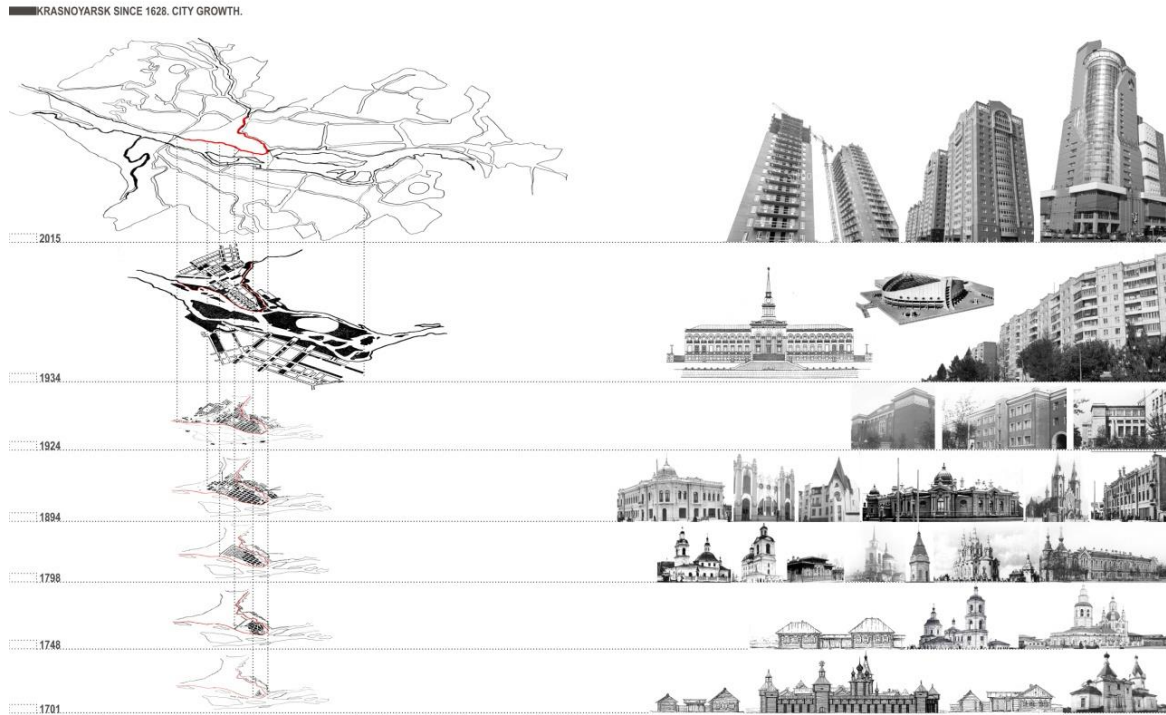


Figure 1. City growth and architecture



Figure 2. Globalized patterns in the city center of Krasnoyarsk

It is apparent that one of the major concerns of the city now is the loss of the cultural Identity of the visual environment. However, the preservation of cultural layers is one of the key elements needed for national consciousness and a sense of national Identity. Additionally, a great deal of previous research around the world has focused on cultural factors and how they influence individual and group behavior. Bogner (1985) suggests that ‘people and their environment mutually include and define each other’. Therefore, the preservation of cultural environment is of importance. Finally, after a long period of neglecting, it is becoming one of the core issues of Policy of the Russian Government (V. Putin, 2009).

The Krasnoyarsk Branch of the All-Russian Union of Architects (potential Agency of Identity) had the rights and responsibility for the formation of a comfortable and relevant architectural environment and interactions between the environment and society during the Soviet Union period; however, currently, in fact, it has lost its rights and is dying gradually. The set of functions and responsibilities of the Union is still enshrined in the Statute of the Russian Union of Architects, which today is merely a formal document in the case of Krasnoyarsk.

Theoretical framework

In order to define the Identity, existing research on the role of architecture in the definition of Identity was studied. It appears that, year by year, architecture is becoming an increasingly sophisticated phenomena, encompassing socio-political aspects and agendas, science and technology, even ideology and philosophy: in a word, anything but art, tradition and human creativity (Abel, 2000). Thus, it is quite clear that architects should go further towards socio-political sphere in order to succeed in defining and sustaining the complex phenomenon of Identity.

Probably, one of the cutting-edge problems for architects as ‘elite’ spatial practitioners, is the issue of maintaining the significance of architecture and its privilege to influence people. Tschumi (1996) said: ‘The increase in change and superficiality also means a weakening of architecture as a form of domination, power, and authority, as it historically has been in the last six thousand years.’ Architectural environments are influenced by globalization and the media, which suppress culture and traditions. Architecture as a discipline seems to be lost among other disciplines and scopes of production. Local Identity is being changed gradually by exchangeability and facelessness. The superficial decisions taken are the outcome of market-driven economical processes, where thorough consideration often gives way to quick actions. However, architects still hold the important tools in their hands that could potentially help to build new forms of society and bring cultural legacy into it. ‘Architecture is not about the conditions of design, but about the design of conditions [...] Strategy is a key word in architecture today’ (Franz, 1994).

In Russia, we still hear no confident voice of architects as a community or a Union regarding the ideological mission of architecture, or, alternatively, this voice appears to be suppressed by concerned parties (Charley mentioned the same problem, 2010). Thus, the responsibility for the environment and for spatial interventions (in Krasnoyarsk in particular) appears to be blurred. Jonathan Charley, concerning the mission of architects, said: ‘Implicit in the ideas of authors like Mandel, Arrighi, Schumpeter, Marx, and Harvey is the possibility for constructing a quite different periodization of modern architecture based on the cycles and crises that characterize capital accumulation. Baroque and Soviet Union used architecture as a power.’

When it comes to the physical aspects of the issue of Identity, here is a clear trend called Critical Regionalism that can be considered as a methodology, mediating between an analytical deconstruction of cultures and critique of universalism on a way of ‘cultural uniqueness’ (Lefavre, Tzonis, 2012). Along with quite straightforward methods of preservation of the past (conservation, design guides and codes), Critical Regionalism seems to be a possible technical way towards sustaining the cultural layers.

When it comes to the philosophical aspects of the issue, the role of architecture can be seen as a ‘filter’, a special type of ‘prism’ to refract the current reality (Fig. 3). It is apparent that

society and the architectural environment are interdependent phenomena. Architecture, as a discipline, and architects, as representatives of the discipline, being the centre of the 'prism', could potentially influence a two-way process of reflection and refraction in a required way. Representatives of 'conceptually oriented research (a psychological frame of reference)' believed that attention to 'collaboration in designing' would produce more 'meaningful environments' (Franz, 1994).

Apparently, architecture in a wide sense is a powerful instrument. Thus architects, as a form of community, are responsible for shaping both the environment and the society on condition of a participatory approach (Hofmann, 2014; Lee, 2008), which brings the particular idea that The Union of Architects could become a form of 'Spatial Agency' (Awan, Schneider, Till, 2013).

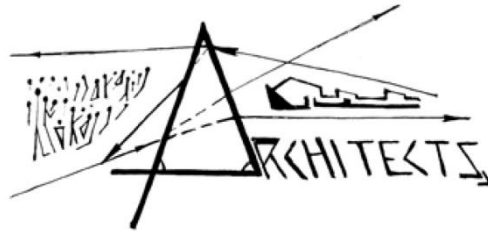


Figure 3. Architecture as a transforming prism

Research question

Thus, the research questions of the article (based on the MA dissertation SSOA, The University of Sheffield) could be stated in the following sentences. Firstly, is it possible to rehabilitate and sustain the local identity for Krasnoyarsk as the cultural capital of Eastern Siberia? What is the role of Architect in this process? Finally, how could The Union of Architects return the prerogative for identification and sustaining of the local visual and cultural Identity of Krasnoyarsk as the cultural capital of Eastern Siberia, acting as a connector of the society and the built environment?

Research methods and methodology

First of all, logical argumentation (Groat, Wang, 2013) was used to state the problem correctly, relying on the existing research. Secondly, an interpretive-historical research strategy (Groat, Wang, 2013) was employed, investigating the development of the socio-political sphere in correlation with the development of architecture in Krasnoyarsk within the context of growth of the profession in order to prove the powerful potential of local architecture along with the society of architects (Fig. 4). The history of The Union of Architects in Russia (Krasnoyarsk) demonstrated the importance of the Union along with its actual impact. This was explained in the form of diagrams and allowed to extrapolate the role and responsibility of society of architects in the creation of meaningful environment.

Then, using case studies of existing approaches around the Western World, potentially responsible bodies were defined. Case studies of successful forms of architectural societies (for example, RIBA), and their roles, methods and impacts along with the book 'Spatial Agency' inspired the research and helped to construct the new approach to The Union of Architects as an institution (Awan, Schneider, Till, 2013).

Elements of qualitative research (questionnaires and interviews, local newspapers and official documents (for ex, federal bills) were used to gain feedback and prove the contemporaneity of the issue. Then, in order to investigate the current real practical situation in the city in relation to power distribution, mass media and official documents, as well as interviews with local authorities and stakeholders, were used to find the gaps in the system. Then, using the 'mapping controversies' (Yaneva, 2017) methodology, the draft scenario of programme implementation of the empowerment for The Union of Architects was created.

Searching for successful precedents and frameworks for the reinvention of the Union, it is worth considering ‘New Institutionalism’ (Ekeberg, 2003) as the movement, encompassing a series of practices, appeared in 1990-2000 to reinvent education and art institutions in terms of both activities and a mission.

Finally, relying on the existing theories of urban power distribution (Domhoff, 2006; Mossberger, 2001; etc) and instruments of participation (Hofmann, 2014; Lee, 2008), the MA dissertation suggested possible ways of empowering and reinventing of the new Union, including the system of methods that could potentially be used by The Union of Architects to sustain the local Identity, and link the society and the built environment.

In sum, the combined methodology (Groat, Wang, 2013) was used, including elements of historical-correlational research, qualitative methods, case studies, mapping and logical argumentation to construct arguments.

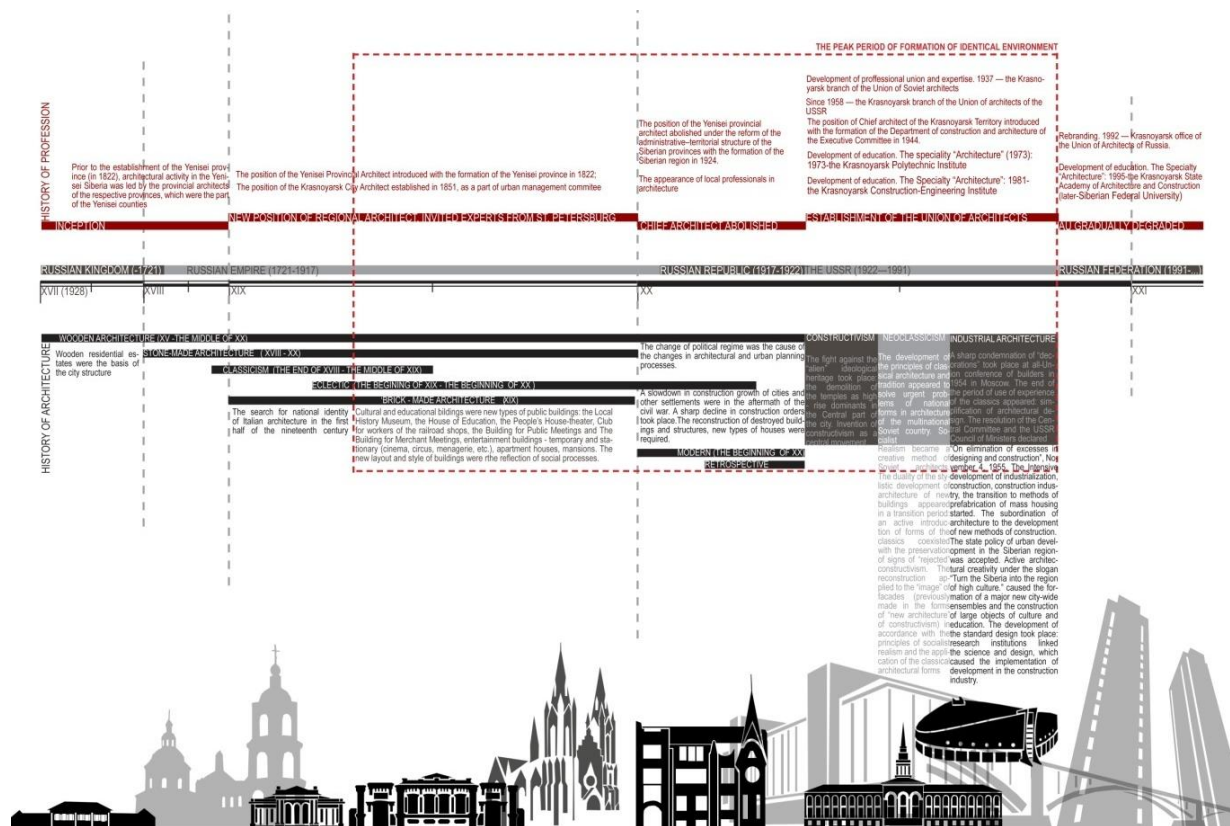


Figure 4. Correlational diagram. History of architecture as a profession and as a physical environment

Results and discussion

Thus, the problems of local visual, cultural and morphological Identity and the Role of Architect are interconnected and could be potentially solved together on condition of mutual contribution.

First of all, Identity needs definition, taking into account citizens’ perception, by using a participatory approach. A questionnaire completed by citizens and existing research demonstrated the fact that heritage and historical areas play important roles in the formation of citizens’ perception of Identity (Fig. 5, 6). Thus, architectural heritage as an important part of local Identity, as well as a possible methodology of sustaining Identity is nearly defined. To answer the questions ‘what should we preserve?’ and ‘what should be done?’, it is worth extracting local patterns, which can become a starting point for the essential dialogue with citizens on a way towards the coproduction of local Identity, its promotion and the informing of future practitioners. Studies of western methods provide the sustainable approach, encompassing

heritage protection and professional expertise in environment (to sustain the identical pattern) and interventions along with the promotion of local Identity. Studies of Russian trends in the field demonstrated the lack of awareness of what exactly could be done. Thus, successful approaches around the world should be adapted to the local situation, taking into account the urgency and high relevance of the issue. Additionally, when it comes to practical approaches to architecture, critical regionalism (Lefaivre, Tzonis, 2012) revealed the necessity of finding local regional techniques, providing continuity of historical and cultural layers, and making links and references with the past to provide diversity and survivability. Thus, even global models should be appropriately adapted to local conditions and reflect the spirit of place. The role of an identical pattern is essential.

The methodology of mapping controversies helped to investigate the complex situation around Identity and find out actors interested in sustaining Identity, who influence the built environment and how they do it (Fig. 7). It appeared that the representatives of The Union of Architects act dynamically, but separately. The existing problems in the built environment helped to define the fundamental problem, causing strong opposition between citizens and authorities (see Diagram 2). Thus, the potential role of The Union of Architects as a consolidated, solid Agency, responsible for the connection of authorities, the environment and people through Identity became visible (Fig. 8).

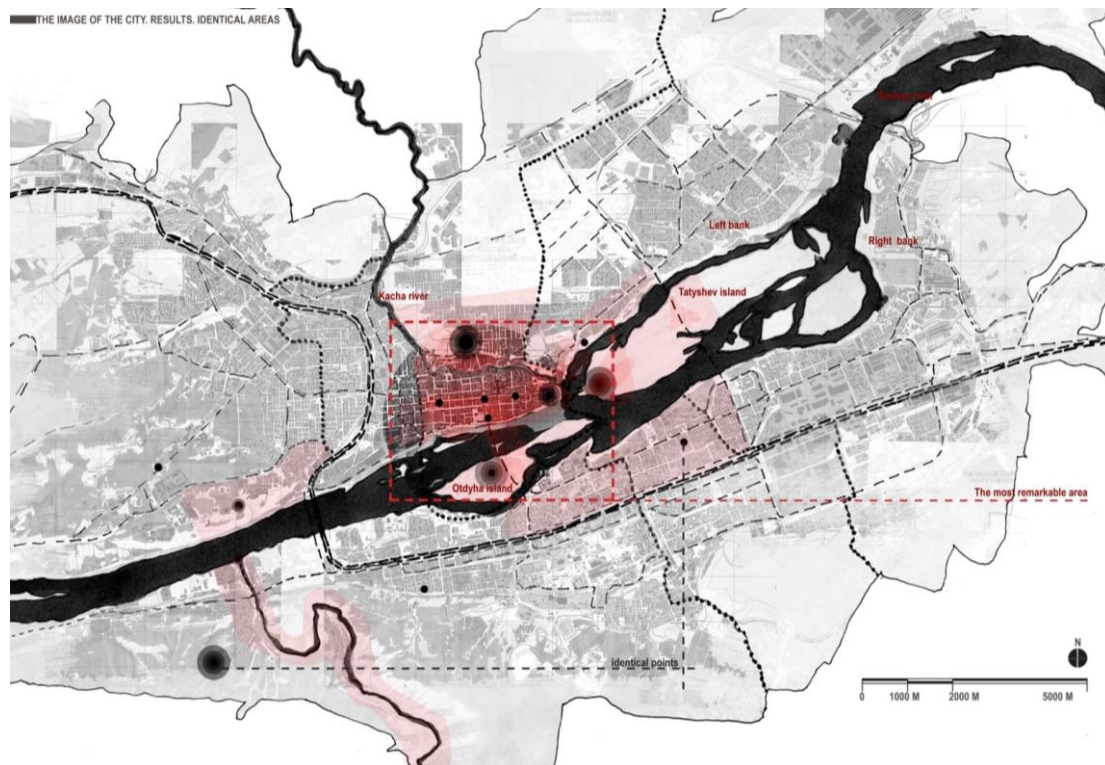


Figure 5. The citizens survey. The most identical areas and points of the city

The official statute of the Union, describing its suggested functions and mission, provided the set of potential basic activities for the future Union. The critical evaluation of ‘other ways of doing architecture’ (Awan, Schneider, Till, 2013), full of successful examples, proved the necessity of reinventing the Union and largely informed the strategy (Fig. 9). In sum, new type of institution could potentially work as a questioning, researching, pushing and, perhaps, even problem-solving platform, an ‘active space between community centre, laboratory and academy’. Critical self-reflection of the institution can potentially lead to the re-invention of a dying form of activity. With regards to the first steps, the transformation of this type of practice from a top-

down structure and insider audience towards the new proactive democratic position can be mentioned (Domhoff, 2006). Therefore, in the spirit of reformation, the attempt to create something new on the basis of such an old-fashioned institution as the local office of The All-Russian Union of Architects seems a logical reaction to the socio-political conditions (Ekeberg, 2003).

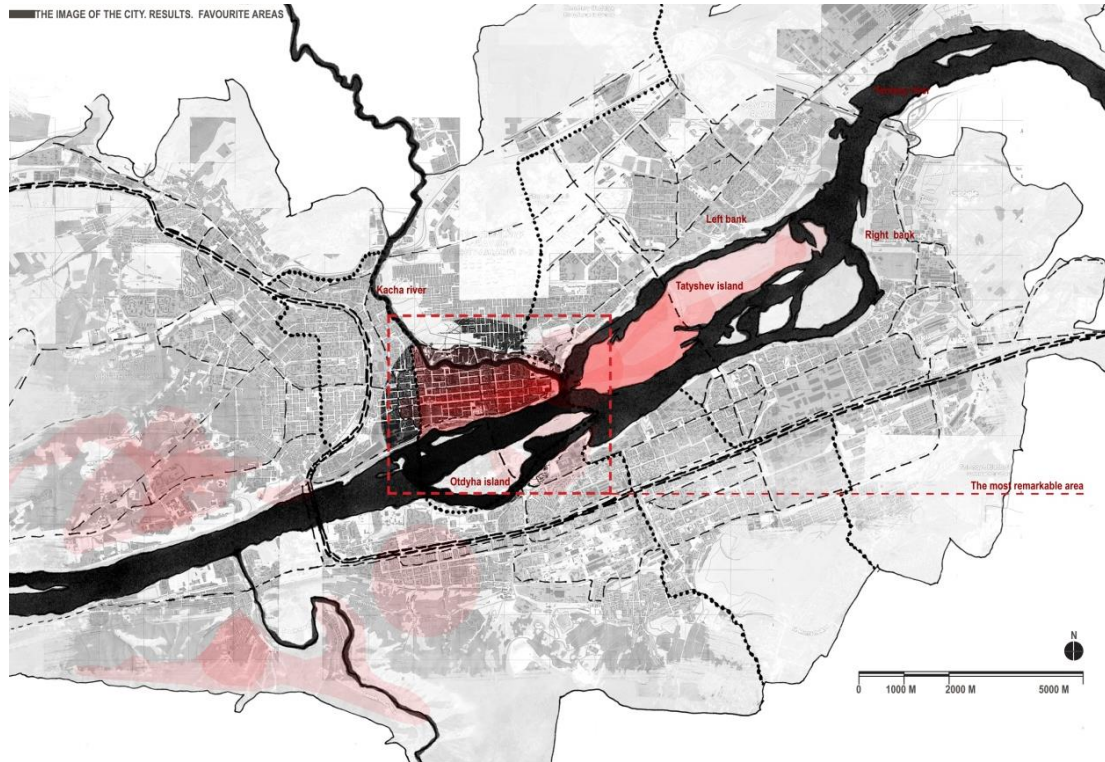


Figure 6. The citizens survey. Favorite areas of the city

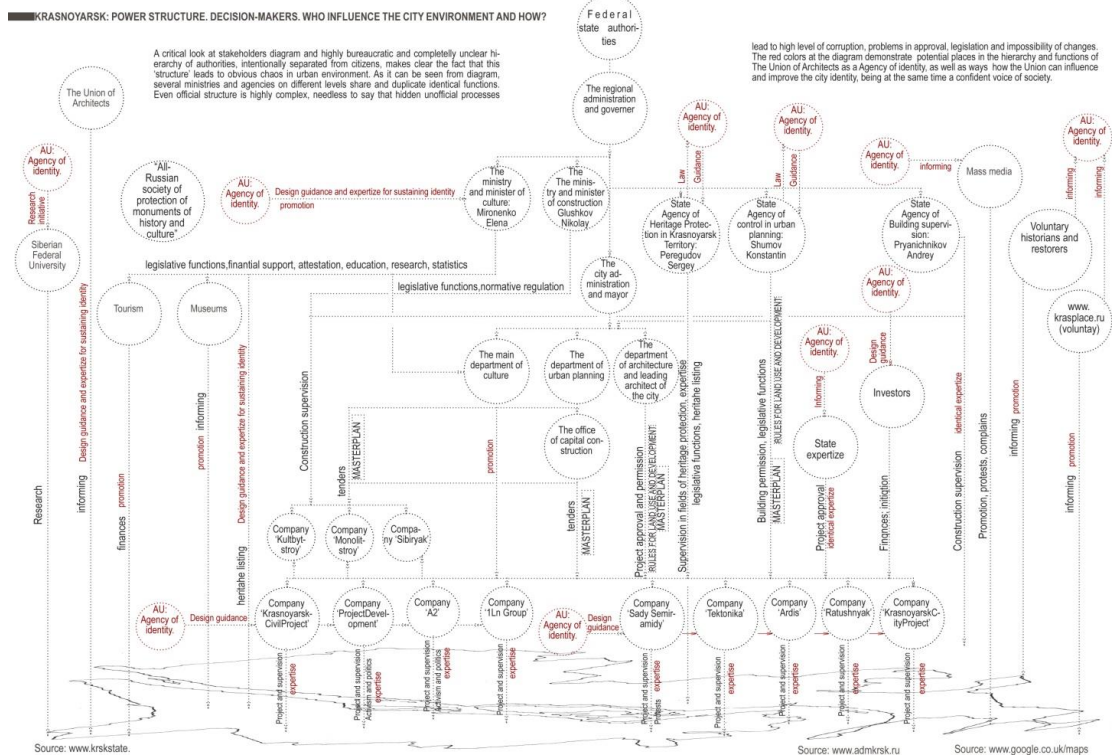


Figure 7. The potential functions place of The Union of Architects (red) in the power structure of decision-makers



Figure 8. The Union of Architects as mediator and filter between society and authorities

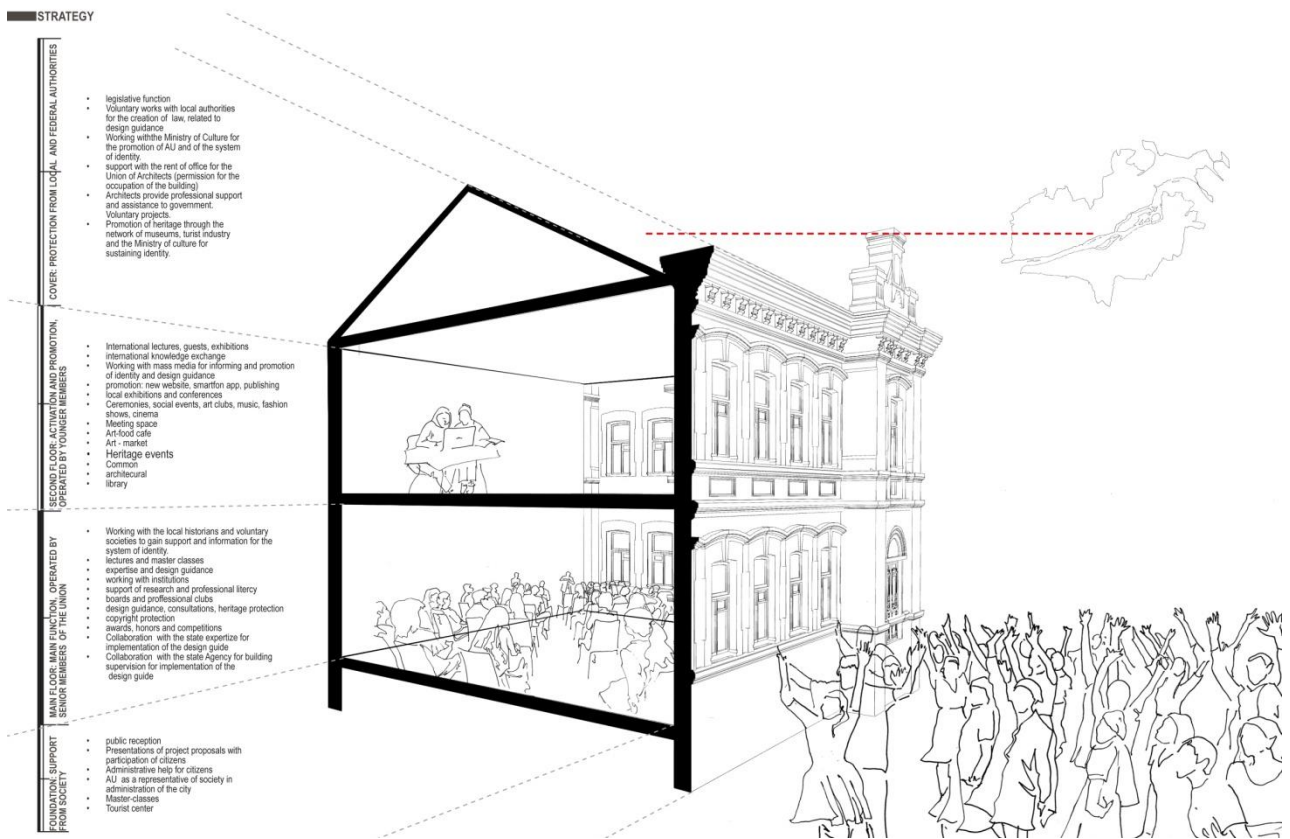


Figure 9. Imaginary strategy the empowering of the reinvented institution

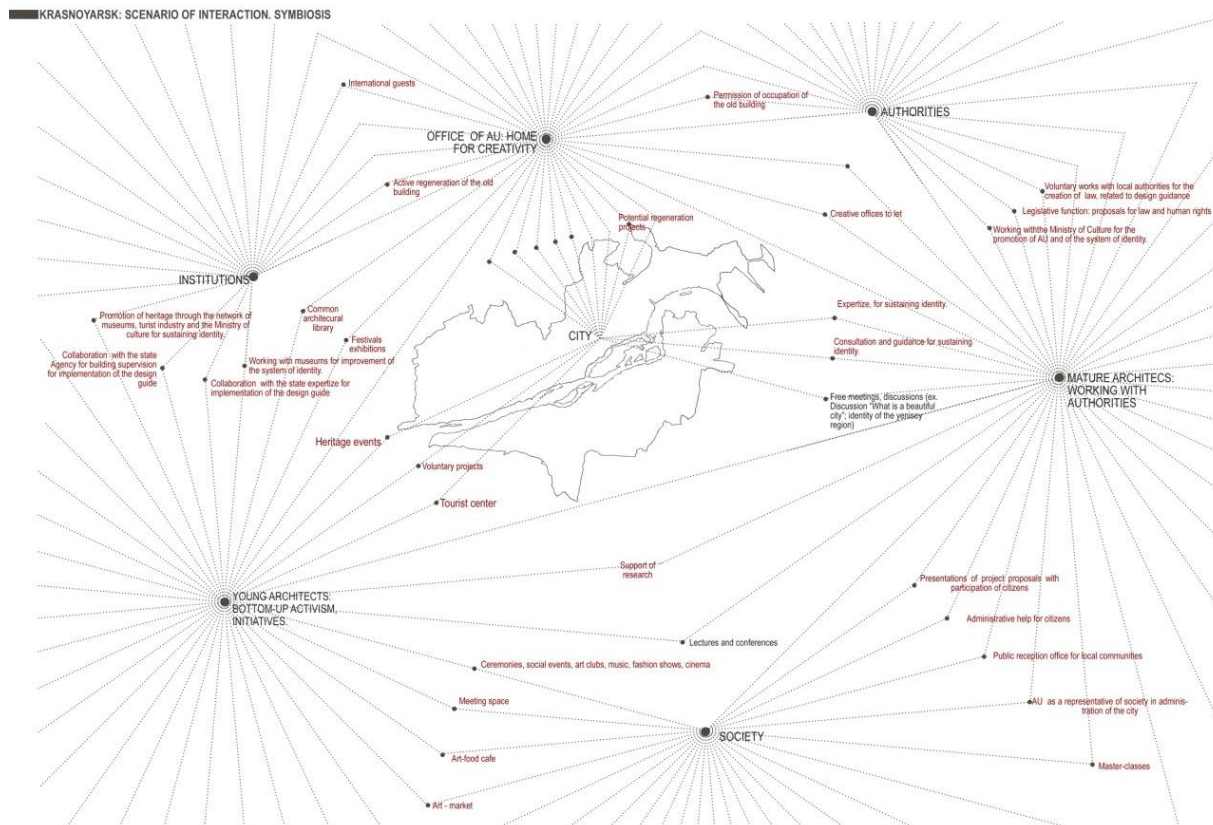


Figure 10. Imaginary strategy the empowering of the reinvented institution. Scenario of interaction on the way towards the city Identity

Thus, architects as ‘thinkers of architecture’ should occupy this unique niche: in order to overcome and balance the existing blur of responsibility, architects, being ‘mediators’ between the environment and society, could potentially act as a third party, responsible for the selection, control, guidance and gentle corrections of a vast variety of spatial interventions to bring the message of, for instance, cultural legacy to life (Fig. 10). Therefore, when it comes to the strategy of the social experiment of reinvention of the old institution into the new one, it is worth matching the current needs of society and the political and economic conditions. This could potentially lead to the finding and sustaining of local Identity on the condition of coproduction. The MA dissertation came to the strategy of reinvention and empowering of the Krasnoyarsk office of The Union of Architects as a new institution and presented it in a form of story (narrative), answering the questions ‘how?’ and ‘what if?’ The strategy is also presented in the form of diagrams, illustrating the fundamental principles of the experiment: the principle of interaction of the main parties, the potential place of the Union in the power structure, a programme of activation with particular actions and one of the possible scenarios of implementation (Fig. 7-10). Rebranding of the new institution finalized the overall picture. The graphical analysis of identical elements of the city could potentially be an initial point for the dialogue with citizens.

It is apparent that in the process of construction of the perfect utopian picture (ideal Union), actors would encounter real and quite significant problems, resistance and opposition. The first problem it may encounter is fragmentation. Thus, after the fall of the Soviet Union Russian society suddenly become individualized and fragmented. Therefore, the appearance of a strong leader, image, mission, belief, energetic followers and constitution are required (New Institutionalism, Ekeberg, 2003). In addition, all members of the Union should be highly proactive in taking a strong position and avoiding the current tendency of gradual decay. Members of the Union should start perceiving themselves as a part of commercial world with its constant changes, challenges and competitive nature (Power Distribution, Domhoff, 2006). Any

position should not be taken for granted, as the only way to solve problems in the crisis condition and the context of scarcity is escaping the comfort zone. The Union should build the belief in their ability to become efficient again. Snobbery and skepticism, quite common in architects as a form of self-protection, can lead them to the perception that they work in a vacuum. However, the link with people in a broad sense, co-production and commitment are inevitable and absolutely central to the profession today. Moreover, architects' mission of encouraging participation and creativity of the society is among the most important aspects of their role.

Conflicts of ideologies, expectations and even timescales are always possible. Members of the Union should show and promote mutual respect and appreciation even in case of contradicting requirements and expectations of different parties, and accept differences, imperfections and even opposing points of view. Strategic thinking based on constant dialogue is the condition of success, maximizing the potential of coproduction. Soft skills, a nuanced approach to the building of sustainable relationships and self-awareness could potentially lead to the achievement of synergy, transforming not only the Union as an institution, but the whole city.

The lack of clarity in certain possible actions, caused by huge differences between the Russian mentality and Western mentality, make the use of experience of successful precedents quite limited. This should be compensated in practical terms with constant self-assessment and a recording of the process. The move from rhetoric to actions is essential.

Conclusion. Recommendations

The issue of national cultural Identity of the built environment is a complex phenomenon, encompassing the interrelated notions of urban morphology and cultural and visual identity, currently almost lost in Russia, and Krasnoyarsk in particular. However, architecture, urban structure and heritage are significant ingredients of it. Thus, operation within the architectural and urban aspects of it could potentially lead to the recreation of a meaningful environment as a part of local cultural Identity.

Sustainable relationships between groups of architects, society, institutions and authorities could potentially transform the identical image of the city in a positive sense. Awareness of local cultural roots by the promotion of Identity, participation and flexible systems of design guides and regulations could potentially grow into a strong sense of cultural and national identity. It is apparent that the image and strategy proposed in the work (based on the MA dissertation SSOA, The University of Sheffield) are merely the first step towards solving such a complex problem and should be developed further with better precision and be tested and corrected after testing. Thus, it is an iterative process, which must be carefully recorded. The work does not pretend to be a panacea or universal treatment. Instead, it names the issue, investigates the details and roots of problems in order to find the best practical solutions, taking into account opinions, parties involved and local features. Rather than trying to directly solve problems, it aims to widely inform future practitioners and participants, as well as propose the general approach and ideology. The successful implication is possible on condition of shared values, COOPERATION and constant reflection.

In general, the carefully recorded experiment of the reinvention of local Identity through the empowerment of the Union of Architects could potentially inform other local offices of the Union of Architects in their development and ultimately lead to the creation of a powerful network across the country. Methodologically, it is highly important to document and analyze the experiment. It can be a part of dissertation, a book, and/or a series of presentations. Properly recorded, the experiment can become a unique and important part of the theoretical framework for future researchers. The methodology of mapping controversies can be used to track and record changes in the socio-political sphere around the situation, and the experiment, in turn, can become a precedent for the application of the methodology of mapping controversies, continuing the theory of new regionalism in practical terms.

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