

# **Transnational Circulation of Cultural Form: Multiple Agencies of Heritage Making**

Nelly Bekus

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**ABSTRACT** The article analyses the evolution of the Soviet heritage-making policy in late socialism. Based on archival sources and interviews with former key experts from the Soviet ICOMOS committee, as well as other activists in conservation and heritage protection in former Soviet republics, the article explores the multi-faceted nature of the construction of heritage in the Soviet context that involved a complex interplay between local and international agencies, mediated by Soviet cultural institutions. It shows that rapid development of conservation activity in the USSR along with officially backed public engagement in heritage protection in the late 1960s and 1970s manifested a 'historical turn' that reflected a demand on the rationalized past in the socialist modernization project similar to that seen in many western countries. The article contributes to the discussion on the role of cultural heritage in the ideological construction of Soviet society and to the growing literature on socialist cultural engagement with the outside world by examining the role of heritage as a global cultural form.

**KEYWORDS** Internationalism; heritage protection; Icomos; Soviet Union; socialism

## **Introduction**

In 1974, the group of American heritage preservation experts from the USA-USSR Joint Working group on the Enhancement of the Urban Environment visited the Soviet Union to study the Soviet approach to historic preservation and restoration. In the reports, written by members of the working group and published in the brochure in Washington D.C. year later, one of the experts described his first impression of the Soviet conservation practices as 'a shock':

*“Upon arrival, we were taken to the Hotel Rossiya<sup>1</sup>, the largest hotel in Europe, which was built in close proximity to the Moscow Kremlin. The location of this enormous hotel seriously overpowered numerous old churches and dwellings adjacent to it that had been preserved and given adaptive uses. The churches had been heavily sandblasted; patched with bricks that did not match in either color, texture, or size. And crudely repointed with modern Portland cement. All of these techniques we deplore in our own work, yet often find them applied by unsympathetic or inexperienced people. .... Our initial evaluation was that the Soviet Union had much to learn from us” (Judd 1975, 39).*

The group was then taken on a tour around the Soviet Union to visit Russian historical towns such as Vladimir and Suzdal and several heritage sites in Armenia and Georgia. By the end of this trip the opinion of American experts on the Soviet practices of historical preservation had changed.

*“There is no question of the Soviet commitment to historic preservation. Many agencies are involved in one way or another ... in restoring old structures. Money seems to be no obstacle, for the Soviets are lavish – at least by American standards – in their expenditures for historic preservation purposes. ... Prevailing policies and general attitudes about historic preservation in the Soviet Union are not much different in their ideal state from those operating in the United States. In many significant instances, however, the Soviet Union has come closer to achieving this ideal than has this [US] country” (Holland, 1975, 8-15).*

These contrasting observations – one genuinely alarmed by the lack of professionalism in the Soviet restoration practices, and the other full of respect for the system of preservation endorsed by the Soviet policy – reveal more than a change of US heritage professionals’ judgement during their stay. They grasp the significant shift in historic preservation policy that occurred within the decade from the mid-1960s, when the *Hotel Rossiya* was built in complete disregard to the urban fabric of

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<sup>1</sup> Hotel Rossiya was built in 1962-1967 and demolished in 2006.

Moscow's historic town, and the mid-1970s when the American delegation saw the effect of the dramatic turn towards heritage preservation in the Soviet Union.

This article explores the evolution of Soviet heritage preservation policy by taking a closer look at the mechanisms of this change through the lens of interactions between various types of agency involved in this process behind the monolithic façade of Soviet cultural heritage policy. The rise of heritage protection in the Soviet Union in the 1960s is commonly seen as a top-down process that dogmatically reflected the change of the ideological paradigm articulated by Communist rulers and implemented by state institutions (Gonzales 2016). Kelly analyses the revitalisation of 'heritage' and tradition under Khrushchev's rule in political and ideological terms as a part of a broader process of rehabilitation of the past. It was, she argues, meant to become an 'alternative' integrative symbol of Soviet unity invoked by the rulers after the denigration of Stalin as an iconic people's leader (2018, 99). Main uses of the cultural heritage in this context are seen as deriving from the necessity to master the culture inherited from the past and to integrate its ideologically acceptable elements in the production of new socio-political reality. Preservation of cultural heritage becomes perceived as a means of strengthening the foundations of Soviet society by rooting it in the national past (Donovan 2013). In this way, the fundamental dichotomy of the Bolshevik ideology of heritage that reflects the tension between past and future, destruction and construction, rejection and appropriation, has been overcome (Deschepper 2018). The interpretation of a cultural heritage reflects the ideological concern to demonstrate the superiority and historic necessity of socialism. (Smith 2013).

This article, in contrast, argues that the growing importance of heritage preservation in Soviet cultural policies was not exclusively a top-down process but became a product of a complex interplay between cultural elites and heritage experts of national republics, the Soviet state and international organisations (such as UNESCO and ICOMOS). Employing the argument that the Soviet heritage regime was shaped by heterogeneous networks of people I explore how different actors and organisations mobilised, juxtaposed and interacted in the process of this Soviet policy shift.

Based on archival sources and oral interviews with former experts from the Soviet ICOMOS committee as well as other activists in conservation and heritage protection in the Soviet national republics, the article traces various interpretations of

cultural tradition, history and heritage employed by different agencies in Soviet policy making. Focusing on the experiences of actors taking part of shaping and implementing cultural policies across the Soviet space allows to revisit the sphere of heritage preservation as a space of multifaceted interactions and negotiation. This methodological move allows to deconstruct the ideological cliché according to which a state is considered to be the only legitimate operator in heritage protection domain under communism (Iacono 2019). The article traces the diverse trajectories of reinventing traditions across the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s that preceded and to some extent prepared the turn to national histories in post-Soviet countries after they became independent. The article contributes both to the discussion on the role of cultural heritage in the ideological construction of the Soviet society and to the growing literature on socialist cultural engagement with the outside world by examining the role of heritage as a global cultural form.

### **Socialist framework for heritage re-signification**

The specifics of heritage protection as an instrument of cultural power in the conditions of communist system was linked to several strands. The Bolsheviks had a clear objective to establish an ideological monopoly to control every aspect of post-revolutionary society, including representations of the past, among which the cultural heritage was the most important. Following the outburst of violent destruction in its revolutionary drive to eliminate ideological symbols of Czarism, the new government issued various decrees that tackled the issue of the protection of cultural monuments. In the new state they were seen as an important resource for cultural education of masses (Shchenkov 2004, 9). Most architectural monuments, including religious buildings and palace ensembles, that survived the revolution and civil war passed into state ownership and became a subject of new policy of museification developed by Soviet experts in the 1920s and 1930s (Shmidt 1929, Karpov 1987).

As Laurajane Smith writes, material heritage objects are symbolic not only of identities but also of certain values, being an embodiment of the object of desire and prestige because of their association with the ability to control the symbols of power (2006, 53). Museification of cultural objects including architectural monuments in the socialist system entailed their dissociation from the initial system of values and asserted the defeat of the old power regime. Secular cultural monuments became

disconnected from the social class system that originally shaped their meanings, while religious objects were deprived of their sacred sense.

This elimination of class value from the architectural monuments in socialist conditions paradoxically reiterated the retrospective conception of “nation-alised and tradition-alised culture” invoked by national heritage discourse in Western societies, which implicitly envisages societies as being culturally homogeneous and socially unified (Hall 2005, 24-26). The conservation movement became contained within the consensual framework of the welfare state (Glendinning 2013, 320) that effectively downplayed the social aspects of cultural values represented by heritage. Recognition of the relics of the past as heritage in the Western European context began at the instigation of a social elite and designated grand and spectacular buildings and artefacts that were closely identified with the same elites and their values (Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge 2000, 40). The rapid patrimonialisation of the attributes of the English aristocracy in Great Britain that took place in the 1970s and 1980s allowed aristocrats to secure public funding for preservation of the country houses as a part of their own lifestyle framed as part of national tradition and identity (Deckha 2004). In the Soviet Union, by contrast, the cultural patrimony of the former aristocracy was re-appropriated by a state that aimed to dissociate itself from the values of former possessors and re-pack the meaning of heritage outside its initial social frame. And while in Western Europe the objects of cultural heritage often partly preserved their previous social function, in the Soviet context each of such objects appeared as an extracted cultural value utterly isolated from its social and political frame (Kaulen 2012, 44).

According to Steve Smith, the contentious status of patrimony in the socialist context reflected a deeper uncertainty about the relationship of national identity to socialism, but the national construal of cultural heritage has ultimately triumphed over the class one (2015, 211). Prevalence of the ‘national’ frame in structuring the societal conception of cultural heritage in the Soviet context was, however, complicated by the multinational configuration of the Soviet Union. Rather than reinforcing the unity of the Soviet people by stressing the common history, as some scholars imply (Kelly 2018, 99, Donovan 2013, 19), as would be the case in a typical nation-state, cultural heritage in the USSR also magnified the diversity of cultural and political traditions represented by Soviet nations. The context of belonging and continuity affirmed by cultural heritage as an instrument of fostering collective identity (Lowenthal 1985,

214) in the Soviet context had acquired multiple meanings depending on the lens of a particular region or nation. In the perspective asserted by a heritage discourse, Central Asian nations had been realigned with Mongol, Persian and Turkic civilisations (Tuyakbayeva 2008), Latvia and Estonia with German cultural tradition (Shchenkov 2004, 217; Glendinning 2013, 376), and Belarus linked to Lithuania and Poland rather than to Russia and Ukraine as in the conventional Soviet interpretation of unity of East Slavic people (Bekus 2017), etc. Connecting diverse pasts of Soviet nations with cultural civilisations beyond and across Soviet borders architectural monuments symbolically deconstructed the Soviet ‘unity’, revealing its politically conditioned status.

On the other hand, the multiplicity of cultural traditions lodged within the boundaries of the Soviet state and the diversity of civilisations exemplified by their cultural monuments formed the material ground for mental mapping of the Soviet space as global.<sup>2</sup> It is not a coincidence that heritage discourse became particularly important in the second half of the twentieth century to support the international image of the Soviet Union as a transnational cultural formation of global spread. In UNESCO’s Major Project for Mutual Appreciation of Eastern and Western Cultural Values (1957-1966) that, among other aims, covered the sphere of historical preservation and conservation, the USSR presented itself as a multi-national space of interaction between Oriental and Occidental traditions that made Soviet cultural experience relevant both in European and Asian cultural contexts.<sup>3</sup>

Cultural heritage protection emerged in this context as a complex field located at the intersection of intra-Soviet cultural politics and increasingly salient Soviet engagement in the international cultural cooperation. It reflected the complexity of Soviet nation-building with its hierarchical structure of *matryoshka-nationalism* that allowed the wider frame of an all-Union Soviet identity to operate alongside the ethno-cultural identities of multiple nations (Bremmer 1993). The policy of heritage protection in these settings required elaborate mechanisms of inclusion of multiple

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<sup>2</sup> On the idea of the transnationalism of the Soviet Union: Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, 2016 “Transnationalism in One Country? Seeing and Not Seeing Cross-Border Migration within the Soviet Union”, *Slavic Review* 75 (4)

<sup>3</sup> The statement of the Soviet National Commission on the participation of the USSR in UNESCO’s Major Project for Mutual Appreciation of Eastern and Western Cultural Values (1957-1966). UNESCO Archive 008 477 MP-03

civilisational threads that would open Soviet cultural space to international currents without undermining its unity.

### **Heritage as a Global Cultural Form**

After the shift from socialist realism to industrial modernism proclaimed by Khrushchev in 1954 in the USSR, there was a period of growing convergence between the socialist East and the capitalist West in their view on the balance between old and new in urban development.<sup>4</sup> Having adopted a modernist architectural paradigm socialist states not only became integrated into the global space of architectural production but also began to export it to Third World countries (Healey and Upton, 2010, Stanek 2012). In the 1960s, rapid advancement of new industrial architecture and large-scale redevelopment in socialist cities was reinforced by the idea of cost-efficiency that dominated the thinking of socialist architects and urban planners. Unconditional preference for new construction over the restoration of the old urban fabric, however, triggered discontent among national cultural elites concerned with the fate of cities' history and architectural monuments as a symbols of nations' traditions. Gradually, the issue of protecting cultural heritage grew into a matter of profound public concern. Soviet policy of heritage protection developed as a response to this public activism while providing a forum for nation-minded conservation activity. Whilst these processes differed from conservation radicalism in the West both in form and scale, they formed part of the same story of explosive growth of the Conservation Movement as a whole (Glendinning 2013, 380).

A universal turn towards history in urban policy, thus, can be perceived as a manifestation of a new form of historical consciousness that crystallised both in socialist and capitalist systems. As Betts and Ross write, histories of heritage were much more than wistful responses to the threat of modernisation, but rather are better understood as central aspects of the modernisation process itself (2015, 14). "The turn to history" in the context of socialist modernisation offers a chance to rethink the rise of heritage as one of the global cultural forms which occurred in socialist states concurrently with the capitalist West at the intersection of local and international developments.

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<sup>4</sup> See "K V Kongresu Mezhdunarodnogo Soyuzu Arkhitektorov." *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 1, 1958: 67-68.

Cultural globalisation is most often analysed as the effect of both capitalist markets and cultural imperialism placed in the context of modernity's drive for universalisation and global convergence (Giddens 1991, Guillén 2001). Globalising effects of the socialist involvement in this process only recently attracted the attention of some scholars who pointed out the involvement of socialist cultural producers and experts in the twentieth century internationalisation of culture (Péteri 2004, Marks 2003, Molnar 2005, Long and Labadi 2010, Mark and Apor 2015). Studies of diverse cultural fields – from classical music to folk dances – revealed that socialist states with their distinct visions of modernity have contributed to the cultural developments that enabled the emergence of the transnational imagination fundamental to globalisation (Tomoff 2015, 6). This shift in cultural policy has become a product of reorientation of the Soviet leadership from confrontational towards more collaborative strategy in relationships with the Western world, international organisations and the Third World countries (Krasovitskaya 2013).

Most often however this process is discussed in the categories of cultural imperialism, Westernisation or Europeanisation, in which Soviet cultural institutions played an intermediate position by channelling to national republics the demand for global cultural forms which they previously re-appropriated from the West (Clark 2011). As Adams writes, by translating the global logic to the local level and bringing local culture to a global level, Soviet cultural institutions created a strong centre-periphery dynamic that resembled the coercive cultural imposition described in accounts of cultural imperialism (2008, 623).

The study of the evolution of heritage protection in the late Soviet period, however, reveals a more intricate multidirectional process of cultural transmission between the three levels – national republics, Soviet cultural institutions and international agencies. Rather than being organised in the strict hierarchy of prestige, in which, as Adams writes, each field structure was increasingly influenced by the structures on the next higher level and which resulted in a growing homology among local fields (2008, 619), the domain of cultural heritage revealed different dynamics. In some cases, the local heritage developments preceded and influenced the structures located higher in the organisational pyramid. In other cases, various networks of regional interactions within the borders of historically formed areas with shared elements of cultural tradition and heritage facilitated intra-regional cooperation outside the centre-periphery axis. Finally, heritage professionals from national



republics were often part of international cultural networks (within the ICOMOS scientific committees) which allowed them to channel the knowledge and experience between local and international without direct involvement of the Soviet centre.

In the classification of theoretical models of cultural globalisation described by Crane (2002), the model of cultural imperialism underlines the imposition of global cultural forms by powerful nations on the weaker nations that results in subsiding of local cultures that features cultural homogenisation. The evolution of the heritage field in the Soviet Union, however, is better understood through the combined lens of cultural networks and cultural policy models (Crane 2002, 3). The cultural flows or networks strategy stresses the multiple directions of the transmission process with no clearly defined centre or periphery (Appadurai 1990). It also increases the importance of regions as ‘producers’ of heritage discourse by placing them alongside other modes of organisation, i.e. international, macro-regional, national, micro-regional, local (Pieterse 2004, 65-6). Cultural heritage thus embodies a case of particularity, which represents a global value while the evolution of heritage protection exemplifies a “universalization of particularism” or the “global valorisation of particular identities” (Robertson 1992, 130). This global context of rising importance of cultural heritage was exploited by local cultural elites to negotiate the protection and the enhancement of their cultural resources within the Soviet system.

### **Shaping A New Heritage Regime**

Conceptualisation of heritage protection phenomenon often comprises negative emotions and painful experience, making destruction and loss a constitutive part of heritage (Kuutma 2012) and Soviet development after the Second World War confirms this observation. The restoration of architectural monuments that were devastated during the war acquired particular importance for the society as a way to complete victory over Nazis by “unmaking the damage”. Proud examples of regained heritage in the USSR (Leningrad, Novgorod, Pskov, Smolensk, etc) and Poland (Warsaw) were criticised by Western experts as a form of “Disneylandisation” of cultural monuments that undermined the western concept of monuments’ authenticity (Placzek et al. 1979). The symbolic significance of the reconstructed projects, however, overpowered the concerns about the incompatibility of its principles with the idea of historical truthfulness.

Plans for heritage restoration in the USSR were made even before the war ended. To consider the vast devastation of Soviet cities, a special commission was created at the Academy of Architecture and in 1944-1945 it made new master-plans for over two hundred cities. As Shchenkov writes, there was a profound disparity between the pre-war and the post-war master-plans of the Soviet cities in their approach to history and cultural monuments (2004, 207-8). In the new plans the balance between the reconstruction of old monuments and new development had become a matter of special concern. The change indicated the formation of a new Soviet 'heritage regime' with a new set of rules and norms regulating the relations between a state and society in matters related to tradition and patrimony (Bendix, Eggert, and Peselmann 2012, 13). This regime did not arise at once, though, but took shape gradually through the formation of the institutional infrastructure of restoration and development of the legislation in the heritage field.

On March 19, 1945, Leningrad city council made a decision to create a special platform of heritage experts, the Leningrad Architectural Restoration Studio (LARM), that would coordinate the work of conservators. The decision was made under pressure from the Leningrad community of heritage practitioners, which was one of the strongest in the Soviet Union not only in terms of their professional achievements but also their ability to influence the city government.<sup>5</sup> Similar arrangements were made in Moscow and other cities, but Leningrad Studio remained the largest restoration enterprise in the country for decades.

In 1948 the Decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR on the protection of cultural monuments was adopted, which was the first post-war Soviet legislation in the sphere of heritage protection.<sup>6</sup> The Decree advised national republics making institutional arrangements for heritage protection and restoration. Some Soviet republics established Scientific Restoration Workshops modelled on the Leningrad and Moscow studios; Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Georgia, Armenia, and Uzbekistan did so in the 1950s. Others, like Belarus or Moldova, did not establish such workshops until the late 1960s.

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<sup>5</sup> The scientific restoration workshops (studios) existed in the USSR between 1924-1934. After their dissolution in 1934 their functions were transferred to major museums.

<sup>6</sup> Full text of Decree: <http://pravo.levonevsky.org/baza/soviet/sss6320.htm>

After the adoption of the first Decree on cultural monuments in 1948, the Soviet Union did not have any centrally or hierarchically structured administrative framework for heritage protection. Different types of cultural heritage were curated by different governmental bodies: the State Committee on Art was responsible for museums, theatres, concert halls and certain parts of cultural heritage; archaeological and historical heritage was administered by the State Committee on Culture and Education; architectural monuments were overseen by the State Committee on Construction.

This situation began to change with the establishment of the Ministry of Culture in 1953, but every republic made amendments in different areas and at varying speeds. In most republics the administration of heritage protection was transferred to the republic's Ministries of Culture, though the State Committee for Civil Construction and Architecture remained responsible for implementing and complying with the policies formulated by the Ministry of Culture. In some republics, such as Ukraine, Armenia, and Estonia, it was the State Construction Committee that continued to oversee all preservation activities. The question of administrative affiliation in the Soviet era was not a matter of pure formality. In the larger structural hierarchy the State Construction Committee was more powerful than the Ministry of Culture, both financially and symbolically, as it administered the vast industrial section of the state economy. Restoration and conservation of cultural monuments in this structure comprised a minor segment with little economic value. Restoration practitioners within this system had limited power and instruments at their disposal to influence the decisions concerning the finances and management of the architectural monuments.<sup>7</sup> However, even in those republics where the work of heritage practitioners was governed by Ministries of Culture, they experienced pressure both from the local administration and from the republic's. It is noteworthy that in accordance with the Departmental instructions issued by the State Committee of Architecture at the Council of Ministers of the USSR in 1949, the personnel of local organisations responsible for protection of cultural monuments could not be fired and moved without previous agreement with republican and Soviet central governing

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<sup>7</sup> Author's interview with the President of the Soviet Committee of ICOMOS 1986-1991 Sergei Petrov, 1 November 2016, Moscow.

bodies.<sup>8</sup> The directive clearly foresaw the tensions that the protection of architectural monuments could provoke, in which the heritage practitioners represented a vulnerable agency facing pressure exerted by operators from the construction industry, finances, and urban planning.

Institutional variations among republics could account for the different status and different mind-sets of local national cultural elites, architects, historians, archaeologists, and ethnographers, who were major players on the cultural heritage scene. The Soviet heritage protection policy at that time had only an “advisory” character. It was local actors’ responsibility to lobby for their agenda at the level of republics’ governments.<sup>9</sup> These elites’ experience in conservation and restoration in various republics, in turn, informed the development of the Soviet cultural heritage protection field. One of the most important platforms for interaction between the heritage practitioners was the interdisciplinary Scientific-Methodological Council on the Protection of Cultural Monuments, created at the USSR Academy of Sciences in Moscow in 1949 (transferred to the dominion of the Ministry of Culture in 1963). Members of the Council were recruited from restoration professionals from all Soviet republics and regions. In the introduction to the first textbook “Methodology of Restoration of Monuments of Architecture” published by the Soviet Academy of Architecture and Construction in 1961, the authors acknowledged the important contribution of the practitioners from various restoration centres – in Kiev, Tashkent, Vilnius (Maksimov 1961). The book became the first attempt to systematise the experience of restoration of architectural monuments in different Soviet regions and to formulate some common principles and objectives of restoration practices based on the experience of restoration work accomplished in different parts of the multinational country (Maksimov 1961, 18). It was by no means the one-directional transmission of the experience of Russian experts to republics, but the network of interactions between professionals working in restoration workshops across the country.

Development of the heritage protection legislation displayed a similar lack of strict centre-periphery hierarchical order. In the early 1960s Soviet heritage practitioners realised that their area of expertise was still “ruled” by the Decree signed

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<sup>8</sup> *Instruktsia o poriadke ucheta, registratsii, soderzhania i restavratsii pamiatkinkov arkhitektury stoyaschikh pod gosudarstvennoi okhranoi*, Moskva: Gosudastvennoye Arkhitekturnoye izdatelstvo, 1949.

<sup>9</sup> Author’s interview with Prof. Jonas Glemža, 22 December 2015, Vilnius.

by Stalin which had become utterly outdated both in professional and ideological terms. Republics were quicker to respond to this legislative deficiency. In 1960 the Council of Ministers of the Russian Federation adopted a Decree “On Further improvement of the Matter of the Protection of Cultural Monuments in the RSFSR”. Several republics adopted Laws on the Protection of Cultural Monuments: Estonia in 1961, Lithuania in 1967, Armenia, Moldova and Belarus in 1969, and Kazakhstan in 1971 (Borisevich 1976, Steshenko 1974, Charniyauski 2006).

In 1968, a group of experts from various Soviet republics were invited to join the working group for drafting the state heritage protection law. The republican laws served as a kind of “dress rehearsal” for a complete recodification of the law on monuments (Fieldbrugge 1989, 195) and yet, it took years to formulate new Soviet legislation. Following the adoption of the all-Union law “On the Use and Protection of the Cultural Monuments” in 1976, each republic was advised to update their heritage protection legislation. New republican laws were to be modelled on Soviet law (if they did not have one) or to be revised accordingly, but republics were given the right to add their own content if needed.

The Soviet Law consisted of 31 articles and many republics added more addressing their specific cultural agenda. For example, Lithuania, which had the Law since 1967, adopted a new Law modelled on the Soviet one as advised by the Soviet government and added 15 more articles, proposed by the local practitioners. These additional articles of the republican Law had to be approved by the Soviet Ministry of Culture.

Professor Jonas Glemža (who was Head of the Department of the Museums and Cultural Monuments Protection at the Ministry of Culture of the Lithuanian Republic) was among the experts who visited Moscow to consult the Lithuanian proposals of extra articles in the Law. He recollected these negotiations as a complex process with many agencies involved and no pre-defined outcome. While the representatives of the Soviet government and of the Supreme Council of the USSR disagreed with the Lithuanian proposal, the Legal Department of the Supreme Council of USSR supported the Lithuanian delegation and their proposal was accepted in full.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Author’s interview with Prof. Jonas Glemža, 22 December 2015, Vilnius.

Formation of the Soviet legislation on cultural monuments unfolded as a multidirectional process which involved various actors and organisations. The Soviet Law on the Use and Protection of the Cultural Monument was built upon the ideas and concepts previously developed by local experts in the republics. The adoption and endorsement of all-Union law entailed not only the imposition of the heritage ideas from centre to the peripheries, but facilitated the transmission of the experience and ideas from more advanced republics to those with less developed expertise.

Local experts and practitioners remained major actors in the Soviet heritage field and operated in a dual hierarchical structure – Soviet cultural organisations and the republic’s administration. The efficiency of heritage protection and realisation of the restoration projects largely depended on their ability to negotiate their interests with players at two different levels.

### *International Engagement of Soviet Heritage Actors*

The centralisation of heritage protection in the USSR became more prominent when it actively engaged in the work of ICOMOS after its establishment in 1965. The participation of the Soviet Union in the work of ICOMOS was strikingly different when compared to the first years of UNESCO itself.<sup>11</sup> At the first general assembly of ICOMOS in Warsaw Soviet representative Vladimir Ivanov was elected (and served three terms) as a vice-president of ICOMOS. Later on, a “politically balanced” distribution of posts in ICOMOS between East and West became an unwritten rule of the institutional design of the committee<sup>12</sup>.

In the wake of the state’s involvement in the work of international heritage organisations, Soviet heritage professionals entered the “architectural field” as legitimate participants in the urban development debate at home. The first two publications by Vladimir Ivanov on the matter of heritage protection in the leading architectural journal “Arkhitektura SSSR” (Architecture of the USSR) were dedicated to the Venice Charter 1964 and to the establishment of ICOMOS (in 1965). After 1966 the journal launched a special column dedicated to the issues of preservation and conservation of architectural heritage in urban development. A new edition of the *Methodology of the Restoration of the Monuments of Architecture* (1977) edited by E.

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<sup>11</sup> See the article by Corinne Geering in this issue.

<sup>12</sup> Author’s interview with Prof. Jonas Glemža, 22 December 2015, Vilnius.

V. Mikhailovsky once again acknowledged the contribution of the heritage practitioners from major Soviet restoration centres in various republics, but also emphasised the embeddedness of the Soviet heritage development in the international context (Mikhailovsky 1977, 14-15).

One of the important consequences of the USSR's involvement in the work of ICOMOS was the facilitation of regional cooperation between professionals of various republics. As advised by ICOMOS, several regional committees were formed in the territory of the USSR, which demarcated cultural historical regions with shared elements of tradition essential in monuments' restoration (cultural tradition, construction techniques, materials, climate conditions etc.) In some cases, this strategy only formalised cooperation that already existed. Heritage practitioners from the Baltic republics organised regional conferences every two years after 1959. Following the recommendation of ICOMOS, the experience of Baltic republics was used for organising a similar regional group in Central Asia and Azerbaijan<sup>13</sup>. Belarus joined the Baltic group and the Belarusian heritage protection practitioners remained part of this expert community until the end of the Soviet Union.

The second important effect of ICOMOS activities in Soviet Union was the compilation by every republic of official lists of their cultural and historical monuments. In 1972 at the ICOMOS conference in Prague the proposal of such lists was made by the president of the Soviet national committee of ICOMOS Oleg Shvidkovski, and was accepted after debate (Dushkina 2006). This decision not only suggested the compilation of such lists in every country (which in many cases already existed), but also set the international standard for selection, description, and methodology of scientific research on cultural monuments. Within the USSR every republic was recommended to create a special institutional body that would work on such lists of cultural monuments. In many Soviet republics this work started in the Soviet Union but continued in the conditions of state independence. Among Soviet republics only Belarus had managed to compile the full list and to publish eight volumes by the mid 1980s.<sup>14</sup> Lithuania only published a first volume out of four planned. The Russian Federation had only made some sample listings in separate

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<sup>13</sup> In spite of being a part of the south Caucasus region together with Armenia and Georgia, Azerbaijan joined the Central Asian group due to a shared Turkic and Muslim cultural tradition.

<sup>14</sup> Author's interview with architect Sergei Baglasov, August 2016, Minsk.

regions. Kazakhstan had published the first volume of the collection on the Southern region of Kazakhstan after the disintegration of USSR in 1994. By channelling the information on the international standards, methodologies, and technological requirements in working with heritage sites and monuments in Soviet republics, the Soviet committee of ICOMOS effectively prepared them for integration into the international scene after the dissolution of the Soviet state.

Most of the republics had representatives on the Soviet, international or regional committees, who became integrated into the international expert community. Direct interaction between practitioners was facilitated by the structure of ICOMOS with National Committees linked to the states and International Scientific Committees providing a platform for communication between the experts within the specialized fields. Practitioners from various Soviet regions worked in Scientific Committees corresponding to the type of the heritage they dealt with. Kazakh architect Bayan Tuyakbayeva, the Director of the Central Asia and Azerbaijan Regional ICOMOS committee (1984-1991), recollected the importance of the professional exchange program with Turkey, India, and Italy that she was able to organise through ICOMOS Scientific Committees. The findings of the Soviet conservators from Uzbekistan, Russia and Kazakhstan involved in the work on the mausoleum of Ahmad Yasawi (Turkistan)<sup>15</sup> made a great contribution to the understanding of Timurid history and architecture, placing the monument in its position of the keys to the architecture of the Timurid world.<sup>16</sup>

Russian conservator Boris Gnedovsky, a member of the Soviet Committee of ICOMOS from 1976 to 1988, specialised in the restoration of wooden architectural monuments and actively promoted vernacular wooden architecture (“the architecture without architect”) as an important part of the architectural legacy (Gnedovsky 2002, 10). Due to his involvement in the ICOMOS Committee on Vernacular Architecture the Soviet practitioners’ experience of restoration of wooden architecture in Russian North was part of the international discussion on the principles and evaluation criteria

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<sup>15</sup> The mausoleum of Ahmad Yasawi was built in the fourteenth century by the emperor Timur (Tamerlane) to commemorate the Sufi poet and teacher Sheikh Ahmad Yasawi, who died in 1166. Yasawi is credited with the conversion of the Turkic-speaking people to Islam, and is considered as 'Father of the Turks'.

<sup>16</sup> Author’s interview with Prof. Bayan Tuyakbayeva 29 March 2017, Astana-Almaty.



in vernacular architecture.<sup>17</sup>

The international engagement of Soviet heritage experts also played an important role in developing the idea of “historical cities”. The international symposium of ICOMOS on the “historical centres of cities” that took place in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius in 1973, and the General Assembly of ICOMOS in 1978, facilitated the development of the systemic approach to the preservation of historic cities across Soviet republics (Lavrov, Kniazev 1980). The official lists of the historic cities, classified in accordance with the internationally recognized standards (strongly promoted by ICOMOS) were created in all Soviet republics between 1980-1988.

Reports of the Soviet national committee on the implementation of the decisions made for the General Assembly of the international committee ICOMOS demonstrate how all restoration works in different republics across the USSR were inscribed into the logic of implementation of ICOMOS policy or decisions<sup>18</sup>. The USA-USSR Joint Working group on the Enhancement of the Urban Environment that allowed to American heritage professionals travel to USSR in 1975, mentioned at the beginning of this article, occurred in this atmosphere of internationalisation of the Soviet heritage field that the cultural networks provided.

The ideological context of the Soviet state with its class society concept and the vision of heritage as an educational resource for socialist enlightenment left a specific imprint on heritage preservation. It placed much greater emphasis on architectural significance and aesthetic value rather than on the associative historical value of a given monument (Proceedings of the Seminar, 1975, 151). This approach to cultural heritage changed after the heritage protection arena was joined by wider national cultural elites grouped around the voluntary associations for the protection of monuments of history and culture in every Soviet republic.

### **Changing the Framework of Cultural Heritage**

Formally, the idea of establishing the voluntary societies in every Soviet republic came from Moscow. Behind the decision, however, there was interplay

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<sup>17</sup> Rachele Anguelova, *Rapport Generalisateur Sur le Theme de la Deuxieme Reunion du comite International D'architecture vernaculaire de L'Icomos*. Plovdiv 1979, ICOMOS Open Archive,

[http://openarchive.icomos.org/1242/1/R\\_Anguelova\\_rapport\\_generalisateur.pdf](http://openarchive.icomos.org/1242/1/R_Anguelova_rapport_generalisateur.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> RGRALI f. 674. 4. 849.

between groups of cultural activists who adhered to the idea of the revival of cultural tradition and heritage expert communities actively engaged in the work of international organisations like ICOMOS and the International Union of Architects.

The decision to establish the Society in the Russian Federation was made by the Council of Ministers of the Russian Federation in 1965. Similar arrangements were to be made in other republics, too. In many republics, however, societies with similar functions already existed but in a new context they were given wider functions and stronger authority. In Lithuania, since 1960 there had existed the society of local history, geography and culture of the Lithuanian SSR which was transformed into the society of protection of cultural monument and local history; in Latvia there existed the society of nature protection but it also dealt with the protection of cultural heritage, like landscape architecture of parks and garden. It was renamed the society of cultural heritage and nature protection. In Georgia a similar society had been established in 1959, in Azerbaijan in 1962, Armenia in 1964, Turkmenia in 1965, Moldova in 1965. Paradoxically, the Russian Federal Republic, Ukraine and Belarus were the last ones to establish such voluntary societies of the protection of cultural monuments in 1966.

The internal structure of the monument protection associations mirrored the organization of the Communist Party: primary organizations, councils at intermediate levels, at the top a central council and a presidium. The various levels of the societies, down to city or village level, had the rights of a juridical person (Fieldbrugge 1989, 203). The total number of republican association members in the USSR in 1977 was more than 30 million (Borisevich 1976). Most likely not all members of these voluntary societies were equally engaged, but the very fact of their existence shaped a wide public awareness of the issue of heritage protection.

Essentially, the voluntary societies were not a pan-Soviet organisation: their hierarchy “ended” at the level of the Union republic, which meant that their activities were not centralised and were deliberately framed within the context of nations’ heritage protection. The establishment of such societies was a response to the societal initiatives, which originated in the cultural traditionalist environment; to some extent they opposed the Soviet idea of radical modernisation and the one-sided future oriented temporality of the Soviet developmental project. The idea of building the “better future”, which for a long time overpowered the values of the past, was now openly contested. The international engagement of the Soviet experts in heritage protection played a crucial role in this contestation. Their high status and prestige in

the international arena helped to create a positive image of Soviet cultural policies abroad while back home it became an important argument in supporting specific projects of conservation, getting access to state funding, etc.

Local cultural activists involved in voluntary associations, among whom were painters, writers, and historians, might not have been aware of international developments in heritage protection. Most often they focused on the preservation of a specific monument, building, church, park, etc. It was heritage practitioners who combined the local and global perspective and who could effectively engage with both in order to pursue their agenda dealing with either the local administration or Soviet cultural institutions.

Involvement of local cultural elites in the protection of cultural monuments, however, facilitated interest in heritage as a “rooted legacy”, a manifestation of nations’ specific cultural traditions. In each republic these groups were mainly concerned with their own “national” tradition which could also be viewed as the cultural elites’ resistance to the growing intra-Soviet internationalism and pan-Soviet patriotism, which was becoming a mainstream mentality among Soviet citizens during the 1960s. These traditionalist approaches essentially reframed heritage not only as architectural or aesthetic artefacts, but also as the values associated with their nations’ historical past.

Formation of the voluntary societies was welcomed by the expert communities as a way to increase their symbolic weight as it allowed them to shift the status of heritage protection to a new level of state concern. The societies were often led by officials of the top country management that further strengthened their power. Thus, in the Russian Federation the president of the Voluntary Society was vice chairman of the Council of Ministers of RSFSR Kachemasov V. I.; in Lithuania, the president of the Voluntary Society was the vice chairman of the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian USSR; likewise, in Belarus, the president of the society was Klimov I. F., who was the vice-chairman of the Supreme Council of the Belarusian SSR, to give just a few examples. Essentially, among the top management of the Voluntary Societies in many republics were also members of ICOMOS, like Vladimir Ivanov in Russia, who was the vice-president of VOPIK in Russia, and the vice-president of ICOMOS, Jonas Glemža, in Lithuania.

Associations in the prevailing majority of cases had become a response to the demand on the side of the national cultural elites that engaged in the advancement of

traditionalist cultural values. Ultimately, their activity changed the focus of the state heritage policy by bringing forward associated cultural and historical values of the monuments and historical sites, which previously were overshadowed by the emphasis on aesthetics that expressed a pan-Soviet approach to heritage making.

## **Conclusion**

The article examined the formation of a new heritage regime in the USSR in the 1960-1980s through the lens of the main actors involved to uncover the parallelism in developing heritage concepts and ideas by heritage practitioners in the context of western and Soviet modernisation. It was driven by a changing attitude towards cultural tradition among cultural elites that was triggered by rapid modernisation. Conservation and restoration professionals who were actively engaged in the post-war reconstruction projects formed a network of expert communities across the Soviet republics. One of the specific features of the Soviet organisation of conservation and heritage protection was a lack of strict centralisation and relative flexibility of the organisational schemes that were largely dependant on heritage practitioners in various republics. Since the 1960s, the role of the centre in many cases was taken by international bodies, while the peripheries often preceded the Soviet centre in the advancement of heritage policies.

This lack of institutional homology provided the space for local governments to take initiative for implementation of their own ideas and to respond to the demand of local cultural heritage communities by adopting laws, establishing societies, financing restoration projects. On the other hand, in those republics where cultural elites had no strong heritage-oriented stance in relations with the republic's government, the lack of a strong Soviet central policy left them without any authority to appeal to in their initiatives. Paradoxically, it was the Soviet involvement in ICOMOS that provided experts with an added "authority" to which they could appeal in pursuing their heritage protection agenda in the local power games.

The history of ICOMOS reveals an unprecedented influence that an external organisational body could exert on intra-Soviet development. It depicts the peculiar moment in the history of Cold War when the Soviet Union "learnt" to trust in international institutions, overcoming its overall suspicion that characterised their

attitude towards any international bodies, including those dealing with culture. It could be explained by the fact that ICOMOS remained a rather closed elite community of practitioners that served as a mediator between Soviet professional communities and international cultural institutions. But it allowed heritage practitioners from different parts of the Soviet Union to communicate with foreign colleagues and to contribute their findings to the global development of heritage ideas, concepts and conservation principles.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union was followed by the dismantling of old institutional schemes in heritage protection. On the one hand, the conditions of national independence elevated the status of cultural heritage as a matter of particular political concern of national governments. After the turmoil and economic crisis of the 1990s, when most of the former Soviet countries struggled to survive, new schemes of national heritage protection were gradually established. In many cases, these systems were built on the foundation of Soviet institutional attainments but this fact became more often ignored than acknowledged.

In some cases, like in Baltic states in the early 1990s, new political elites aimed to reduce the influence of former Soviet cultural experts, accusing them of collaborating with old regime. It was the international prominence of heritage professionals that allowed them to regain their status in the new national heritage protection systems. Due to their efforts, Baltic states turned out to be well prepared for operating as independent actors in the international heritage protection field.

In some Central Asian countries, such as Kazakhstan, the estrangement of former Soviet heritage professionals did not occur in a radical form, but their role in the formation of national centres of restoration became downplayed. The institutional arrangements of the international organisations played a part in this process. According to UNESCO's organisational structure (also followed by ICOMOS), post-Soviet Central Asian countries were re-assigned to the Asian and the Pacific region. This broadened international contacts and cooperation between professionals within this region, but reduced the contacts with colleagues from the former Soviet space. Publications on heritage conservation that assert the incorporation of the former Soviet region in the narrative of Asian

development produced by western scholars depict the Soviet period of heritage conservation in Central Asian countries as a deviation from the western conservation expertise that needed to be remedied by western and international heritage agencies (Stubbs Thomson 2017). Local experts tend to see the Soviet development of conservation in a more positive light, as a period of the formation of their national schools of heritage protection that came into being in close cooperation with Soviet scholars and practitioners, in the first place, from Russia (Beisenov 2017, Tuyakbayeva 2008).

In spite of the rising importance of heritage in the context of national independence and the unrestricted interactions with the outside world after the fall of state socialism, the new era brought its own problems and controversies. Heritage protection and conservation in many post-Soviet countries has transformed from a small elitist field of knowledgeable and skilful expertise into a massive arena of enhanced political importance and, notably, of a significant commercial value that has led to a rapid decline of experts' symbolic power. In the Russian Federation, violations of both state legislation and international treaties in the sphere of heritage protection policies and the fall of international prestige of Russian heritage practitioners has led to a devaluation of their former attainments.<sup>19</sup>

According to Laura Adams, the adoption of global forms is often rooted in the communicative goals of elites (2008, 636). The story of Soviet engagement in the global circulation of the heritage concept and policies reveals the important role that national heritage practitioners played both in rationalizing their nations' past for the sustaining modernization project that structured Soviet cultural, social and political life and in the formation of their nation-centered heritage regimes. The protection of heritage in the socialist state was hampered with various ideological restraints while the international cooperation unfolded in the atmosphere of the Cold War that imposed additional limitations on actors engaged in transnational initiatives. Studied through the lens of these actors' experience, the Soviet system, however, reveals the porosity of its cultural

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<sup>19</sup> Russian Committee of ICOMOS had lost accreditation with ICOMOS from 2014 to 2016 as a result of organisational disarray that led to the failure to pay ICOMOS membership fee.

infrastructure and borders that ultimately prepared the ground for social criticism, political dissent and eventual system termination.

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