

4Blocks in Podil: Kyiv's Response to the Crisis of Modernist Planning

Introduction

Postmodernism in socialist architectures has gained a certain amount of attention in recent publications covering the Baltic States, Central Asian republics and the Socialist Block¹. The editors of the 2019 edition of JoA have outlined that since 2012 an impressive amount of scholarship contributed to provincialize the solidified narrative of Soviet Union with Moscow as a center of every decision-making process². It is clear today that within the pre-eminently hierarchical and centralized intellectual, cultural and economic system of the 1960s arose a number of divergent trajectories in cultural policies and certain opportunities of self-realization and self-expression. Above mentioned substantial contribution edited by V. Kulic signals the need to redefine the canon of postmodernism in architecture, as more and more positions, projects and discourses on this side of the Iron Curtain are uncovered by scholars. Ukraine, though, is still seriously underrepresented in these discussions. Being the second largest by population and the third largest by the area of the USSR republics, Ukraine had quite a few established architectural schools: two in Kyiv, one in Lviv, one in Kharkiv, and one in Dnipro (former Dnipropetrovsk, earlier—Ekaterynoslav).

Towards the 1980s, Soviet urban society itself has changed, becoming more diverse and educated, working more in the tertiary sector than ever before. This period saw the ascending of a new generation of people—urban dwellers, who associated their cultural aspirations with the rise of new urban culture and who were not primarily focused on the everyday survival and covering their basic needs. It led to the transformation of leisure practices towards focusing on self-development. As for the urban space, the newly arisen interest in urban history was gaining ground among the citizens, framing new attitudes towards the cityscape and architectural heritage.

Our paper thus intends to look at postmodernism as incorporated in the late socialist architectural production through the lenses of Kyiv's regionalism, historicity, and locality. It argues that the multiplicity of effects informed by such a 'historical turn' instigated the intellectual parting with Moscow as an imperial and colonial center. On the other hand, the 'historical turn' constitutes a dilemma of urban development and transformations in relation to both

¹ Bocharnikova / Kurg 2019; Demchenko 2018; Maroš Krivý, 2016; Mankus 2017; Szacka & Krivy 2018; Urban 2019.

² Bocharnikova / Kurg 2019.

3 For a more general discussion on 'historical turn', consult Kozlov, D. (2001). The Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture: Retrospectivism, Factography, Doubt, 1953–91. *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 2(3), 577–600. doi:10.1353/kri.2008.0097.

4 For instance, as our informants stated, it was up to Moscow architectural officials to use their discretion in deciding who would enter the international competition, which journals would be on the libraries' subscription list, or who would be in the 'professional exchange' group for the visit abroad, etc.) As for the architectural journals, only a few periodicals, like, for instance, *JA/The Japan Architect* or *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, were accessible either in the library of Ukrainian Architectural Association/*Spilka Arkhitektoriv Ukrainy* or in The Communist Party State Republican Library of the UkrSSR /*Derzhavna Respublikanska Biblioteka imeni KPRS*/ now—Yaroslav the Wise National Library of Ukraine; besides, representatives of architectural elite/nomenklatura could get a subscription. (Interview with Volodymyr Nikitin 2020).

5 Voitsekhov 1991.

innovation and conservative politics.³ The construction industry, spurred by Khrushchev's housing policy, managed to outperform the goals, and created housing for millions of families across the USSR. Hence, the lack of housing was not as acute as 20 years before. By 1980, about 1 million square meters of housing estates were built in Kyiv every year. And it is by the 1980s that the general excitement about architecture's transformative promises, Khrushchev's housing reform, and Brezhnev's housing programs of 1971–80 started to vanish and were giving way to the concerns over urban milieus, comfort, and new aesthetics. Or, to borrow the wording from the professional discussions of the days—there was a need to humanize the built environment.

Thus, the architects of the 1980s were operating in a distinctly different social atmosphere than those who were designing and constructing the micro-districts in the early 1960s. However, when it came to the decision-making process, international connections and exchanges, or the intellectual sphere (for example: public discussions, access to professional publications and translations, participation in international competitions, etc.), then, in most cases, Ukrainian architects did not enjoy full-fledged professional agency and had a limited access to it. In terms of postmodernist critical discourse, the strict center-periphery disposition was in place.⁴

The case of four blocks built in Kyiv's Podil did not make a radically different turn either, as it was endorsed on an all-Soviet competition and published in *Arkhitektura SSSR*, the central USSR architectural journal. Leonid Voitsekhov, the then-contemporary artist, described it as follows:

“In a peephole, one could see an abstract Moscow in the glimmering haze, and beyond Moscow stretched the West. Everything was sent to Moscow for coordination and verification; and it is from there that the final response was expected, as a judgment from the heavens.”⁵

Following the questions and problems outlined above we structure our paper via several points. In the first section, we intend to outline the institutional and social contexts and the discourses of the time related to the construction of 4Blocks. The following chapter deals with the key specifics of the project, its problematic and the afterlife, and its today's transitory status. We conclude by discussing the place of this project on the map of postmodernisms, its influences and impacts on Ukrainian architecture, and the value of the design method applied for the inner-city reconstruction.

The Architectural Logic of Late Socialism: Ukrainian Contexts

“Even though they were not as politically constricted as the social science disciplines like sociology, the work of aesthetic professionals such as architects and designers was inhibited in other ways. Professionals within these spheres often found themselves at the periphery of the decision-making process due to the organizational structure of the construction

and production industries, which elevated builders and engineers as the primary decision-makers.”⁶

6 Alekseyeva 2019.

Anna Alekseyeva suggested that the disenchantment of the intelligentsia with the notion of progress and modernity happened within the repressive state. It led to the redefinition of ‘control’ in society—from overt repressions and censorship to latent oversight and mutual surveillance⁷. Such a position put people at risk because the limits of their freedom became more labile and uncertain.

7 Ibid.

Yet, many examples of postmodernist architecture could not be said as being ‘capitalizing on their dissidence,’ since architectural design and construction were deeply entangled in the socialist networks of patronage and production⁸. As Vladimir Kulic argues,

8 Kulic 2019.

“Architecture thus complicates the simplistic distinction between official and dissident culture, illustrating how state socialist systems were able to assimilate differing and even dissenting aesthetic approaches and the changing preoccupations and concerns.”⁹

9 Ibid.

The hierarchical and centralized system of architectural production at large state and municipal design institutes suppressed the individual standing of the architect, while a limited set of career opportunities led to further frustration among newly graduated specialists. Neither could most of the architects enjoy the luxury of individual design, since mass housing constituted the basic building typology at the time.

The city authorities, the *Kyivmiskbud*, the only municipal construction company that operated in Kyiv, and the *Gosstroy*, as the highest authorizing body, were pushing the residential panel district development to mitigate the still existing housing shortage. On the one hand, state ownership of most of the housing stock in the city should have given all the required powers to the municipal authorities to demolish old dilapidating housing and to build new high-rises with contemporary infrastructure started with the blank slate as it were. It seemed much more cost-efficient and appeared ideologically viable because the whole industry was retrofitted to fulfill the specific task of producing panel housing for the micro districts.^{10/11} On the other hand, this was not the case, since the demand for housing was still pressing until the late 1980s, and during the following decade, political turmoil and inflation brought construction almost to a virtual halt. Thus, dilapidated apartment houses were rarely given the benefit of doubt when deciding between major repair and demolition. The planners and city officials did not dare to take on the responsibility to remove old housing stock. Although most of the residential buildings in Podil were in dire need of renovation or reconstruction, rarely did it happen. The district survived the most radical 1960s era without much change, and already in the 1970s, the plans of total redevelopment were met with fierce resistance.

10 Syetin 1988.

11 Inozemtseva / Muliar / Piskovskiy / Solovyov 1988.

The late 1970s and early 1980s signaled the turn from the vast amounts of prefabricated mass housing with its *Zeilenbau* planning system and uniform typologies towards blocks and twisted group sections. After years of tedious standardized production, elements of formal complexity and color made their return into housing design, along with certain concerns for contextualizations and individuality.¹² Yet the industrialized process of prefabricated housing construction was reluctant to remodeling, for every change required the implementation of new building technologies and codes, let alone a dramatic increase in costs. The demand for a system change was getting to a crucial point: architects felt they were losing social standing and voicing, while residents were raising their voices against the monotony of the sleeping districts. Valentyn Yezhov, the city chief architect in 1981–1987, argued that

12 Ryabushin 1978; Sokolov 1978.

“a lack of individuality and monotony of building blocks started to frighten not only specialists but also city residents. [...] The dominance of uniform typologies and prefabricated construction, and certain architectural faults in the historic part of the city, together with Kyiv’s apparent retardation as compared to the architecture and construction in capital cities of other socialist republics—i. e. Vilnius, Riga, Tallinn, Almaty, Yerevan, Tashkent—became quite an issue for professionals and seriously excited the general public.”¹³

13 Yezhov 2001: 153.

Besides, the urban planners started to question whether organizing the city around micro district units was fostering the requisite unity that they were looking for. According to this emerging perspective, the decentralized micro district paradigm had created closed off urban units, disconnected from one another and from the rest of the city.¹⁴

14 Alekseyeva 2019.

These discontents and professional crisis found its theoretical engagement in the discussions on the need to humanize the built environment. The idea of humanization of the built environment in times marked with the critical stance towards modernist architecture and urban planning is primarily associated with the return to human scale and re-orientation to the cultural and spatial contexts of the European city¹⁵. Apparently, as our informants stated,¹⁶ Ukrainian architects hardly had access to the texts of, say, Jane Jacobs or the Krier brothers¹⁷ who criticized the modernist legacy and were praising the virtues of European conventional historic cities instead. The implicit discontents with the vast standardized spaces and buildings deprived of any sign of identity—personal, historic, or local—prompted a change in thinking. The late 1960s and onwards, albeit the rather narrow spectrum of available architectural literature, saw the growing interest in the topics of history and preservation, local context, and tradition.

15 Agnew / Mercer / Sopher 2013.

16 Schalatskyi 2019; Antoniuk 2020.

17 Jacobs 1961; L. Krier & Vidler 1978; Krier & Rowe 1979.

DISCUSSION

A good case in point can present dynamic polemics over the relations of ‘old’ — ‘new’ and ‘historic’ — ‘contemporary’, set against the grain of architectural production of a socialist version of modernism, found in the *Stroitel'stvo i Arkhitektura/Construction and Architecture* journal in 1969. It opens up by the two texts¹⁸ that use the language as if it comes down from the pages of architectural manifestoes of the 1920s, where one could see two completely different approaches. Vadym Hopkalo, Anatoliy Dobrovolsky, et al., the representatives of architectural establishment who had good connections to the communist party officials, and who got the commissions for the many major buildings in Kyiv, represent the first one. Their argument revolves mostly around the case of the modernist-like residential high-rise (built in 1968) in the historic center, just in the view of the National Opera House (1901). Needless to say, that Hopkalo et al authored the project. The building was nicknamed ‘the building overlooking the Opera House’ and became a byword in professional milieus since then. (fig. 1) For them, in the historic center, ‘preservation’ and the creation of the ‘new’ would never come to terms. Certain historic buildings should be treated as ‘gems in the crown’, and the rest of the territory would appear as a potential construction site. They definitely gravitated toward the ‘future’—the ‘future’ as appeared in communist party programs and slogans. While the condemnation of the ‘past’ was much more widely presented: Podil’s old buildings were called “just a handful of mediocre merchant housing surrounded by slums and dirt with narrow dark courtyards deprived of greenery”.¹⁹

Advocating highly selective principles of conservation and preservation of individual objects and without putting forward any criteria for their assessment, the authors by no means accept the idea of a complex approach toward the built environment or preservation of historical urban fabric.

Petro Yurchenko, a renowned scholar, architect, and educator, stepped forward with an opposite set of arguments. His criticism highlighted the extraordinary importance of a complex approach toward the built environment and was in many ways then supported by the colleagues in the upcoming issues of the journal.²⁰

It is the concern for a holistic approach to the historic environment and the human milieu that Yurchenko opposes to ‘the single monument ripped out of contexts and put on the no man’s land as it were’²¹. Underlining historic architecture’s role in shaping urban societies and individualities he emphasizes the special value of authenticity, criticizes the monotony and formal quality of mass construction of the time, and condemns the stylistic repertoire of “historic simulations” as mere decorativism and fakes^{22/23/24}.

BUILDING the SUBWAY EXTENSION in PODIL

According to the Kyiv General Plan of 1967, the new subway line was to be built to connect the newly constructed Obolon’ district to other parts of the city. The groundwater level appeared too high to dig the tunnel deep, and it

18 No. 2, 1969, 3–4, 5–9.



Fig. 1 Vadim Hopkalo et al. 1969 realized building project overlooking the National Opera.

19 The representations of the ‘past’ and the ‘future’ in Kyiv’s architectural/urban discourse go beyond the scope of this discussion, on this account also see Lositskiy, Yuriy & Vlasova Tatyana (1991) *Kievskiy Podol—Evolutsia Tzennostey* [Kyiv’s Podol—an evolution of values]. *Arkhitektura SSSR* (1–2). Moscow: Stroyizdat, p. 26–31.

20 cf. I. Ignatkin, No. 3, 1969; L. Pliashko, S. Sjedin, No. 5, 1969; K. Stetsiuk, No. 7, 1969; O. Malysenko, No. 9, 1969.

21 p.7.

22 p.9.

23 Indeed, his critique was prompted by his recent attendance of the Architecture and the Human Milieu International Union of Architects 9th Congress, Prague convention.

24 cf. famous Augustus Pugin’s maxim: “It is alright to decorate construction but never construct decoration”

25 Historically, Kyiv used to have three centers. Its 11th century configuration was a common medieval disposition: Upper city (Prince Volodymyr's town—castle—the site of power) served a political center, Lower city (Podil—market square, multiethnic craftsmen's and merchants' town) formed a commercial center, and, at the distance—the 'Sacred city' (Lavra /Pechers'k monastery—also on the hills) composed its religious center. From the end of the 18th cent. up to the beginning of the 20th cent., Lower city—Podil—served a commercial center and was considered to be the 'heart of the city.' Up to the 1830s, the Podil neighborhood actually stayed for the city itself. Upper City was devastated after the Golden Horde invasion (1240s), the Castle and upper city cathedrals were extremely slow to be rebuilt. Instead, Podil enjoyed home-rule (Kyiv was granted Magdeburg municipal rights) and remained a busy and bustling site. Thus, Podil presents an urban setting where the touch of semiotic stability is particularly visible.

26 Vechirniy Kyiv, 1971–2.

27 Serhiy Taranenko, head of the archaeology research department at Kyiv-Pechersk National Reserve, detailed how the archaeological excavations influenced archaeological research at the Academy and the overall public interest. Interview with Serhiy Taranenko, July 21, 2020. In this connection see also: M. Sagaydak. 2016. "Kyivskyi Podil za zavisoju vikiv/Kyiv's Podil behind the veil of ages", interview, Visnyk NANU (National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine)/The NASU Newsletter, No. 8. 73–84; P. Tolochko, K. Hupalo. 1975. "Arheologichni vidkryttia 1972 na Podoli"/"Archaeological Findings in 1972 Podil", in J. Borovskiy, V. Dovzheniuk, S. Kiliyevych, P. Tolochko, eds. Starodavniy Kyiv: Rozkopky Kyjeva 1969-70-h. Kyiv: Naukova Dumka. 5–27.



Fig. 2 Celebration of the 1500 years of Kyiv (1982).

28 A detailed account of the ideological and organizational issues that conditioned the celebration of 1500 Kyiv's anniversary could be found in: J. Isaievych, "Juvileii mist: Lviv, Kyiv, I znovu Lviv"/ "Cities' Anniversaries: Lviv, Kyiv, and Lviv again" <http://dspace.nbuv.gov.ua/bitstream/handle/123456789/12730/18-Isaievich.pdf> (accessed Sept 15, 2020) For the popular account see also: <https://vechirniy.kyiv.ua/news/yakym-bulo-pershe-svyatkuvannya-dnya-kyjeva> (accessed Sept 15, 2020)

was decided to build it close to the surface. According to the project, the subway line had to cut through the early nineteenth-century grid of Podil's streets. The project thus was further complicated by the additional challenges: the government was to decide what had to go and which parts of urban fabric could be preserved and to start archeological excavations on the site in order to study the remains of the ancient city ahead of the upcoming construction.²⁵ In the 1970s, the archeological digs in Podil were the key factor that instigated the overall interest in Kyiv's archaeology. As the excavations progressed, many Kyivans visited the site as an attraction contemplating the log houses of the 9-10th centuries found at a depth of 10-12 meters. *Vechirniy Kyiv/The Evening Kyiv*, the most popular city newspaper, wrote about the 'sensational findings at ancient Podil' and 'the Ukrainian Pompeii' and called it 'a real miracle of our days'²⁶. For the National Academy of Ukraine governing body, it became a perfect chance (and a good excuse too) to start the ongoing archaeological project on a permanent basis.²⁷

CELEBRATING 1500TH ANNIVERSARY of KYIV

1982 was assigned the year of 1500 Kyiv's anniversary. Since then, every year, on the last weekend of May, Kyiv celebrates its City Day. This ideological gesture offers evidence of an appropriation of Kyiv's cultural memory, which, however, had been limited to the events of Kyiv Rus period as a more distant and thus definitely more "secure" point of reference than the times of hetman Ivan Mazepa or the immediate colonial and totalitarian past of the 20th century (fig. 2).²⁸

The anniversary contributed decisively to the public awareness in the city's history, just as the organization of the celebrations was one of the leverage points to undertake different urban renovation and reconstruction projects. Characteristic of these processes is the conscious use of urban renovation in planning as an instrument of civility that contributed to the construction of a Kyivan identity and new forms of urban life. Among others, there should be mentioned: the landscaping project on the Starokyivskyi Hill (Upper town), archaeological excavations that revealed the remains of Liadsky Gates, certain renovations at Andriivsky Decent, the opening of the Golden Gates (in fact, a pavilion that replicates the actual thing and houses the remains), the monument featuring the legendary founders of the city at the embankment, and the Samson fountain at Kotraktova square in Podil. The latter was but a small fragment of the overall Kontraktova square reconstruction project commissioned to Valentyna Shevchenko. Her initial project appeared a large-scale takeover. However, later versions were limited to replicating the destroyed or badly damaged structures: the building of Brats'kyi Corpus, the Orthodox version for Jesuit College (since 1992, National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy), Samson fountain, and the House of Contracts, while the Guest House was built anew after Swiss Italian architect Luigi Ruska's initial project.

The reconstruction of 1982 proved an immensely controversial endeavor. It had set free certain "complexities and contradictions" we are facing today.

First, like all acts of “inventing traditions,” it proceeded through a highly selective appropriation of what could count as Kyiv’s architectural tradition in privileging historically overcharged and place ambivalent classicist forms thus ruling out numerous architectural and historic layers. Second is the question of ‘authenticity.’ The replicas of ‘historic’ structures or the practice of constructing something ‘original’ that had never existed violates all the conventions on conservation and preservation whatsoever; moreover, lately, it resulted in depriving the Guest House of its status of architectural and historic heritage site thus toeing way for its privatization and further alternations. Finally, giving preference to the concept of ensemble completely ignores the social dimension—public spaces, local traditions, or spatial practices of its users.

The same year the preparations and the celebrations of 1500 Kyiv’s anniversary were in progress, the conference of the Union of Soviet Architects focused on the topics of architecture and its engagement with ideology took place in the city. Alexander Riabushin, who was the secretary of the executive committee of the Union, urged his colleagues to

“critically evaluate the state and new tendencies in our creative practice, giving attention to the real expectations of Soviet people, their desire for a varied, rich architecture that is nationally and historically inflected”.²⁹

29 Riabushin as cited in Anderson 2018.

In effect, the aforementioned cases demonstrate that the discourse of preservation, local context, and tradition was gradually taking visible contours, as the dissatisfaction with mass construction loomed large. The rising awareness of the new construction in historic environments posed the question of a complex approach to renovation and preservation (‘state-supported and scientifically grounded approach’—as it appeared in official documents) and stirred up reasonable doubts about the relevance of the historic simulations among professionals and the general public.

On the Turn of the Era: Construction and Afterlife of 4Blocks Timeline

- 1968: First modernism-inspired detailed plan for the Podil area
- 1973: Assessment of the historical monuments and valuable buildings
- 1974: New detailed plan of the Podil area with identified reconstruction areas
- 1977: Central Podil architectural conservation zone is created
- 1979: Architectural contest for the development of 2 areas in Podil
- 1984: All-soviet architecture overview won by architectural team
- 1993: Construction of the 4Blocks (almost) finished

After the shock of mid-1950s, Khrushchev’s reforms and restructuring of the architectural and construction industries, 1960s saw a great rise in the modernistic aspirations of architects in Kyiv, a high point of which could be seen

30 Shalatsky 2018.

31 Miletskiy 1998.



Fig. 3 Experiments with color, heights and typology in the housing units on Antonovycha street in the early 1980s.



Fig. 4 Housing unit on Skovorody, 13 street, in the 'Rozenberg blocks' (1988).

32 Taranenko 2017.

Fig. 6 Model of the V-14 Block, view from the Kostyantynivska street (1986).

in the General plan of Kyiv of 1967. The following year planners proposed a redevelopment program for Podil, that had gained a lot of attention and was the first publicly discussed urban planning document. After a harsh discussion, a new plan was created, now based on the historical monuments assessment and preservation principles. According to its provisions, a competition was launched in 1979 to redevelop 2 areas of 3 and 4 blocks.³⁰ There was a notable shift of the approach: architects proposed using combined typified and individual construction elements to close the block perimeter and keep the heights approximately equal to the old buildings.

Although this could have been surprising for the jury, a rather closed circle of architects of different generations who studied at the Institute of Arts (today—National Academy of Fine Arts) and worked at KIEVPROEKT design institute were for a long time reflecting on the ideas of city history and urban renewal. Starting from 1968, Avraam Miletskiy worked on the project of museum-park “Ancient Kyiv”³¹. Viktor Rozenberg joined to help him a few years later. Some of the architects involved also successfully participated in the all-Soviet architectural competition for the reconstruction of Nizniy Novgorod.

The contest for the areas in Podil was won by a team led by Ihor Shpara and Viktor Rozenberg. (fig. 3) They formulated conceptual approach and were officially responsible for the realization, while their younger colleagues took control over planning solutions, documentation and physical construction of the projects. In 1980, they split their bureau to develop detailed projects for each area separately. (fig. 4)

The difference between the two areas was about the ‘layeredness’ of the place with the cultural remains of previous eras and differences in the quality of existing architecture. “Rozenberg blocks” were situated in a restricted historic area with the archaeology pointing towards late 900s.³² On the contrary, the “4Blocks” area was a more distant one, and supposedly uninhabited before the 17th century. Located further away from the historic core of the city, it bordered industrial sites on two sides and a light rail line cut through the planned redevelopment zone. The team had greater freedom to experiment and create a diverse urban environment.



The first stage of the design (*stadiya proekt*) was accepted in 1983 as an integral general plan of construction. At first, it was modelled in a late-soviet style including both prefabricated and individual building parts, maintaining a balance between cost-efficiency and local specificity (fig. 5). Architects used a narrow window of opportunity by participating and winning the prize of the All-Soviet competition for architecture in 1983. This success paved the way for the long but successful realization. A year later in the final project design (*stadiya rabochiy proekt*) the authors introduced completely individualized elements, both in facades and public space design (fig. 6).

The chief architect of the later stage, Yuriy Schalatskiy, distributed the task to design adjoining buildings among the team of architects. This ‘personal touch’ allowed an increased diversity of facades and sculptural details within an integrated concept and infrastructural program. The creation of common spaces remained a group work with the discussion and proposals from all authors (Leonid Moroz, Tatyana Lazarenko, Heorhii Dukhovychnyi).

Due to the constraints of the available material quality and typology, the only material that could suffice for the interests of the personalized architectural project was local brick. It was used for walls, columns, parapets, and porticoes. Mass-produced prefabricated concrete elements were the other readily available option used to create contemporary scale and slackness of arches, propylaea and pathways through the buildings. (fig. 7, 8) Architects also designed different streetlights in one style which would fit the varied landscape of inner courtyards and pavement. Overall, urban furniture was made in a simple way: wooden planches put on the concrete parapets around the planted trees—a principle that made it easy to maintain the furniture. Because of high underground waters, two heating facilities were constructed above the underground level and their roofs were planned as secure free time spending places. One of them was designed as a summer terrace with a table and barbecue, whilst another featured a pigeon loft and arches. (fig. 9, 10)

The construction itself happened in a non-conventional way, as the city administration refused to finance the pricey project and transferred the responsibility to construct 4blocks to the different enterprises in the vicinity. This allowed the project to happen but increased the complexity of the authors’ control over the construction quality and comprehensiveness. Several companies were building at the same time with different managers and speeds. In the end, the (almost) complete project implementation of 16 houses took more than 8 years (1985–1993).

This loose oversight over the project led to further complicacies. For instance, some public design elements, such as children playgrounds, benches and symbolic objects (ancient water piping station and new baroque-style solar clock) were never installed. This and the poor quality of the materials led to a fast decay of meaningful public-private areas of courtyards.

Old housing stock was partially rescued from demolition. Authors carefully embedded new housing into the old fabric where the latter prevailed and acted more pretentiously with the old buildings where they were standing

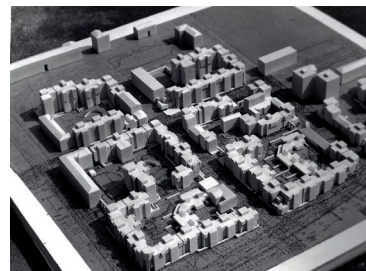


Fig. 5 Primary model of the 4Blocks development (1981).



Fig. 7 4Blocks residential building on the intersection of Yurkivska and Kostyantynivska streets, photo immediately after construction in 1989.



Fig. 8 4Blocks residential building on the intersection of Obolonska and Kostyantynivska streets, photo at the time of construction in 1990.

alone. Although this was done on paper, some 19th-century buildings were demolished afterwards. It was rumored that demolition was ordered by party committee members to regain the high-quality bricks in order to build private dachas. Because most old buildings were lacking the heritage status, an investigation was never conducted.

One of the kindergartens was never finished, as it was the last building on the construction list and the fall of birthrates starting from the early 1990s rendered additional kindergartens useless in the eyes of economic planners of the city administration. It was left half-built with the part of the walls still standing to our day. Although there is a shortage of places for kids in municipal care centers, the latest archaeological excavations on this spot opening the foundations of the mid-12th century church put the aspirations of a new kindergarten to a halt.

While people were struggling through the economic downfall and job losses in the 1990s, most important aspects of planned publicity were neglected, as first-floor verandas were built up for security reasons and green spaces occupied by parking and garages. Public spaces without clear function rapidly dilapidated or were closed up to prevent hooligan behavior. Interestingly, though inner courtyards were designed for mutual interaction and surveillance to minimize marginalized behavior and sustain a feeling of safety (fig. 11), they are continuously appropriated by local alcoholics, who like being secured from the ‘eyes from the street’. As a lot of the industrial enterprises where people had a permanent and stable job have closed, some dwellers turned to the practices of partial privatization of the publicly owned areas. This all created an atmosphere of mistrust and disinterest in the quality of the common space.

We must note that planned first-floor businesses changed the appearance of the original look of the facade but still create a livable atmosphere in

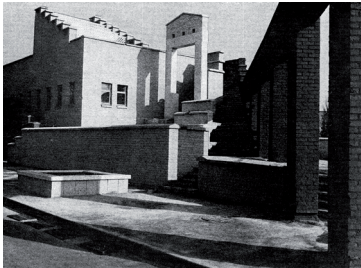
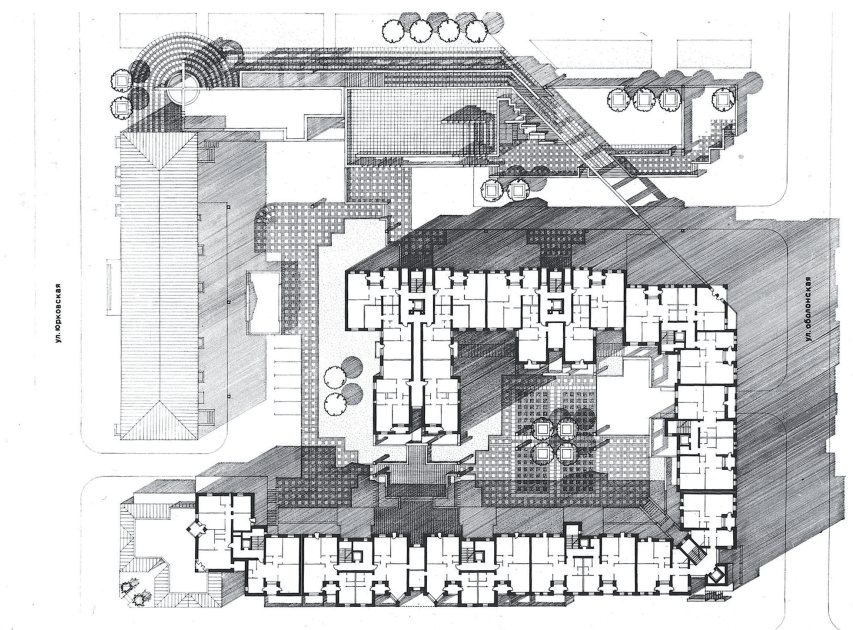


Fig. 9 Amphitheatre on the stairs to the summer terrace on the boiling facility in the block V-14 (1986).



Fig. 10 Summer terrace on the boiling facility in the Block V-14 (1986–1987).

Fig. 11 General plan of the block V-14 with the floor plan, street furniture and pavement (1986).



the district. Shop signs became bigger, randomly colored and out of architectural context (although very much in the economic and social one). Some of the new owners enclosed the bordering green spaces and expanded the floor area, whilst others built up additional floors where possible.

Today there is a slowly growing sense of self-identification with the district among dwellers. People still focus mostly on the economic side of the living conditions, limiting the opportunity to shift their attention to the aesthetic characteristics of the neighborhood. However, we know from numerous discussions with residents that such features, as greenery, enclosed and car-free courtyards and warm flats are highly recognized and valued.

Reflecting on the Rozenberg blocks project 15 years after, the city ex-chief architect wrote that they were the first systematic and holistic realization of the reconstruction program envisioned in the Detailed plan of 1979. And that today's critics are profoundly wrong in underestimating the value of this approach, further realized in such projects as 4Blocks³³. In our opinion, the impact that this contextual approach had on the face of the city was limited but still manifold.

33 Yezhov 2001.

Locality and Postmodernism

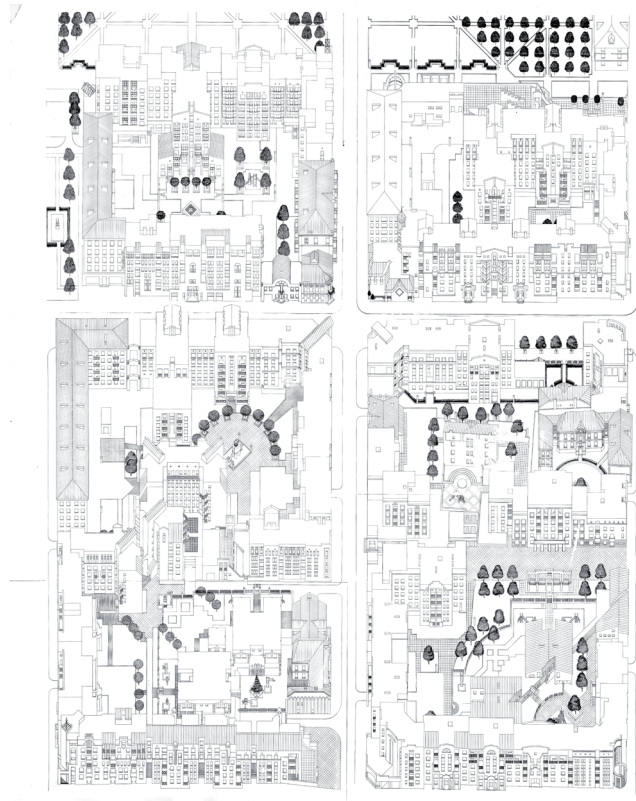
Microdistricts, the main and often the only unit of spatial development, were markedly obsolete and irrelevant forms of collective life in the 1980s as Soviet society became well-educated, obtained a diverse range of occupations and interests that connected people from the whole city, sometimes on the scale of the republic. Social bonds of a local collective were much weaker than in a professional or hobby collective, that people were tied to³⁴. Dull and repetitive open spaces of micro districts could not compete with the older, symbolical central streets and squares of Kyiv located on picturesque hills. While the interests of kids and the elderly could be satisfied in the vast green areas surrounding typified housing units, youth and adults were looking towards more multi-purposeful places and cultural activities.

34 Alekseyeva 2019.

A challenge to the State-endorsed model of collective life came from the architects' reflection on what is a good society. They presumed their dwellers to be well-educated people with a high interest in the history of the place. The authors also believed that adequately balanced and locally anchored social life of a community is a unique urban good that should be supported and fostered. The introduction of local-scale commerce and cafés was oriented towards the creation of a new distinct locality of the 4blocks, still morphologically and historically connected to the older city parts. This transparent border of identity would be encompassed in the logic of building, block, neighborhood and the city being various scopes of 'my home', thus creating a basis for collective care and appreciation of the "urban".

The architecture of 4Blocks would play the role of a backstage, main actor, stoned music and much more if only taken care of and loved by the citizens. Moreover, authors almost prescribed some places to function in a way not seen before in Kyiv, for instance, as a collective open-space amphitheater

Fig. 12 'Straight' axonometry of the final project of the 4Blocks, final stage (1986).



or a nostalgic waiting corner with benches and a baroque sundial clock in the center. A general sense of public security and a basic level of well-being for all people that came from the late soviet welfare state allowed the creation of partially open and walkthrough courtyards. In the imagination of the architects, real gates would never be needed as people would easily differentiate public space of the street from the collective space of the courtyard by the symbolic delimitation of arches. (fig. 12) Politically such a project would hardly ever contrast itself to the developed socialism, but it showed concrete signs of the post-industrial society with its focus on spaces for free time spending, flaneuring routes, local restaurants and viewpoints.

“Such architecture presupposes an equal in the viewer, presupposes an interlocutor. Here the authors take a great risk because an unprepared viewer can take the inexplicit, or rather the misunderstood, for the architect’s failure.”³⁵

35 S'yedin 1989.

We would argue that authors shared a decolonial perspective, and while designing a Kyivan neighborhood, were wittily using the local regulations and state liberalization for the interest of the project quality. Open disgust of the state—and Moscow—guided typified modernist housing in all its featurelessness and ‘timelessness’ transcended theoretically heavy articles of the architectural critics, materializing the long-headed desire for self-realization of the author.

The methods of the ‘construction of locality’ were quite varied. Yellow clinker brick pavement was used as a mode of connection to the past materi-

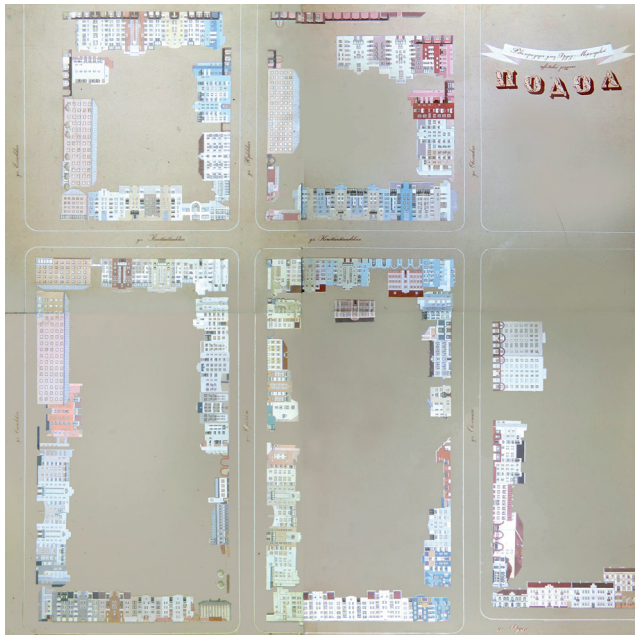


Fig. 13 Integrated color palette for the facades of the 4Blocks, project stage (1984).

ality. Local motifs such as screened inner balcony galleries were reintroduced with a romantic re-scaling, somewhat similar to Leon Krier's approach to the Breitenfurter Straße in Vienna (1984–1987). More importantly, architects managed to reflect the ancient street pattern discovered by the archaeologists. During the design process, they changed the layout of one of the blocks to encompass a small side-street, unofficially calling it 'Bulgarian lane' as a recognition of the 17th-century settlement of merchants and craftsmen of Bulgarian origin on this place. (fig. 13)

Colored facades were another unique feature drawn from the local context. Architects used a historical case from Kyiv when a lot of the late-19th century housing was painted over brick to disguise the absence of plaster. Some of these remaining houses were included in the projects and adjoining new units were supporting the heights and the volume of the old structures. Disintegrated and disjointed courtyards were put together again with the parceling of the blocks into smaller-scale spaces, that often drew inspiration from some peculiarities of the existing stock and morphology. (fig. 14)

These spaces all were set as the part of the big architectural-theatrical backstage of everyday life. Playgrounds for children and piazzas inside the 4blocks all had their own symbolic bearing. Some referred to subjects from literature whilst others were indicating a "presence of the past". Victor Hugo's Elephant of the Bastille was converted in a children's slide and a variation of the baroque sun clock was set in the exit from the kindergarten. A playground in the form of a ship retained the 4blocks connection to the significance of the nearby Dnipro river to the history of this district.

Comparing the project with prominent examples of socialist postmodernism elsewhere, we can point out conceptual similarities in the approach. In the case of Berlin, for example, Nikolaiviertel was a mixed success of the old city reconstruction (1983–1987), where architects Günter Stahn, Rolf Ricken



Fig. 14 Arch between buildings, contemporary photo.

36 Urban 2017.

37 Since 2018 it is a protected area. <https://www.berlin.de/sen/kulteu/aktuelles/pressemitteilungen/2018/pressemitteilung.666989.php>.

38 Kurg 2009.

39 Krivý 2017.

40 *Arhitektura SSSR*, No. 09 1982, p.14–15; No. 01 1985, p.74–76; No. 3–4 1988, p.20–26



Fig. 15 Yuriy Schalatskiy and Georgiy Dykhovychnyi on the promenade in the 4Blocks, 2018.

and Heinz Mehlan retained the old street pattern, rebuilt the damaged or destroyed architectural monuments and inset the panel housing with the prefabricated decorations^{36, 37}

While Estonian architects masterfully worked with social facilities such as kindergartens and social centers³⁸, or Slovaks created ironical and witty projects in Bratislava as detailed by Maroš Krivý (2016), principles of common housing projects rarely were revolutionized and realized. Often the changes happened within the typified projects by developing new elements and joints that slightly altered the look of the mass housing blocks. Sometimes, experiments allowed for peculiar blending of panel slabs with the new typologies of public spaces and services.³⁹

What is potentially unique in the case of 4Blocks is the holistic integration of contemporary functions and residential life quality on such scale within the old district, preserving its character without any straight imitation and, furthermore, addition to the complexity as well as historic continuity of the space. The idea of the environmental approach (*sredovoi podkhod*) was widely discussed in the professional press at that time.⁴⁰ This was meant to change the focus from the creation of new environment (*sreda*) towards the search for the key characteristics of the existing urban landscape and subsequent addition of new buildings or spaces to the city. Such a shift was not irrelevant for the practice, although the delay was immense, as Gosstroy was never interested to produce small-scale, detailed housing projects.

‘Revalorization of 4Blocks in Podil’ as authors themselves named the project, recalls us the idea that inherent values of space could be re(turned) by new reflection. Careful attention to the past, taking different epochs and styles as equal is one of the guiding principles. (fig. 15)

Conclusion

In the 1970s, most of the architectural principles of modernism have proved their irrelevance, and its proponents were losing grounds as the harsh architectural discussions leveled in the US, Western Europe and Japan. Architectural theory and practice of late socialism came to a similar turmoil facing the questions of history, context, and individuality.

4Blocks can be rightfully considered among the first post-soviet architectural projects designed ahead of ‘Perestroika’ and realized before the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of official Soviet architecture. Conscious rejection of monopolized modernist discourse and style set by the Moscow government led to the decolonial perspective on architectural production. Seeing the city itself as a main source of project ideas, whether it was its history, architecture or citizens’ practices instead of abstract notions of functionality, simplicity, airiness could be considered a significant step into the search for ‘Kyiv urban form’. Radical refusal to follow the classical model of micro district planning and successive years of pressure, pleas and negotiations conducted by the team of authors were made possible also by the unique circumstances of the 1980s. The strong heritage protection movement, successful

victory on the all-soviet competition of architectural projects and liberalization of the economic relations within the UkSSR all contributed to the fortunate construction.

Reinvention of social bonding based on spatial aesthetics and urban memories tied to a place were rarely looked after in Ukrainian Soviet architecture. This project proudly affirms the value of conceptual and integrated approach to urban design and architecture. By the means of melting the boundaries between the buildings with the urban landscape, open spaces, architects managed to construct an area that subtly joins the urban fabric of the city around. Simplicity and poor quality of materials were to a greater degree compensated by the flexibility of the brick, allowing for a varied and human scale spatial design. Although this contributed to the problems with maintenance, the project still stands out in the district as a beacon of its own time. Articulated desire to reform the logic behind inner-city redevelopment projects and unconventional wittiness, symbolism inscribed in the vision of the new area, its ‘completeness’ could be considered as one of the most valuable examples of late socialist planning and architecture in Kyiv. Iterative, time design process with several stages of modifications led to the detailed, individualized and thought-through solutions.

Concerning the current need to radically review the developmentalist practices and growth-oriented ambitions of architecture (in the post-socialist countries, in particular) in the light of the looming climate crisis and resource depletion, we stress the need to pay attention to the successful 4Blocks project. Efficient land-use, use of sustainable local materials as well as outstanding spatial embeddedness prove its significance for the contemporary architectural practices and still can be presented as an exemplary case.

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Figures

Fig. 1 Final design of the building of the National Academy of Sciences on Volodymyr-ska str. 51–53 Architects: Vadim Hopkalo et al. Source: archive of KIEVPROEKT design institute.

Fig. 2 Celebration of the 1500 years of Kyiv (1982), Source: newspaper 'Khreshchatyk' on 2.06.1982, p. 2–3.

Fig. 3 Housing units on Antonovycha street, early 1970s (photo 1995). Source: private archive of Yuriy Schalatskiy.

Fig. 4 Housing unit on Skovorody, 13 street, 'Rozenberg blocks' (1988). Source: private archive of Sergiy Zakharchenko.

Fig. 5 Primary model of the 4Blocks development (1981). Source: private archive of Yuriy Schalatskiy.

Fig. 6 Model of the V-14 Block, view from the Kostyantynivska street (1986). Source: private archive of Yuriy Schalatskiy.

Fig. 7 Residential building on the intersection of Yurkivska and Kostyantynivska streets (1989). Source: private archive of Yuriy Schalatskiy.

Fig. 8 Residential building on the intersection of Obolonska and Kostyantynivska streets (1989). Source: private archive of Yuriy Schalatskiy.

Fig. 9 Amphitheatre on the stairs to the summer terrace on the boiling facility in the Block V-14 (1986). Source: journal 'Architektura SSSR' 1989–12, p. 42.

Fig. 10 Summer terrace on the boiling facility in the Block V-14. Source: private archive of Yuriy Schalatskiy.

Fig. 11 General plan of the block V-14 with the street furniture and pavement (1986). Source: journal 'Architektura SSSR' 1989–12, p. 38.

Fig. 12 'Straight' axonometry of the final project of the 4Blocks, final stage (1986). Source: private archive of Yuriy Schalatskiy.

Fig. 13 Integrated color palette for the facades of the 4Blocks, project stage (1984). Source: private archive of Yuriy Schalatskiy.

Fig. 14 Arch between buildings in the block B–15, contemporary photo.

Fig. 15 Yuriy Schalatskiy and Heorgiy Dykhovychnyi on the promenade in the 4Blocks, 2018.

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