

Redesign of the Lenin Memorial Zone in Ulyanovsk, Russia

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Abstract

The degree project "Redesign of the Lenin Memorial Zone in Ulyanovsk, Russia" focuses on revitalizing the Lenin Memorial Zone and converting it into a museum complex titled "The Epoch of the USSR." Designing the Interactive Center, titled the "Global Experiment Laboratory," will be a starting point for the creation of the Museum Complex in the Lenin Memorial Zone and to regenerate the whole city center. The field of interest of different parties, such as citizens, regional economic planners and federal authorities, will be discussed.

Urban development problems of the central part of Ulyanovsk, as well as their consequences, were analyzed and recognized as being typical for many cities of the former Soviet Union. Solving such problems as the degradation of environmental quality, city center decay, a lack of identity, lack of residents' involvement, huge unused spaces, inconvenience and the alienation of urban design will increase residents' quality of life, sense of security and participation and thus will make the city center attractive.

The central part of the city has long been in need of an upgrade, a new material-cultural layer, and the energy of the 21st century. But the near-positive effects of modernization that create a new identity can cause problems, including the definition of cultural value and handling the Soviet heritage. Aspects of maintaining a historical balance will be mentioned.

The degree project is also considered an example of the transformation of the Ulyanovsk cultural potential on the threshold of the centennial of the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917 and also as an example of the creation of a tourist destination.

Keywords: Ulyanovsk, Lenin Memorial Zone, Post-Soviet cities, urban space regeneration, cultural potential, museum of the USSR

Introduction

In the context of globalization, interest in a regional identity is growing as well as an interest in the history of the period of the Soviet Union and its historical perspectives. Thus, a strong need for the creation of a Museum of the USSR as a museum of a completed epoch has become obvious. The historical center of the city of Ulyanovsk contains a variety of unique cultural heritage resources of the Soviet period, which could be converted into a museum complex with the theme of the USSR. This museum complex is needed to awaken the collective memory of the people, to extend an understanding of their own identity, and to broaden their views on the past, present and future of the country.

In the past decades the theme of regeneration of urban space in post-Soviet cities has become very important.

Common aspects of the urban environment of many cities as well as individual city phenomena require study. After decades of sprawling and uneven development of cities, a need to escape from the degradation of the urban environment and to create a more compact heterogeneous urban space has revealed itself.

A newly defined creative class with its modern views on an urban environment is beginning to become active in a city space.

With the location of the Museum of the USSR in the city center of Ulyanovsk, it becomes possible to overcome the crisis of identity, to create a new image of the city, to regenerate the urban environment, to include communities in the city as a social action, and to outline the prospects of the city development, thus creating an attractive, livable and living city.

Field of Interests

The need to create the museum complex "The Epoch of the USSR" was caused by the Russian people's desire to record the existence of the unique Soviet period and its people's achievements, triumphs and tragedies. Attention to the Soviet experience and interest in its historical perspective are also relevant in the context of the reintegration processes in the post-Soviet states. It is of national interest to maintain a historical balance.

Ensuring the cultural sustainability of the city and the region will make a substantial contribution to the economic development and to strengthening the regional identity by creating a tourist destination. The aim of providing cultural sustainability is not only to preserve the past, but also to create spatial harmony, to establish a relationship between the creativity of contemporary urban design and historic heritage, and to augment the cultural heritage of Ulyanovsk.

As a consequence of current urban development problems of the central part of Ulyanovsk (which are typical for most of the cities of the former Soviet Union), degradation of the environment has revealed itself. The environment became unattractive aesthetically, alienated in its evolution from creative residents and inconvenient for most residents. Obtaining a livable city is one of the primary needs of the residents of Ulyanovsk. The evolution of directions of redesigning the central part of the city of Ulyanovsk appear to be a starting point for creating a humanely scaled and "personified" environment throughout the city and thus to escape an "impersonal" approach in city development.

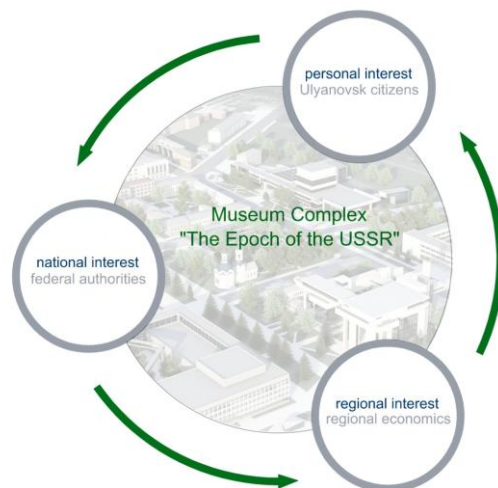


Fig. 1. Stakeholders' interconnectivity

Historical Reference

Ulyanovsk is a fairly young city, founded in the 17th century. Initially called Simbirsk, the city was the birthplace of Vladimir Ulyanov Lenin (the ideologist and the leader of the Socialist Revolution and the founder of the Soviet Union). The region was also the birthplace of N. M. Karamzin (one of the founders of Russian historical sciences and social-political journalism). Ulyanovsk reached the peak of economic, social and cultural development during the period of Developed Socialism (the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s). To celebrate the centennial of the birth of Lenin in the 1970s, the historical city center was substantially rebuilt. Before this event, there were provincial administrative institutions, educational institutions, private houses, craft workshops, public gardens and boulevards in the city center. A development of modern buildings appeared in the 1970s in this area, and thus an architecturally and artistically expressive Soviet Modernism ensemble was created, which is characterized by a high concentration of buildings designed by the best architects in the country. This ensemble (the Lenin Memorial Zone) includes the Venets Hotel, the Pedagogical University, the Palace of Culture (now Gubernatorskiy City Hall), a new Gymnasium No. 1 building, the Sovietskaya Hotel and the Lenin Memorial Building. Ulyanovsk became an important tourist destination during the Soviet era. The cultural and architectural heritage of the Soviet period that is concentrated in the historical center of Ulyanovsk, however, has been little studied and analyzed.



Fig. 2. City center before the 1930s

[<http://www.fototerra.ru/Russia/Ul-janovsk/Darthol-12096.html> (01.02.2014)]



Fig. 3. City center after the 1970s

[<http://ulgrad.ru/?p=62008> (01.03.2013)]

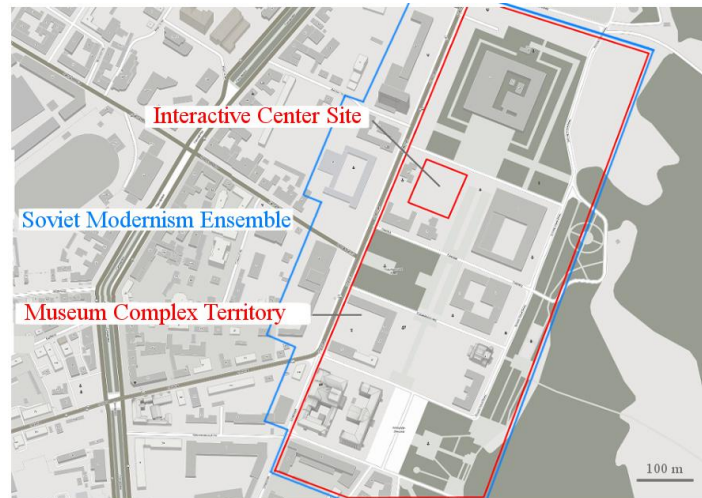


Fig. 4. Location scheme

Methodology and Progress

The Lenin Memorial Zone is a unique spatial and compositional structure that was created in the Soviet era in the 20th century. Absence of awareness about the architecture of Soviet Modernism among citizens has led to a weak relationship between citizens and this place. The Lenin Memorial Zone still exists, but it is not living any more. It needs an upgrade and an emergence of modern buildings and public spaces. An undefined attitude of modern society to the architecture of Soviet Modernism could cause serious, irreparable losses.

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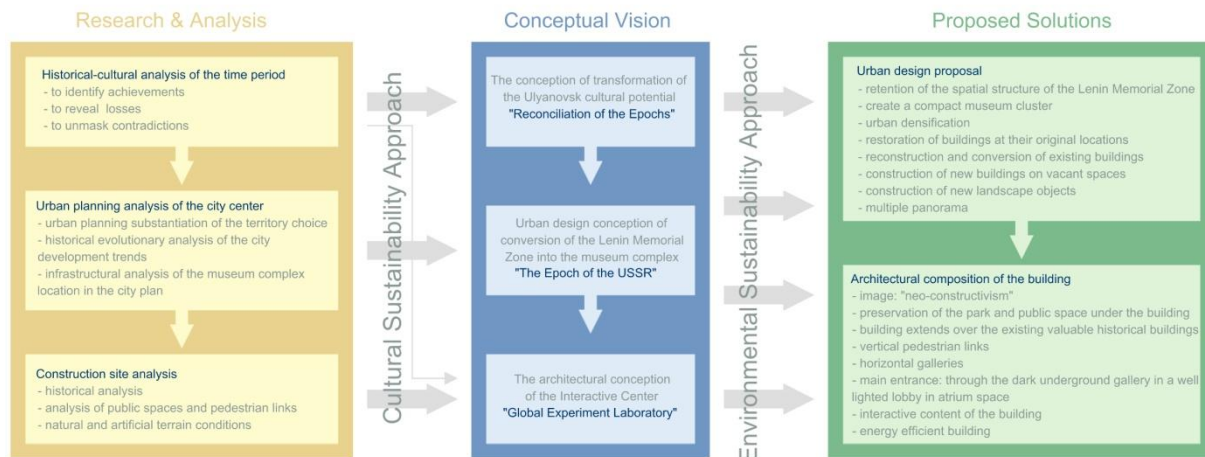


Fig. 5. Project methodology

The project is a result of three consecutive levels of a problem interpretation: research and analysis, conceptual vision and proposed solutions.

The stage of research and analysis includes a historical-cultural analysis of the time period, an urban planning analysis of the city center and a construction site analysis, which have all emerged from another.



Fig. 6. Scheme of the existing and projected parking areas and public spaces

According to the results of research and analysis, the conceptual vision was expressed. The conceptual vision consists of three dependent levels. The first level is the way to present the cultural heritage and historical values of the city, titled "Reconciliation of the Epochs." The second level is urban planning and an urban design concept of the conversion of the Lenin Memorial Zone into the museum complex "The Epoch of the USSR." The third level is the architectural concept of a museum as a museum complex's starting point: an interactive center titled the "Global Experiment Laboratory."

The stage of proposed solutions includes such urban design proposals as the retention of the spatial structure of the Lenin Memorial Zone, the creation of a compact museum cluster, urban densification, the restoration of buildings at their original locations, the reconstruction and conversion of existing buildings, the construction of new buildings in vacant spaces, the construction of new landscape objects, a clear definition of pedestrian links, multiple panoramas and visual corridors.

The Concept of a City's Cultural Potential Transformation: "Reconciliation of the Epochs"

The Lenin Memorial Zone is a mighty spatial and compositional structure that creates a huge space effect. The Lenin Memorial Zone needs to be preserved and consciously developed without destroying the pre-revolutionary architectural heritage located next to it. Moreover, the city center has long been in need of redesign and new development.

Titled the "Reconciliation of the Epochs," the concept defines the course to present the cultural heritage, the historical values of the city and contradictory aspects of the city development. According to a new concept, the museum complex will "reconcile" the epochs: the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and the modern Russian Federation, and it will give an impetus to the development of the city center; the complex will reconcile not in the sense of stopping contradictions, but in the sense of balancing meanings and having a permanent visual dialog between historical layers.

The low, eclectic pre-revolutionary buildings with their subtle details, the huge Soviet Modernism masterpieces with their clear forms and the contemporary minimalist structures with their airiness should produce the liveliness of visual interaction. Respecting the diversity of historical layers, this approach aims to harmonize the urban environment.

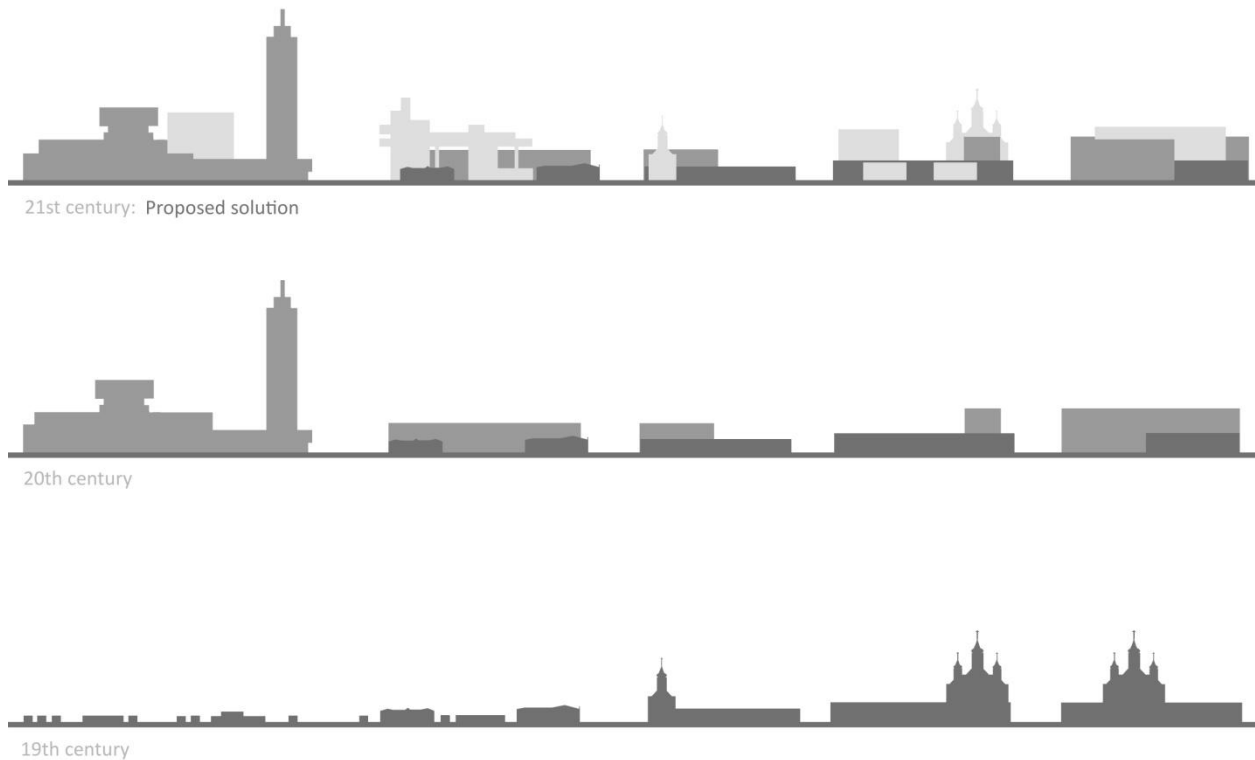


Fig. 7. Urban design: time layers approach

Urban Planning and the Urban Design Concept: The Museum Complex "The Epoch of the USSR"

It is proposed that the museum complex "The Epoch of the USSR" will be located in the Lenin Memorial Zone (in the area of 26 ha). To express the idea of a reconciliation in a city space, planning approaches were overlaid and combined. In an urban planning scale in a city structure provided by Soviet Modernism (with its huge spaces and with its solemn esplanade, leading to the main building, the "Lenin Memorial Museum" and having a sole massive building along an axis) a city texture of the previous periods (unclosed uneven blocks of low buildings that are copies of destroyed ones) was inserted. On an architectural scale, the point was to obtain the highest contrast between Soviet Modernism development and pre-revolutionary development, the two nearly opposite phases of one urban development process. Specific measures of urban design concept implementation include restoration of destroyed pre-revolutionary buildings (18th-19th centuries), renovation of the existing buildings of the Soviet period (20th century) and construction of new buildings (21st century) and new landscaping. Urban design proposals and the architectural design of the building are based on the ecological, economic and social aspects of the sustainability principle.



Fig. 8. Master plan of the museum complex "The Epoch of the USSR"

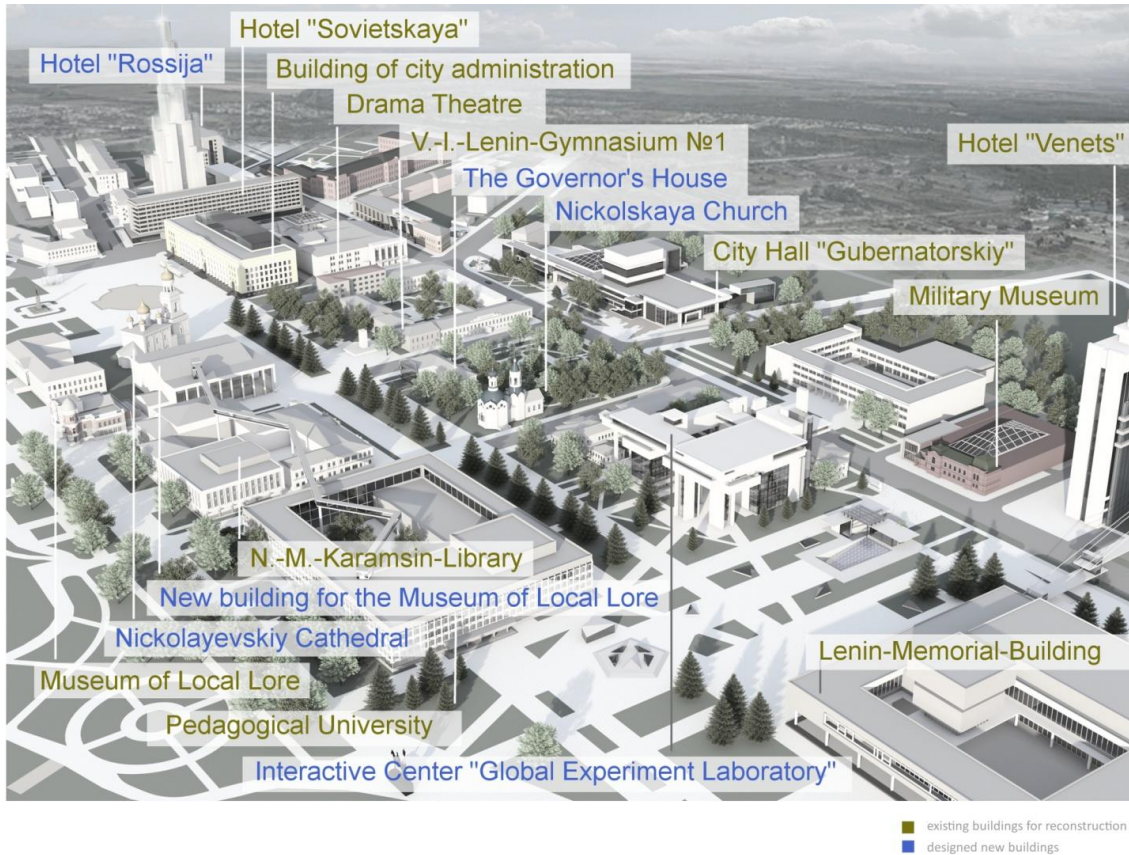


Fig. 9. Bird's-eye view of the museum complex "The Epoch of the USSR"

The question of cultural value substantiation is considered controversial. According to heritage protection principles, the described insertion may not have any cultural value, or even devalues Soviet Modernism. Aiming to strengthen the confrontational spirit of the city as the identity of the place and its intangible value, the concept "Reconciliation of the Epochs" could have validity and thus could be successful.

To save the city center environment from degradation, the historical layers should be maintained and augmented. In this case, considerable interventions can be considered relevant because they will form a comfortable and lively environment for further use.



Fig. 10. East elevation along the esplanade

The Architectural Concept of a Museum: The Interactive Center "Global Experiment Laboratory"

The creation not only of a traditional museum that people visit just to see the exhibits, but also a museum with interactive content that allows visitors to participate and become a part of a historical event, is an appealing trend in museum design.

The Museum's location is specified by the existing urban complex constructed in honor of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Lenin - the Lenin Memorial Zone. The Museum is a product of the Soviet era and acts as a powerful spatial and compositional structure, creating the effect of the global space.

To stress the experimental character of the existence of the Soviet Union, the image of an interactive museum and its content are based on innovative architectural ideas of the Soviet period, which resulted in a new creative direction of that time - Constructivism. The projected building reflects ideas of Soviet architects and artists (I. Leonidov, K. Malevich, E. Lissitzky and A. Rodchenko). The ideas, complemented by modern technological solutions and materials, obtain a new relevance.



11. Interactive Center "Global Experiment Laboratory"

Fig.



Fig. 12. The Interactive Center courtyard

The Museum building has a spatial structure composed of vertical pedestrian connections linked with exhibition galleries along the perimeter that aim to maximize the use of the ground surface under the building for public space and landscaping. The Center will contain interactive exhibition halls where global projects and achievements of the Soviet Union will be represented. The Interactive Museum architecture is woven into the urban fabric and is commensurate with neighboring buildings.

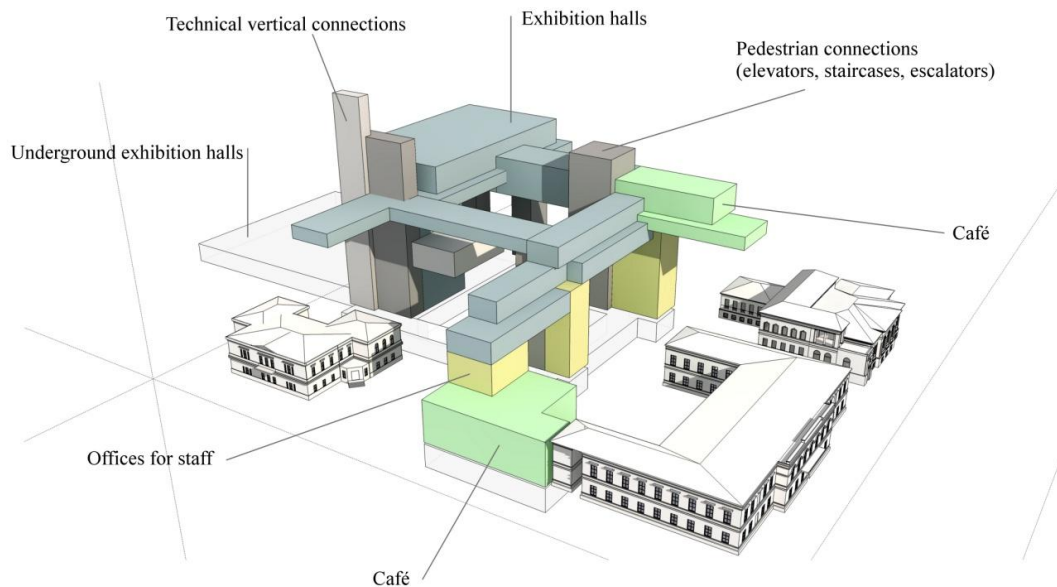


Fig.13. Functional zoning scheme

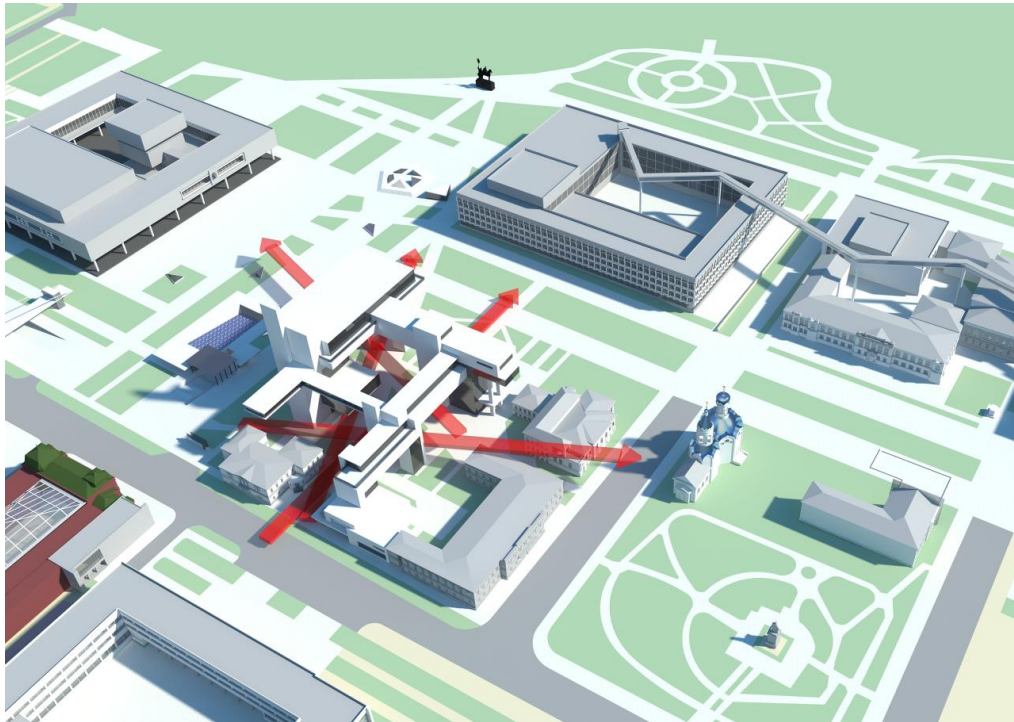


Fig. 14. Visual axes scheme

The compositional emphasis of the building is a seven-levelled atrium space that hosts the model of the Palace of the Soviets on a 1:20 scale (authors: architects V. Schuko and B. Iofan, 1930). The atrium is crossed by stairs, escalators and elevators. The glass elevator traveling up the main facade allows a magnificent panoramic view of the city center and the Volga River.

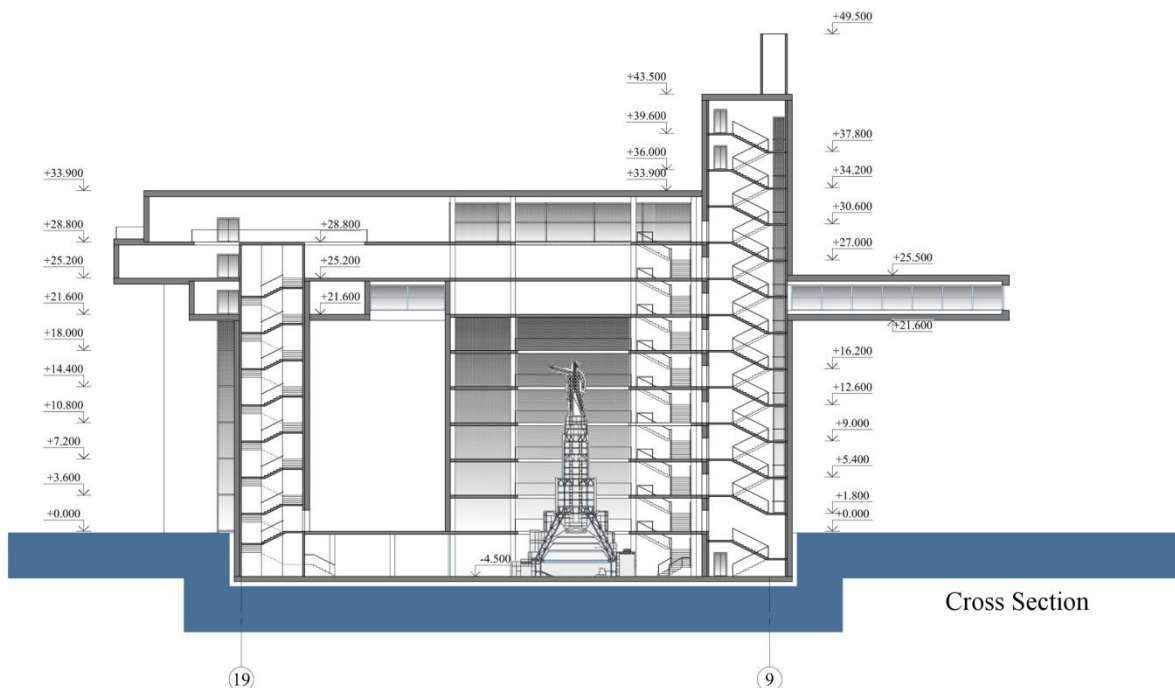


Fig. 15. Cross-section

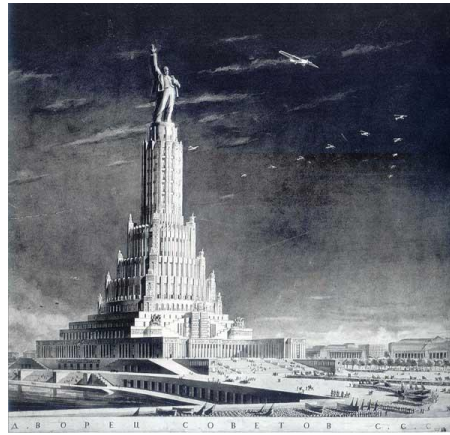


Fig. 16. The Palace of the Soviets: architects V. Schuko and B. Iofan, 1930
[<http://nmm.me/blogs/kryaker41/dvorec-sovetov/>]

The main entrance into the building is located on the square in front of the building and leads to an underground gallery, which leads visitors to the existing building of the Lenin Memorial Building and the projected Interactive Center. The underground gallery is very dark and narrow and contains exhibits of controversial and even tragic moments in Soviet history. Through the underground gallery visitors enter a well-lighted exhibition space in the main lobby with the model of the Palace of the Soviets. The visitors' transition from the dark gallery into the bright, big lobby should create a sublime feeling that symbolizes the Soviet people's dreams and expectations of a bright and perfect future. From the lobby on the ground level visitors walking up the stairs or using elevators and escalators enter galleries on upper levels where global achievements and never-realized mega-scaled projects of the Soviet Union will be represented.



Fig. 17. 1st-level layout (on the +0,000 mm level)

The main exhibition halls are located in the basement and on levels six through nine. The exhibition is composed in such a way that a visitor passing through the exhibition halls can “accumulate” through many fragments of exposition including unrealized projects in architecture, the transformation of nature, space missions, an expedition to Mars, animations on the history and alternative history of the USSR, the full image of the Soviet era and the feelings of its people.

Main exhibition halls:

- 1) Radio astronomical observations (attempted contact with aliens)
- 2) Experimental aircraft and military equipment
- 3) Terraforming of the Moon, Venus, Mars and the militarization of outer space
- 4) Experimental geology
- 5) Ideal city
- 6) Alternative energy
- 7) Predictions of science fiction writers
- 8) Huge hydro projects

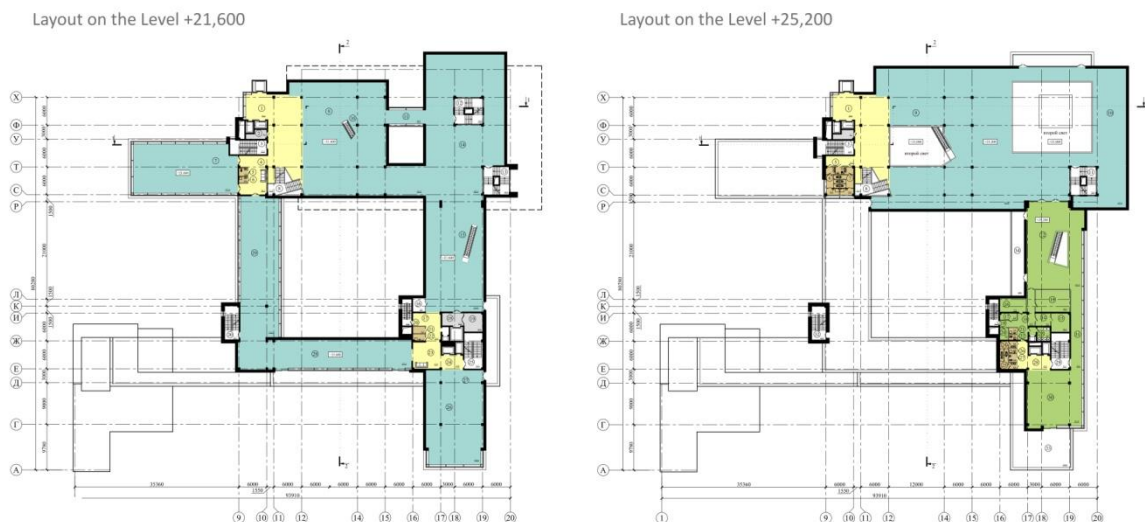


Fig. 18. Seventh- and eighth-level layouts

The building also hosts the offices of the Institute for the study of the USSR, including research laboratories, a library and discussion halls. In addition to the main entrance there are two more entrances: one from the esplanade and one from the opposite side (from Sovietskaya Street). They could be used for visitors of the temporary exhibitions and for visitors of the cafés that are located on the ground level and on the eighth level of the building.

Technical and economical rates:

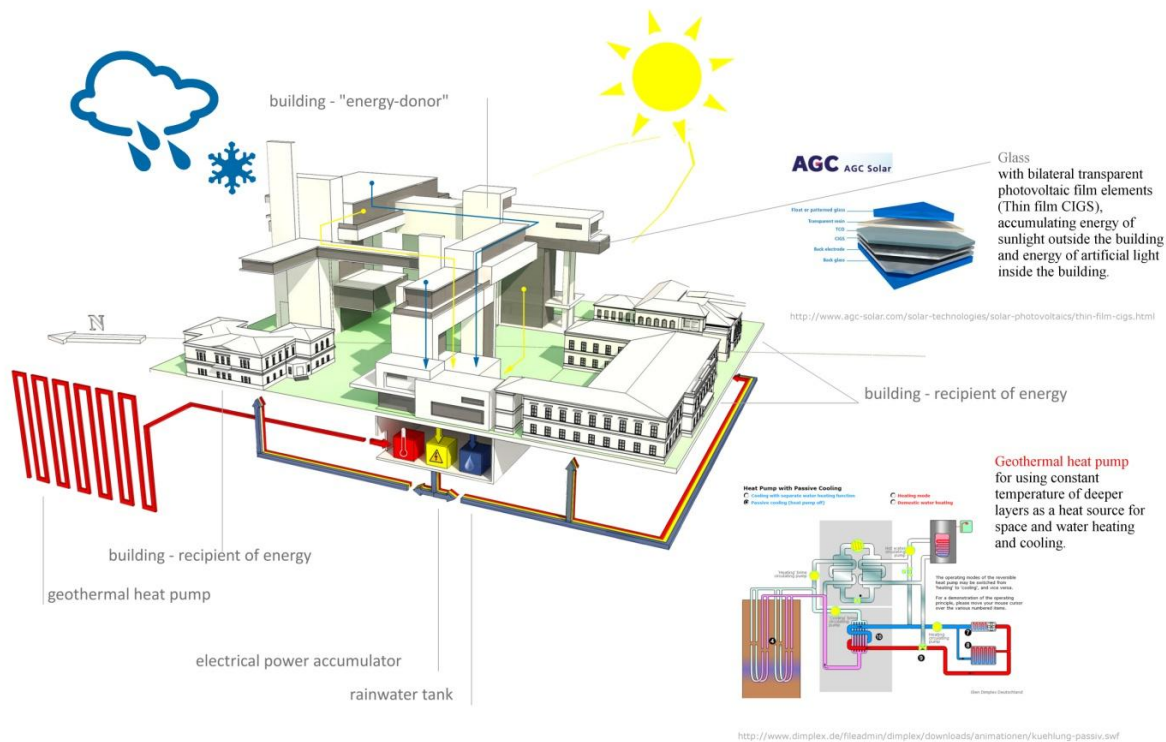
Building area – 11,200 sq.m

Total area – 9,800 sq.m

Exhibition halls area – 8,550 sq.m
(underground area – 4,200 sq.m)

The Interactive Center can accommodate 1 million visitors per year (3,000 visitors per day or 300 visitors per hour).

The building has been designed taking into account the principles of energy efficiency; for example, there is a ventilation and air conditioning system with exhaust air heat recuperation. It has been proposed to use geothermal heat pumps that convert thermal energy for heating, hot water and cooling. Large glazed surfaces covered with double-sided translucent film with photovoltaic cells accumulate energy outside from sunlight and inside from artificial light. Flat-roof surfaces aid the collection of rainwater and, with the help of thermal installation, the collection of water from melted snow. Water is then collected in a common tank for further use for the household and technical needs of the buildings. Thus, the Interactive Center building will produce enough electricity, heat and water for itself and the nearby existing historical buildings.



9. Scheme of the energy-efficient building

Fig.1

Conclusions

On the basis of the unique cultural heritage of the Soviet period concentrated in the Ulyanovsk city center, it will become possible to create "The Epoch of the USSR" museum complex as a major educational, enlightening, museum- and landscape-recreational complex. Furthermore, the central part of the city has long been in need of an upgrade, including a new material-cultural layer of the 21st century. "The Epoch of the USSR" in the coming decade could be a starting point for the formation of a cluster of cultural tourism and creative industries in the city. Creating a tourist destination will make a substantial contribution to the strengthening of a regional identity and to ensuring cultural sustainability and maintaining an awakened collective memory of the people.

The formation of a cluster of creative industries would increase participation of residents in the city life and their sense of being a part of history. This project could also be an opportunity for Ulyanovsk residents to realize the city as a symbol of the Socialist era of Russian history, as Saint Petersburg is a symbol of the Romanov Dynasty era and the cities of the Golden Ring are symbols of the Russian medieval era. The project could also be viewed as an example of the transformation of the Ulyanovsk cultural potential on the threshold of the centennial of the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917.

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