Architectural process in Russia in second half of the 20th - early 21st century

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Abstract. The paper seeks to identify the distinctive features of the architectural process as a concept of architectural studies and as a phenomenon, and suggests a methodology for studying the architectural process in Russia. Relevance. The need to study the architectural process in Russia in the second half of the 20th - first half of the 21st century was dictated by the following reasons: firstly, changes in the architectural creativity fundamentals expressing themselves in changes in the design techniques; secondly, development of information and computer technologies, which raised design to a qualitatively new level; third, the need to systematize the scientific knowledge of the architectural process that has been gained to date and reconsider the subject area of architectural history. Research methods. The study reviewed periodicals and research publications addressing the architectural process as a concept of architectural studies and as a specific phenomenon in the sphere of architecture. It is expected that the systematization of this information will enable certain tendencies to be revealed in the Russian architectural process. Conclusions. The proposed methodology for studying the architectural process as a phenomenon enabled three groups of changes to be identified in the Russian architectural process.

1. Introduction

The concept of architectural process is a category of architectural studies employed for describing and structuring the totality of events and phenomena in the contemporary architectural practice. Architecture theory treats structure and process as essential characteristics of architectural history knowledge [1,2].

According to S.P. Zavarikhin, the architectural process is a system of interrelated functioning of all social and professional phenomena and processes which determine the course of architectural evolution in a certain historical period [2,3]. In his view of the architectural process, S.P. Zavarikhin tried to formulate a "principle of action". Also, S.P. Zavarikhin proposed "a whole range of related notions – architectural life, style, direction, movement, school, etc." [1] influencing the architectural process.

It should be specially noted that the concept of architectural process introduced by S.P. Zavarikhin was formulated in support of the need to study architectural criticism and its development over major architectural time spans. Describing the architectural process, S.P. Zavarikhin proposed an idea of basic framework including three systems. The first one is a regulatory system, i.e. standards, directives, views, i.e., in fact, public sentiments. The second one is a consumer system, i.e. owners, tenants, recipients. The third one is a creative system: architect, customer, contractor. The integral
components of the basic framework is architecture and the participants of the architectural process. S.P. Zavarikhin sees as the basis of the architectural process the Marxist theory of the historical process with its concepts of «basis» and «superstructure», and socio-economic formations. Based on these, he examines stylistic trends in architecture and identifies periods in the development of architectural thought. In this general framework, S.P. Zavarikhin ranks architecture as secondary, giving the prevailing role to professional and social events and phenomena [2].

Considering the architectural process as special conditions of the evolution of architecture at the current stage, it is not sufficient to mention its participants, events and phenomena of architectural and non-architectural character. To understand the essence of the contemporary architectural process it is necessary to comprehend it as the result of architect’s activities. Moreover, it is not only individual architectural objects in the description of the architectural process that are an objective characteristic of a historical period (tangible expression of eventful history), but it can also be illustrated with the results of intangible (intellectual – architectural thought, art) architectural activities as a kind of professional landmarks of this or that historical period.

Examination of the architectural process as an integral part of the general history of architecture and building construction can help reveal changes taking place in the social and architectural reality and identify reasons for changes in the architectural practice. Such examination implies information structuring, establishment of system-level relationships, and assessment of effects produced by historic events and social phenomena on the current status of architecture. This generative area of architectural history knowledge calls for a review of the existing approaches to historical studies so that the evolution of architecture could be presented within the framework of a certain system of its objective laws and mechanisms. According to Fesenko D. I., this area of architecture history is evolving into a new discipline, which could be called ‘architectural process theory’ [1].

2. Architectural process studies in Russia

The currently available information on modern architecture and building construction provides vast material for conducting an analysis and developing a general idea of how the architectural process has been developing in Russia. As a matter of fact, numerous publications on architecture produce an effect on the architectural process. At the same time, textual descriptions of ideas and concepts remain little-studied from the perspective of architectural science; nor have they been consolidated into a system of new knowledge about Russian architecture. Tracing the publication of articles and texts on architecture over time could be an important step in the study of the architectural process in Russia.

The most representative period in terms of the influence of Russia’s eventful history on its architectural process is the late 1980s. This period was characterized by dramatic transformations in the country’s socio-political system and, as a consequence, numerous changes in the building design and construction context. Transition to a new format of social order, i.e. to private market, divided the architectural profession into separate clusters of spatial design, landscape architecture, interior design, etc. and triggered changes in form generation and professional self-identification.

2.1. Theoretical grounds for studying information on the architectural process

The following reasons have prompted this survey of information on the architectural process.

Firstly, a review of architectural periodicals should cast light on the objective reality in which new architectural ideas emerge and architectural design is practiced. As indicators of the architectural process, they could enable one to appreciate the variety of architectural reality and understand the dynamics of architectural life.

Secondly, a survey of research publications could help estimate the degree to which the architectural process has been studied as a phenomenon.

Thirdly, a comparison of professional publications and available knowledge on the architectural process should provide an insight into the specific features of the Russian architectural process and help understand the reasons for the change of the scientific paradigm in architectural history research.
2.2. Methodology of the architectural process study

The methodology employed for studying the architectural process has included three phases.

Phase one – collection and processing of factual material. To this end, two groups of information sources have been identified. The first group includes professional periodicals issued from the late 1980s till 2015, printed architectural publications and online magazines including overviews, reviews, criticism, descriptive papers, and personalia. The second group includes research publications: conference proceedings, collections of research papers, monographs, and textbooks.

Phase two – determination of the number of publications and research works dealing with the architectural process and examination of their qualitative characteristics. The qualitative characteristics of the publications have been assessed against the following reference items: object described (object of study in the publication); problems addressed in the publication; historical context (description of political, social, and cultural events, and characteristics of the period).

Phase three – development of a general concept on the status of the Russian architectural process and identification of trends in its evolution.

3. The architectural process in professional periodicals

A review of professional periodicals published from the late 1980s till 1990 has shown that the publications of that period were concerned with the achievements of the regions, cities and design organizations; heritage conservation issues, environmental protection in architectural design, the role of the architect in society, the language of architecture, architects’ creative work in other countries, and the creativity of young architects («Architecture of the USSR»). Many of the articles contain reports from professional events and architectural competitions. Concerning the historical context, the sphere of architecture and planning was a monopoly of the State and local authorities.

After 1990, the system of State and municipal control was replaced with private market actors and investors. Organizationally, the design process changed essentially, and its regular Russian participants now had to compete with foreign architects. This period is characterized by the appearance of a considerable number of printed periodicals on architecture along with their online versions, for example, «Architecture. Building. Design» , «Architectural Bulletin», «Architecture and Building of Moscow», «Architecture and Building of Russia», «Project Russia», «Project Siberia», «Project International», «Project Classics», and online magazines. The range of themes in these publications includes the general living standards, strengthening of the role of the State in social life, increasing corruption in the economic and social spheres of the country, and commercialization and degradation of culture, architectural science and education. In general, the focus of the professional discussions in the 1990s shifted to the influence of external factors on the development of the architectural process. The growing awareness of the importance of socio-political factors drew attention to the role of corporate and private customers in the architectural design practice, the entry of architectural activities into the space of market relations, and restoration of the Academy of Architecture and Civil Engineering. The publications also voiced concerns over the decreasing role of professional associations in general and the Russian Union of Architects in particular.

From the mid-1990s till the 2000s, the publications mainly addressed the issue of changing architectural typologies in the commissions and, as a consequence, its effects on the urban structure, abuse of public spaces and degradation of historical heritage and green areas («Architectural Bulletin», «Architecture and Building of Moscow»).

The publications of the early 2000s are concerned with the social responsibility of the architect, professional ethics, and statutory regulation of architectural design and planning activities. The status of the architectural profession in Russia is estimated in comparison with the status of the profession abroad («Project Russia», «Project Baikal», «Architecture. Building. Design», «Architectural Petersburg»). From the mid-2000s towards 2015 the focus of the publications shifted to the loss of creative initiative among architects and emergence of new professional points of reference («Project International», «Architectural Bulletin»). Particular concern was provoked by the expansion of western practitioners into the Russian market of design services and by the quality of architectural
works and the skills and competitiveness of the Russian architects. Among the highlights are also issues in professional development and the state of affairs in architectural science.

During this period, the Russian architectural practice was considered in the context of growing competition within the profession on the market of design services. The influence of the state machinery on the design practice was among the key issues. The authors attempted to understand the causes of the communicative gap between society and architects and the reasons for the emergence of a vogue for architecture. No less important was the question of the need to revive professional architectural criticism.

4. The architectural process in research publications
In the first half of the 1990s, the research literature saw first attempts to process theoretically the changes that were going on in the architectural process. The latter had to be considered as part of the international architectural process as well as of the national history, art, and culture. Although not numerous, the studies of this kind display a variety of research directions: general problems of national architecture (D.I.Fesenko, G.I.Revzin, V.L.Glazychev) [1; 4; 5], distinctive features of the creative practice (A.G.Rappaport, G.V.Esaulov) [6; 7], comparison of current national architecture with the previous historical periods and with western architecture (A.V.Ikonnikov, V.L.Khait, A.V.Bokov) [8,9,10], the position of architecture in the context of national culture (I.A.Azizyan, I.A.Dobritsyna) [11,12].

The contemporary architecture as a complex structure containing information on the drivers and parameters of development of architecture became the subject of publications. The theoretical foundations of the architectural process were employed by Fesenko D.I. for creating a predictive model for the evolution of modern architecture [1], by Tarasova I.V. and Shipitsyna O.A. for developing a strategy of criticism in the context of the contemporary architectural process [13,14], and by Kurbatov Yu.I. for considering the historical evolution of architectural and cultural life in Russia [15]. It is to be recognized that a major contribution to the development of knowledge of the architectural process was made by Zavarikhin S.P. in his fundamental works in the late 1980s [2,3].

5. Conclusions
A qualitative analysis of publications on architectural process has been carried out, which has revealed two main thematic directions. The first one encompasses critical analysis and includes reviews, overviews, commentaries, and critical papers. The second direction is substantive, including research and typological articles, descriptive materials, and personalia.

The authors of the critical analysis texts published reports from social and professional events and activities which influenced the development of the Russian architectural process and analyzed problems of modern architecture. The feature of these texts is that they contain author's reflections.

In substantive texts, the authors focused on a specific problem of Russian architecture. The information presented in these texts is meaningful, the structure of presentation is consistent, and the conclusions are well supported.

In general, the review of the two groups of information sources on the development of the architectural process in Russia in the second half of the 20th– early 21st century has revealed a number of chaotic changes, which can be consolidated into three groups. The first group includes institutional and organizational changes in architectural design. The second group covers changes in how modern-day architects understand design and research activities. The third group includes changes in the formal and substantive characteristics of the architecture of modern-day objects.

These groups of changes have given rise to a number of problems in architectural design, including an impaired professional image of Russian architects, commercialization of architectural creativity, and change of creative priorities. It should be noted, however, that these negative factors have also brought about positive changes, which have found expression in conceptual architectural creativity and opened up new possibilities for creative growth and for display of individuality by architects in the conditions of market competition.
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