Modern Role of Architectural Style Category in Russian Practice

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Abstract. The article examines the functional aspects of architectural style use as an instrument for communication, self-positioning, representation and commercial attractiveness. The modern Russian practice is marked by a predominance of decorating methods rather than architectural ones used to create an artistic image. Specific examples illustrate stylistic trends that are indicative of an identity crisis. The problem goes beyond the scope of a custom or corporate design. This is especially evident in the former Soviet Union republics. The style issue is inherent in the advertising and commercial sphere of interior design and furnishing promotion. One can state that the category of art studies has been introduced into the collective consciousness but in some extrinsic way. Marketing managers and designers who have a very vague idea of the fundamental scientific concepts form a new language and market demand not only for a design work product but also for its positioning. This leads to a semantic distortion of the architectural style characteristic and a misconception. At the same time, there is a growing need for new definitions and verbalizations of perceptual experience. The conclusions contain an assumption on a reversible scientific and practical process when the theory is forced to accept and attend to a spontaneously formed and deep-rooted system of meanings. The need to develop the architectural theory in the communication language realm is brought up. The research problem is stated both for social science and anthropology as well as for culturology and art history.

Keywords: architectural style, identity, stylization, modern architecture, artistic image.

1. Introduction
Since the end of the 20th century, we have observed a paradoxical situation regarding the category of architectural style. On the one hand, the professional community of architects is not involved in the discourse of art studies, and the concept of style itself is problematic in scientific practice. Leading architects also disregard the category of style in practice, they prefer to address the social economic and functional characteristics of their projects. If it is necessary to make a figurative representation, they would rather resort to the qualities of artistic and spatial composition. But, on the other hand, the term style is easily used by representatives of trade and service, who give themselves no trouble in the accuracy of definitions.

Thus, all the parties of an architectural process - the project developer, the consumer, the client, the executor, the builder, the development, the scientific community, the media - have different ideas about the subject of discourse. The category of style has lost its communicative function, and its meaning is even turning into the opposite. However, the reference to the category of style in practice is
determined by the need for a comprehensible language of communication. In addition to this, I propose to consider other relevant functions of the style that determine its role in post-Soviet architectural practice.

2. Main part

Numerous websites of design offices contain sections offering a brief insight into historical styles in a clumsy attempt to describe them. It is common among designers to demonstrate their works, which represent a palette of “styles”. As a rule, such classification is quite arbitrary, and on closer inspection, lacks the declared diversity. Modern printing technologies contribute to the distribution of colorful albums, encyclopedias and dictionaries of architectural terms [1-7]. However, even the books, whose very names suggest that they should explain stylistic differences, provide only illustrative material with a brief description of objects [1, 4].

Scientific articles written by professionals on the category of style, mostly address the history of architecture, studies of specific monuments and masters of the past. It is extremely rare to find systematic research of the category of style in its actual state. Among Russian quality sources, it is worth to mention a series of blog writings by the Doctor of Art History and architect, A.G. Rappoport [8-12]. The largest scope of materials on the style was published on the blog in 2011.

Thus, we come across with two parallel realities. In one of them - the scientific and professional one - the style is rarely addressed. And in the other - the style is referred to as an immanent property of an architectural structure. What is more, the semantic content of this category is different in both cases.

Custom orders are more closely associated with decoration and styling, rather than design (or even architecture). Nowadays, such names that pretend to denote a certain fashionable style (loft, provence, fusion, country, colonial and many others) are widespread. An attempt to define them results in little verbal difference and the visual one, as the objects of one style lack formal similarity. The examples of realization of the said “styles” show no clear characteristics and patterns of formation. When decorators apply more traditional attributes of historical styles to their creations, they just express the designers’ (or clients’) views on the object, its imagery and the impression it produces.

Interior design usually involves creation of an artistic image, rather than an architectural style. The perceptually predominant elements of the image associate with recognizable attributes of a certain style (in a particular viewer’s mind). Speaking about a period that began in the 19th century, D. Kirichenko points out that what in the past was acceptable in unique buildings, and yet only in their ostentatious and ceremonial sphere, is now used in mass structures and everyday items. The lowering of hierarchy level allows the sphere of style art to incorporate works that previously seemed unworthy of it [13].

Styles of epochs are embodied in emblematic works of art, such as palaces, temples and architectural complexes. Nowadays, their elements are cited, and stylistic devices are used in mass building. In the new context, the attributes that determine the style lack unity. Like at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the task of an architectural image is the ability to make a person (client) feel involved in the historical process.

Figures 1 and 2 show examples of images borrowed from a foreign culture and applied to large buildings in cities that have their own rich history. The history of Yoshkar-Ola dates back to 1584. A new building, which is positioned as a “building in Italian style”, reveals a direct reference to famous Venetian palazzos. Another example shows the ministry building in Kazan (more than 1000 years of history).
Large buildings that have been erected recently in Kazan represent a hybrid of kitsch with oriental ornamentality and French classicism. In this case, the style performs a compensatory function in addition to the communicative one. An expulsion and replacement of reality by theatricalization, and its identification with an illusory image take place. An attempt to strengthen or find the national
identity also involves the declaration of continuity and the deliberate use of traditional symbols. Stylization in this case reproduces the images of a remote historical epoch. The use of traditional symbols of identity is opposite to assimilation, it indicates lasting effectiveness and passionarity, but not stagnation. By way of example, the creation of a new capital in the former Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan can be cited. World-famous architects from different countries were engaged in the project. For example, the unique building Khan-Shatyry (Figure 3) and other facilities were built with the participation of the architecture firm of Norman Foster. The city plan was based on the competitive project of Kisho Kurokawa.

![Khan Shatyr – Shopping and Entertainment Centre in Astana](https://www.aisberg.com/en/photogallery/hanshatir)

**Figure 3.** Khan Shatyr – Shopping and Entertainment Centre in Astana (photo from https://www.aisberg.com/en/photogallery/hanshatir)

Stylization tendencies are especially prominent under the conditions of the identity crisis (individual or collective), in particular, in the post-Soviet republics. The causes of this crisis are “the denial of symbols, the dissociation of collective memory, ... the disharmony between the descriptive and the normative images of self, the discontinuity in history, the discrepancy between the self-image of the culture and its images in other cultures, and finally the inferiority feeling against a more perfect culture” [14].

In an attempt to form a powerful image of a large corporation or state, the choice of style preferences is limited to radical versions of modernism or historicism that depend on the “target audience”. National romantic variations of the historical style imply the expectation of a positive response from the “internal” addressee. Architectural works of a representative nature aimed at the external response resemble a merry-go-round, where the novelty of forms and compositional techniques are the main criteria for the image created.

The category of style performs two main functions for the collective consciousness - the communicative one and the commercial one. They overlap partially. Thus, the architectural style functions as a means of self-identification, self-positioning and is an object of upscale consumption. Therefore, at the end of the XXth century, Russian architecture underwent a number of semantic changes. First, the social polarity of modernist aesthetics changed - the architecture of functionalism abandoned the revolutionism of the 1920s to become the embodiment of respectability and elitism. In
an opposite way, it resembled something that occurred in the late 1970s, when classicism was no longer perceived as a limited officious style and became a model of romanticism, against the background of predominating concrete and glass of the industrial method. S. Khan-Magomedov distinguishes two global international superstyles; they are the architecture of orders and modernism [15]. At present, the amplitude of fluctuations between historicism and modernism in Russia has damped and there are almost no specific preferences at all levels of orders, from individual to public ones. However, the collective consciousness has a fixed idea about a linear ordering of objectively existing styles of architecture. With respect to historical styles, the idea of their strict succession in certain chronological frameworks is also erroneous. It is difficult to overcome this stereotype.

In modern sociological studies, “massness” is considered conventional and pretending to be total. Everyday life is not to be identified as profane; it acts rather as a guarantee of something illustrative, visible, bright and realizable. We can talk about fundamentally different ways to open up the world; they cross and come into conflict. In the XXth century, “massness” began to be treated not as a marginal segment of social life, but as a principle of functioning of modern society as a whole. “Massness” itself came to be understood not as a breakthrough of the irrational, but as the particularities of a social organization characterized by the uniformity of life, the formation of uniform standards of behavior and consumption [16].

The principle of stylistic classification of objects, genres and trends of art was formed only in the XIXth century and was a kind of convention. The constantly increasing scope of facts and knowledge can hardly be arranged in a hierarchy. It leads to gradual disordering of knowledge. The apparent clarity of formal features of great historical styles is also deceptive. For example, A. Kaplun writes that the “style of epoch” loses the criterion of uniformity; it represents a diversity of artistic and plastic manifestations and forms of vision of the epoch [17].

G. Revzin points out that the central position of the category of style in modern science is beyond doubt. Apart from style, art history lacks any other means to designate any community of material observed in history. Therefore, any studies aimed at analyzing general patterns turn to be related to the category of style [18].

The so-called “large” (historical) styles are highly heterogeneous both in the given time interval and in the territorial aspect. Even within the limits of a country and an epoch, there were schools, directions, regional trends and interferences. For example, if we compare Renaissance architecture of France and Italy (neighboring countries with the common Christian ideology), or (even closer) – that of northern and central Italy, we will see “different” at first glance buildings. On the contrary, the works of Classicism and the Renaissance have more similarities than differences. The architectural style and views on architecture are an integral part of a broader whole, namely, they represent social aesthetic concepts of a certain historical period.

The efforts to classify the stylistics of artistic phenomena of the XIXth, XXth and XXIst centuries are ineffective. The concept of style in its everyday use equals to an artistic image, author’s originality, manner, modern trend or an imprinted association. However, since these associations depend on erudition, professional society and even slang accepted in a certain circle, such designations of “style” may result ambiguous and may not claim to be systemic. For example, “country” (literally “rural”) cannot be an integral style by definition, since villages of different regions have their own traditions determined by local materials, crafts, climate and mythology. And what is called “country” in one case, in another will be referred to as “exotic”, as it is a matter of subjective assessment. In any case, the initial meaning of prototypes changes, because the country mode of life was formed by labor skills and ensured survival with a limited set of local resources. Whereas new structures that are now stylized as “country”, as a rule, serve for leisure and their furnishing is nonfunctional.

For example, when constructing the Olympic facilities in Sochi, hotels were designed as Swiss chalets, but, according to the architectural critic G. Revzin, “a Swiss chalet is originally a work of wooden architecture and is not very large; here things are large, in a way, they are a kind of huts that have grown in size five times”, with five-seven stories, gable roofs and very salient balconies girdling the facades [19]. Speaking about the style of ski resort towns in Sochi designed by the architects M.
Filippov and M. Atayants, Revzin also notes that “here, in Krasnaya Polyana, our country has reinvented the very typology of a historic settlement ... today nobody in the world can solve such problems at such a level ... Russian neoclassicism is a unique phenomenon, and in this respect our school excels nowadays the European, and even the American one”.

The peculiarities of Russian architectural tradition can be underlined by the statement of the architect F. Razumovsky: “The language of spatial images transmitted to people what today is called a cultural code. Western perception of the world is inherently different. It is verbal and more connected with texts and signs” [20]. Russian architectural school should pay more attention to the skill of verbal communication outside the professional community, because there is a growing need for new formulations and verbalization of perceptual experience. Deficiency in language means for expressing an architectural concept, as well as for presenting and maintaining the completed project, resulted in resorting to style characteristics due to the lack of any generally recognized system of meanings. Incorrect references to historical styles (gothic, antiquity) are becoming more frequent, although they are quite fully characterized, both in the iconographic and semantic aspects. These processes consequently lead to the destruction of the main function that the category of style performs for the collective consciousness, and namely, the communicative one. Mutual understanding can be achieved neither at the personal level nor at the level of interaction between the client and the contractor (designer, architect) due to the “language barrier”. Marketing managers and designers who have a very remote idea of fundamental scientific concepts, form a new language and market demand, not only for a product of design work, but also for its positioning. This leads to a semantic distortion of the style characteristic of architecture and a misconception.

The category of style has become important due to its commercial and axiological functions. This is observed not only in Russia. Charles Jencks, a recognized theorist, notes in the interview that abstract modernism of the mid-twentieth century led to the iconographic deficit, to the predominance of pure aesthetics and technological progress. The choice of iconography and style are the most important points through which the architect's creative freedom manifests itself. They should be discussed publicly, but architects often leave it out. James Sterling emphasized: “If you start talking about the style or certain meanings with the client, you will lose the order, because you will be considered an expensive architect” [21]. The commercial function is relatively new for Russian practice, about 30 years, that is, the age of only one generation. However, the ideological and axiological functions have dominated for a long time and surpassed in importance even the artistic figurative one. The role of style as a means of representation expresses all functions of this category in an integral way. Moreover, this is also relevant at the level of creating government buildings and constructing national Expo pavilions, as well as corporate buildings, and even at the level of individual interiors.

3. Conclusion
The issue of the development of architectural theory in the realm of the modern language of communication is one of the most significant. It concerns not only the category of style. To achieve this promising goal, a scientific formulation of research tasks is required for social science and anthropology, as well as culturology and art criticism. Doctor of Architecture L. Kholodova claims that quite a lot of academic architects still believe that the fundamental science is the history of architecture and only. The creation of a new architecture requires an advanced architectural science that is closely connected with other fields of knowledge and occupies a place among the fundamental sciences. Research on the theory of architecture becomes systematic. Research in the field of innovative architecture is especially important, as it implies the development of the architecture of the third global style [22,23].

Acknowledgments
The work was supported by Act 211 Government of the Russian Federation, contract № 02.A03.21.0011.
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