Local Culture Preservation Through Design in Global City

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Abstract. Global cities are becoming the centers of innovations in the XXI century. The image of urban society is a multicultural one, stipulating cross-cultural communications, but the trends show something different. The symbols of national culture dissolve in the information flow, and the differences are neutralized. This article reflects upon the preservation of the local culture that was formed throughout history under the new conditions of existence. Local culture, in this article, stands for a system of cultural values formulated by a group of people in a certain territory. This research covers the visual identification of local culture expressed through design. Within the modern communications model, design can reflect the most significant and prominent features of local culture in a visual form. The current visual culture of big cities features a hodgepodge of styles that demonstrates the dissociation of the visual environment as a result of modernist and post-modern project technologies and, to a lesser extent, specific local cultures. This article deals with the positive examples of competition works by young designers where the local culture of regions is seamlessly entailed in the modern visual environment. Such initiatives are the signs of shifting towards the reassessment of the cultural values of regions. Launching an open dialog about values serves as a boost to preserve the cultural heritage for future generations. The authors see any initiatives from professional communities, civil society organizations, and researchers as an important part of public introspection about the identification and preservation of regional culture in a global city.

1. Introduction
The contemporary civilization demonstrates the rapid introduction of innovations in all areas of people's activities. The transformation of communications led to changes in the economy, politics, culture, and social life. The prophecies of McLuhan have come true [1], the modern world has become globalized, and it relies heavily on information and technology.

2. Research relevance and literature review
The XXI century demonstrates the strengthening of urban culture. Global cities are becoming the centers of innovations. The image of the urban community is a multicultural one. According to U. Eco [2, P.33], this image stipulates cross-cultural communications because cultural phenomena are communications. The current trends are, however, different. Indiscernibility and difference are generic factors of culture and communication that facilitate both the transfusion and the isolation of cultures. National culture and traditions are the basis of communications, and simultaneously they are the source of ‘differences’ in the information flow. Currently, the symbols of national culture are dissolving in the information flow, and the differences are gradually neutralized. D. Hell, D. Goldblatt,
E. McGrew, and J. Perraton [3] underline that globalization shapes cultural exchange with the intensity and at rates never experienced before. This exchange reduces the significance of a certain regional culture that lost its locality and borders. There has been a shift in cultural interactions and the transition to western mass culture. Peter L. Berger in his research on the globalization of culture [4, P. 9] writes that “it is beyond doubt that there is an emerging global culture, and this culture is American in origin and content”. V. Kurennoy, a Russian philosopher, contradicts Berger claiming that “the habit of attributing the global civilization of modernity to a specific country” is invalid. “We used to attribute it to Europe for a long time, and now we assign it to the US but that is wrong: modernity is by nature indifferent to its local and historical origin”. Arguing about the ‘local culture’, the author claims that “Exactly because modernity has no roots, people for the first time start to feel them, it is here that the ‘historical feeling’ or the understanding that the local culture and its history matter is born” [5, P. 26].

3. Statement of problem
A certain cultural code resides in any confined territory, in every resident of this territory and the community as a whole. Even when a person leaves their motherland, they carry this code inside themselves for all their lives. The problem of peoples’ relocation both within a country and from developing countries to global cities is known as the ‘reverse globalization’ [6]. Immigrants bring their customs, languages, and religions to the new territory and create a transcultural environment there. R. Robertson, a globalization theorist and a professor at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, UK [7] coined the term of “glocalization”, i.e., the combination of global and local in the process in question. This trend presents a problem for the local culture. It is especially dangerous for the Russian culture that does not subdue but accepts foreign features and traditions, thus eroding its own identity.

Globalization eliminates differences between cultures. This article reflects upon the preservation of the local culture that was formed throughout history under the new conditions of existence.

4. Theory
The authors understand ‘local culture’ as a system of cultural values formed by a group of people within some boundaries (geographical, historical, social, political, religious, linguistic, etc). This culture has some specific features expressed in cross-cultural communication via identity and markers. This research covers the visual identification of local culture expressed through design tools.

In Russia, the problem of cultural identity was first tackled by philologists, semiologists, and culture scholars. D. S. Likhachev, academy fellow [8], in the 1980es declared a cultural, educational, scientific, and academic concept know as the Ecology of Culture that urged to preserve the cultural heritage. This idea became a conceptual basis for many areas of science and creative arts and determined the orientation of research works for many years to come. This concept is relevant up to day, and it can be manifested in various formats, including the search for new forms and methods of expressing cultural identity.

Culture is a living organism with its history of development including ups and downs. O. Spengler [9] analyzed the achievements of different cultures comparing their existence with the morphology of a living being. Yu. Borev, a Russian philosopher, develops his ideas and claims that culture in all its aspects reflects its ‘genetic pool’, the individual and unique. It is related to its “form and content as the ‘form’ and ‘content’ of a living organism relate to its genes that determine the organization of the entire creature, its individual, genus and species features, and the type of its integrity” [10, p. 218].

The problem of the local culture existing in a global city requires conceptualization, new approaches, searching for ways, and identity markers. Today’s society is overflowing with information and lacks meaning, according to R. Verganti, a professor at Polytechnic University of Milan [11]. The key goal of visual communications is the conceptualization of events. It is crucial to find the answers to the question “why?”, rather than “how” among the abundance of opportunities, which requires a meaningful visual image and not new ideas.
In other words, design can reflect the most significant and prominent features of the ‘local culture’ in a visual form within the modern communications model. The authors believe that it is impossible to keep the local culture unchanged in the modern world. “Unchanged” can be understood differently here. The culture can be unchanged because it is isolated or because its old and tried forms petrified and became obsolete for today's world. It can also be replication and quoting of sometimes random, fashionable trends. On one hand, remaining unchanged is impossible in the age of global communications. On the other hand, some researchers claim that the complete erosion of borders has a negative effect manifested in the loss of identity. This calls for balance and a new form of local culture identity markers relevant to the contemporaries.

With all the transparency of the visual form, this set of cultural codes requires dedicated research on a deeper meaningful level. According to O. I. Genisaretskiy, a philosopher and design theorist, the existence of the receding cultural values in modern conditions requires a set of project efforts that are not possible “without research, as well as social and communications work” [12, p. 431]. He stresses that the formation of a modern environment requires the consideration of all the layers that are new and more prominent in social and cultural terms, where the land shifts from being a living condition to being a symbol of spiritual life.

The current visual culture of big cities features a hodgepodge of styles that demonstrates the dissociation of the visual environment as a result of modernist and post-modern project technologies and, to a lesser extent, specific local cultures. In most cases, one can observe that elements and forms of the traditional local culture are included in the modern works of visual art and design, which is the most obvious and accessible way to address the issue. This stylistic device has been well-known since the middle of the XXth century.

The attempts of tackling traditional regional culture in project work today often take the form of reproducing or directly quoting archaic signs and forms found in museums. When artists and designers introduce artifacts of folk crafts, trades, and local culture markers in the modern visual imagery, they forget that these artifacts were created within an authentic culture and reflected the values and meanings of their time.

For instance, traditional patterns from various regions of Russia that are closely associated with crafts and materials are often used as ‘visual quotes’. Therefore, Gzhel, Khokhloma, and Zhostovo patterns are used on modern, incompatible forms and non-conventional materials. The objects replicating the Dymkovo toys or Bogorodskoye wooden toys are implanted into the urban environment as foreign objects that are not compatible with either the form, or the scale, or the project reality. The elements of folk crafts are juggled with without understanding the project problem and making a new visual code.

For many centuries, people used a very limited set of materials and processing technologies to create a just as limited pool of base forms [13]. "The conditions for the formation of the social and cultural identity of materials, technologies, and forms were fully present, not to mention their very slow, almost imperceptible evolution over time" [14,p.108]. The evolution of all these factors went extremely slowly. Today, the development of technology changes by the day, and technological developments provide people with new and diverse materials that can change their shape and form previously impossible functional qualities and visual compositions. With this diversity, it is difficult to reconcile the attentive and reverential craftsman approach to material and the modern immediacy of mass production.

The problem of the seamless interplay of the natural and artificial environment is addressed in the work by H. Simon [15]. The author notes that any transformation of one situation into another requires project activities and searching for ways of adaptation. Andrea Branzi, one of the leaders of Italian design [16], addressed the ecology of an artificial environment for the first time. He does not see it as a design method but rather as an ethos, a system of values and ideals, careful attitude, the spirit of understanding and empathy towards the existing sources, the fear to break the balance between tradition and innovation.
5. Research findings

The Design and Craft competition that took place in Nizhniy Novgorod, a large economic center of Russia, in 2019, is an interesting example of bringing up the problem of cultural identity. Nizhegorodskaya Oblast is home to 27 historic crafts, which amounts to 40% of all folk crafts in Russia [17].

Artistic craftwork is one of the forms of folk art that is grounded in the local culture. It stipulates the mastery, transition, and development of authentic folk art traditions that were formulated historically in a given region with the associated social and household infrastructure and raw materials. Folk crafts have always combined the manufacturing of daily objects and the art of their production and decoration. The artifacts reflected the historical, spiritual, and cultural traditions of the people, and thus they epitomized the distinctive features of the traditional Russian culture.

The purpose of the competition was not only to support the crafts in Nizhegorodskaya Oblast but also to help companies establish new contacts, establish modern and profitable folk craft production enterprises and, most importantly, find new approaches and development opportunities based on specific production facilities and technologies.

The competition was supposed to result in the production of a practical and (or) decorative object manufactured following the traditions of a given craft type, its technologies, and the manufacturing base. The participants had to present a prototype for a new souvenir, artistic accessory, or household object manufactured at a specific enterprise and fit for mass production.

The hosts of the competition selected five crafts: Khokhloma painting (Semenov); Khokhloma painting (Syomino, Koverninskiy district); Gorodets painting (Gorodets); black-glazed ceramic (Balakhna); Nizhegorodskiy guimp lace embroidery (Chkalovsk). The participants of the competition studied the history of the craft and the manufacturing capabilities of each craft, went on tours to production sites, and consulted craftspeople. All these manufacturers are located within 100 kilometers from Nizhniy Novgorod and are struggling to survive. Therefore, the competition expanded the opportunities for these crafts through their adaptation for today's visual environment and created a large information field around the problem of visual code localization, selected crafts, and the technical and technological peculiarities of the manufacturing process.

A total of 147 projects were submitted for the Design and Craft competition. Winners were determined by the prototypes they produced using the craft. The projects were mainly submitted by young designers and they showed a brand-new approach to problem setting and solution.

The Design and Craft competition is a successful way to find new value for traditional crafts in the context of the global culture.

The question posed to many young Russian designers is as follows: which is more important for the modern local culture: recreating historical technologies or receiving project work experience through the adaptation of old technologies to the modern age? While immersing herself into the origins of traditional crafts, O. Mikkova, a designer, set herself a goal to adapt folk patterns into the living environment. In 2015, she approached Khokhlomskaya Rospis JSC with an offer to produce a series of modern-style desk lamps with some of the elements decorated with the Khokhloma painting. These elements were made of basswood, processed using traditional techniques, and painted by hand. The full production cycle took 58 days [18]. The artistic work of Yulia Gerasimova with the traditional sources of local cultures is another positive example. She introduced the images and symbols of old Russian culture into the modern living environment in a form of embroidered amulets. She used such ancient ornamental patterns as Makosh-Bereginiya, the Tree of Life, and Orepey adding her own style and interpretations. A little late, this designer created drafts for her signature collection entitled My Zhostovo. Seasons and began a collaboration with the Zhostovo plant [10]. She developed a collection of plates and trays for modern interiors that had all of the traditional techniques and regional craft forms but also featured modern visual rendering.

The unique wooden architecture of the Russian North became the basis of a collection of signature lamps called the Shingle by E. Tuktamisheva [20]. Dome-shaped chandelier designs featuring many small shingles appeared in social media and received a great deal of admiration from subscribers. It
was crucial to find a manufacturer that would be able to bring this project to life. In the end, it was
done by Sofia-Decor. A. Koshcheyeva, an object designer, works with birchbark [21]. This material is
durable and does not require special care, it is also flexible and eco-friendly. The designer created the
MOYA brand is now producing birchbark chandeliers, chairs, baskets, and vases. Her production
bases are located in Tomsk and Ivanovo Oblasts. The manufacturing combines manual labor and
modern technology, like the laser cutting of elements.

6. Conclusions
There has been a shift towards the reassessment of the cultural values of regions. There was an attempt
to introduce new, unexpected artistic techniques and technical solutions to help seamlessly adapt
traditions to the visual environment of a big modern city.

One of the ways local culture manifests itself in a global city is resorting to roots, crafts, and elements of
ethnocultural heritage. Competitions and project activities of designers represent the efforts to
reinvigorate, individualize, and identify the living environment. It is an important and necessary
experience in the context of the current age.

Yu. Lotman, an expert in semiology, claimed that every technical revolution generates new forces,
and these forces multiply with every new stage of civilization development. Humanity shall
conceptualize new opportunities and seamlessly adapt to them [22]. O. I. Genisaretskiy, a philosopher
and a design theorist, also believed that the process of social transformations associated with the
society's transition to a new age is inevitably associated with the “value shift” [12, p.420]. According
to this author, it is necessary to “trace the orientation of value changes” and dedicate oneself to a
continuous “axiological introspection”. Genisaretskiy sees the research and academic study of the
links between “value systems” (in our case, it is the visual identity markers of local culture and their
integration into contemporary communication environment) as the methods to achieve the said
introspection. The launch of an "open dialog on values" is a "new responsibility” boost for the
contemporaries to preserve cultural heritage for future generations. The authors of this article also see
initiatives from professional communities, civil society organizations, and researchers (competitions,
festivals, academic publications, etc) as an important part of public introspection about the
identification and preservation of regional culture in a global city.

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