

ARCHITECTURE OF TBILISI – ON THE BORDERLINE OF TWO WORLDS. PART II

Kinga PALUS ^a, Joanna ZABAWA-KRZYPKOWSKA ^b

^aDr. Arch. Eng.; Faculty of Architecture, The Silesian University of Technology, M. Strzody 10, 44-100 Gliwice, Poland
E-mail address: kinga.palus@polsl.pl

^bDr. Arch. Eng.; Faculty of Architecture, The Silesian University of Technology, M. Strzody 10, 44-100 Gliwice, Poland
E-mail address: joanna.zabawa-krzypkowska@polsl.pl

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Abstract

The paper presents selected examples of Tbilisi's architecture from the 19th and 20th centuries as well as the modern one constructed in the last five years. The main task is to show the architectural variety reflecting the turbulent history of the country. It is notable that in spite of the influence exerted by the neighbouring nations, invaders and enemies the art of Georgia had always been connected with the local traditions and the architects were able to create their own forms unprecedented anywhere else.

The study was divided into two parts. The first one deals with selected examples of the sacred architecture and the architecture of the Old Town (Architecture of Tbilisi – on the borderline of two worlds Part I). The second one is devoted to the architecture of the 19th and 20th centuries and to the latest projects (Architecture of Tbilisi – on the borderline of two worlds Part II).

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia wybrane przykłady architektury Tbilisi z XIX i XX wieku oraz najnowszej powstałej w ostatnim pięcioleciu. Głównym wątkiem jest ukazanie różnorodności architektonicznej wynikającej z burzliwej historii państwa. Na uwagę zasługuje fakt, iż pomimo wpływów sąsiadów, okupantów i wrogów, sztuka tego kraju zawsze związana była z miejscowymi tradycjami, a architekci potrafili wytworzyć własne formy niespotykane nigdzie indziej.

Keywords: Contemporary architecture; Tbilisi in the 19th and 20th centuries; The latest projects.

1. INTRODUCTION

Medieval Tbilisi was destroyed as a result of the Persian invasion in 1795, that is why the contemporary architecture consists mainly of buildings from the 19th century. Bourgeois buildings are the tenement houses and edifices which refer to the classicism and secession as well as to the oriental styles. The buildings are distinguished by the diversity of forms, difference of dimensions and functional solutions. Narrow, winding streets and open courtyards full of grapevines, which are vibrant with life, and the washing hung out on balconies, that is the sight of the streets running from the main points in the city, i.e. the Old Town – Moedoni and the Modern City. Incredible impression is made

by the wealth and poverty bordering and intermingling with each other everywhere. Elegant houses, restaurants, cafes stand next to dilapidated and deserted houses without window panes, greengrocer's shops and similar buildings. In the streets you can see elegant shops and women selling bread, nuts, lemons and pomegranates directly on the street.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

Literary and photographic analyses were applied in the paper as well as individual "in situ" observations with particular attention paid to changes related to the ancient historical urban tissue and the changes to the

picture of the city in connection with new architectural and urban planning solutions. The study was based on the research concerning the history of the state, art and architecture, and the influence decisive for the form of architectural solutions. Then the attention was directed to selecting the characteristic features of specific types of solutions to the modern architecture of Tbilisi.

Precise description of the selected topic, pattern of the research and the purpose of the work can be found in Part I.

3. MODERN CITY

In the 19th and 20th centuries Tbilisi was distinctly divided into a traditional eastern part and a modern European one. At the beginning of the 19th century the construction of the main traffic artery of the city began, currently known as the Rustaveli Avenue. The avenue starts at the Freedom Square, which is situated in the western part of the old city.

The first building constructed in that street was the palace of the Caucasus's viceroy. 1845 was the year of a great development of the city. Rapid urban planning expansion resulted in almost complete severance of ties with the Georgian architectural traditions.

It evidently derived more from the classicist patterns prevailing in the cities of the Russian Empire. The city used to grow under the direction of an Italian architect Giovanni Scuderi.

At the end of the 1960's the city was dominated by the wave of eclecticism. Neo-Renaissance and neo-Gothic buildings were constructed, and then the modernistic ones (at the turn of the centuries). Political, cultural and social life have concentrated along the Rustaveli Avenue. There are government buildings, cultural institutions, museums, hotels, shops, restaurants, including the Governor Palace built in the classicist style, Georgian National Museum named after Simon Janashia, Rustaveli Theatre (Fig. 4) with ornaments in the rococo style or the Paliashvili Opera House (Fig. 1) constructed at the end of the 19th century, which resembles more the mosque or the Persian palace, where the inspiration was drawn from the Islamic art.

The building of the Parliament (Fig. 3) was built in 1940's. That building witnessed the struggle for independence. Georgia's "rose revolution" ended up when the demonstrators barged into the parliament building in 2002.



Figure 1.
The Paliashvili Opera



Figure 2.
Building of a school for pupils "from good homes"



Figure 3.
The Parliament building

Behind the parliament building there is a nineteenth-century school building for children from so called "good homes". The present building is a reconstruction because the former one was destroyed during the civil war in 1991/1992 (Fig. 2).



Figure 4.
The Rustaveli Theatre



Figure 5.
Building of the former Ministry of Highway Construction
and currently the Bank of Georgia



Figure 6.
Building of the former Ministry of Highway Construction
and currently the Bank of Georgia

3.1. Building of the Former Ministry of Highway Construction and Transport of the Georgian Socialist Soviet Republic

An interesting example of the architecture from the Soviet times is the building of the former Ministry of Highway Construction and Transport of the Georgian Socialist Soviet Republic. Since 2011 it is the headquarters of the Bank of Georgia in Tbilisi. Situated in Gagarin Street at the Kura River the edifice was constructed in 1975 and had been designed by George Chakhava, Jurab Jalaghania and an engineer Temur Tkhlava. The chief architect George Chakhava was at that time (in 1970) the deputy minister of highway construction. George Chakhava carried out a lot of projects in Georgia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Latvia.

Architecture of the building is based on the concept of the Space City and the inspiration for the project was, according to the author, individuality and beauty of each region of Georgia. Dynamic form of cuboidal blocks – three parts are oriented to the east-west axis, and two to the north-south axis, it springs up straight from the hill surrounded by trees.

The shape of the building is to resemble a spreading tree which is similar to the trees growing over the slopes of the Caucasus. According to the architect's concept the eighteen-storey building hangs above ground, thus it covers less space and gives it back to nature. Vertical and horizontal partitions, which are accentuated in the block of the building, refer to nature – perpendicular lines look like tree trunks and the horizontal lines like crowns – everything was to be designed so as to resemble a forest. All of this should give a sense of comfort and to create favourable conditions for the user to feel well. Reference to nature is also stressed by the shape of pillars, vertical elements which resemble the tree trunks and horizontal elements, cubic parts forming the tree crowns.

In that project it is possible to find similarities to the architecture of Le Corbusier and his Marsyllian Unit or Frank Lloyd Wright's house over the waterfall. The project refers back to the idea of the Russian constructivists from 1920, El Lissitzky's projects and his horizontal buildings from 1940. That style can be called "post-constructivism", it is one of the best examples of that architectural concept in the city. The building is based on the use of concrete and sharp geometrical shapes. It can also be ascribed between brutalism and structuralism, it can also make us think of the work of Japanese Metabolists or the housing estate Habitatu 67 from Montreal.

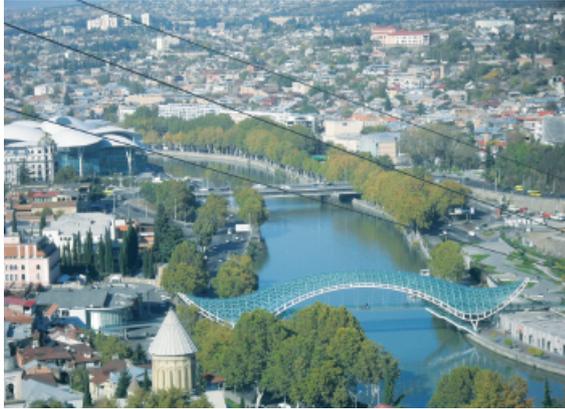


Figure 7.
View over the Peace Bridge and the Tbilisi Building



Figure 10.
The Peace Bridge



Figure 8.
Theatre building (under construction), The Parliament in the background



Figure 11.
Tbilisi Public Service Hall



Figure 9.
The Peace Bridge



Figure 12.
Tbilisi Public Service Hall

It had remained unoccupied for many years and was overgrown with grapevine, and due to its history it had not been appreciated by the citizens of Tbilisi. In 2007 this eighteen-storey building with the floor area of 13.500 sq m was taken over by the Bank of Georgia.

Its interior was entirely renovated and in 2011 the building was provided with a new entrance to the underground hall.

Recently it has been the venue of an international exhibition of modern art entitled “Frozen Moments: Architecture Speaks Back” organized by the founda-

tion The Other Space in cooperation with Laura Palmer's Foundation in Poland – The ruins of our times.

From among all buildings from the Soviet times in Georgia the building of the bank stands out as one of the most unusual examples of the Soviet architecture.

4. MODERN ARCHITECTURE

Contemporary Tbilisi is the city of dynamic changes. Beside the renovated buildings of the past new public buildings spring up. They can make you feel as if you were in an European capital city. Over the recent years a few futuristic structures have appeared in the city, such as Tbilisi Service Hall or the Peace Bridge.

4.1. Tbilisi Public Service Hall, 2010-2012

Tbilisi Public Service Hall was constructed in the central part of the city at the Kura River. It houses many state institutions including: the National Bank of Georgia or the Department of Energy. The building was designed by Italian architects Massimiliano and Doriana Fuksas. After two years of designing and constructing (2010-2012) it was put into use. The shape of the building is unique. It is 28.000 sq. m in area and consists of seven parts, each part has 4 floors located on different levels. All levels are encircled by interior footbridges. The dismembered edifice goes up 35 metres higher than the neighbouring houses. It is topped with eleven canopy structures which look like petals. They create 11 formally and structurally independent roof surfaces of different dimensions and shapes. They are supported by a structure of steel pillars branching out in their upper parts like trees. They are visible from both the inside and the outside of the building. It is a characteristic feature of glass facades that they are completely disengaged from the roof, it is dictated by structural reasons. The building is resistant to snow load, wind and to changes of the thermal expansion. The design assumption was to create a common space on the pattern of a public square around which various office functions gather. A fine footbridge suspended over a busy street makes it easy to peacefully reach and enter the building. Location at the Kura River makes the whole structure reflect in water, which results in another variable view.

Another example of the architecture designed by the same duet of architects is being constructed nearby namely, a theatre and an exhibition hall (Fig. 8). That building, which has been under construction since

2010, is a part of a new public space, the Rhike Park. The park has already become a favourite place for the city dwellers, who like spending their free time there.

Massimiliano and Doriana Fuksas admit that they are the architects in whose work we can find the fascination with dynamics, glass and reflection in water. They have created a lot of examples of modern architecture in the whole world including France, China, Italy, Russia and the USA.

4.2. The Peace Bridge

An example of the modern architecture is the Peace Bridge designed in 2009-2010 by an Italian architect Michele De Lucchi from the aMDL studio. It is a footbridge which connects both banks of the River Kura – the old districts of the city with its modern part together with the Rhike Park. From the bridge you can enjoy a fascinating panorama of the city, from one side you can see the Metekhi Church, Narikala Fortress and the Old Town and from the other side the Presidential Palace and the Baratashvili Bridge.

The steel and glass 150 meters long structure of the bridge took on soft, futuristic, form, organic even. That structure makes an extraordinary impression, especially at night, thanks to the illumination designed by a French lighting designer Philippe Martinaud. Unique lighting system composed of 3000 LEDs and 240 interactive sensors has the task to display current messages and news in Morse code. They scroll along both sides every hour, that is why we deal with the whole lighting performance. Daring form of the bridge aroused a lot of controversy among the city dwellers, who could not accept its interference in the existing urban tissue. However, with time that element became another pride of the city and its unquestionable attraction.

In recent years Michele De Lucchi has worked on many architectural projects for both private and public customers in Georgia, including: Ministry of the Internal Affairs and the Peace Bridge in Tbilisi, Radison Hotel in Batuni. His designs can be found all over the world, in Italy, Germany, Japan, among other things.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Table 1.
Summery of features distinguishing the Georgian architecture of the 19th, 20th century and the latest

general feature	1845 – rapid urban development almost entirely contributed to breaking ties with the Georgian architectural traditions.
features distinguishing the architecture of a modern city	patterns taken from the cities of the Russian Empire, where the classicism styles prevailed
	1960's – the wave of eclecticism, neo-Renaissance and neo-Gothic buildings were erected and then the modernistic ones
modern architecture	lack of reference to the features of the Georgian architecture
	modern forms and structures

Tbilisi architecture is a distinguishing feature of the cultural diversity shaped in the successive historical periods. Individual places in the city are marked by the multitude of forms and solutions beginning from the early Christian sacred architecture built of stone till the time of the 19th century churches and cathedrals. Moreover, there is the view of decorativeness and openwork designs of the walls connected with the decorativeness of wood concerning the architecture of dwelling houses and public utility buildings.

The Old Town is divided into two parts: the Asian one with chaotic layout of streets and wooden balconies and the European one with straight streets and predominance of the classical and Art Nouveau Russian architecture. Modern city makes reference to the European tradition. The main avenue was constructed during the period of the economic boom. The architecture can be distinguished by its similarity to the cities of the Russian Empire, where classicism prevailed. We can meet the examples of the neo-Renaissance, neo-Gothic and also modernistic architecture.

The latest architecture created by the Italian architects does not have features referring to the existing buildings. Instead, you can find here modernity of forms detached from the context of historical buildings. But the extensive architectural diversity concerning the form, function, scale and aestheticism,

which exists in this city, and the landscape dynamics result in the fact that even such daring implementations become part of the existing urban tissue. Modern architects were able to create their own forms, the examples of which are the Tbilisi Public Service Hall and the Peace Bridge. These structures became recognizable modern symbols of architecture amid the historic fabric of the city as well as the evident sign of the transformation taking place in the whole country.

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