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The Houses of Soviets: Soviet Architecture and Socio-Political Change of 1924-37

My doctoral project, "The Houses of Soviets: Soviet Architecture and Socio-Political Change of 1924-37," aims to conduct a first comprehensive study of Soviet government buildings, Houses of Soviets built during 1920-30s. The topic concentrates on the development of the building type being a multifunctional administrative and socio-cultural center with an eye on the rapid socio-political change of the period between 1924 and 1937.

The House of Soviets was a new building type developed by Soviet architects in the 1920-30s. These constructions were usually built in the newly established regional administrative centers, which were mostly small provincial towns. After suddenly becoming regional centers these towns needed buildings for administrative and socio-cultural purposes. Due to this fact the Houses of Soviets were developed as unique multifunctional constructions. They simultaneously housed Organizations of the Government and the Communist Party and provided a space for socio-cultural activities such as theater, cinema and concerts.

The working hypothesis of the doctoral project has been derived from a preliminary study of archival materials concerning the design and construction of the House of Soviets in Elista. The study revealed a complex procedure whereby the architectural project had to go through evaluation and sanctioning before being executed. Firstly, the local authorities, the OIK (Oblastnoj Ispolnitelny Komitet; the State Executive Committee) contracted an architect to draw up a design. Secondly, the local authorities had to submit the design to the state authorities in Moscow.[1] The latter asked to make specific changes to the project. Then, after all changes were made, the OIK had to send it to Moscow again. This process was repeated until the state authorities responsible for the evaluation and sanction of the project were satisfied. Thus, the design of the project changed dramatically from a simple two-story

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[1] The local authorities responsible for the constructions were: Kalmoblplan (Kalmyk Regional Planning Committee) for the overall constructions and city planning, OIK (Regional Executive Committee) for the construction of the House of Soviets. Likewise, the state authorities responsible for the constructions were: Gosplan for the overall constructions and city planning, the Minor Soviet of Sovnarkom for the evaluation the design of the House of Soviets. The latter had a power over three others. Later this function will be executed by the Scientific Technical Council of GYkKh NKVD (The Main Department of Communal Services).

construction to a big three-story building with a tower and the asymmetrical n-shaped plan, which divided the building in three blocks.

The main conclusion of the PhD dissertation would be derived from the fact that the selection, evaluation and authorization of architectural projects were a series of complex processes; and architects did not only have to deal with a large machinery of the government, which stood for this process, but they also were a part of this machinery. Therefore, the form, structure and function of the buildings were shaped by many factors, which were not only architectural, but also socio-political. Accordingly, the question is raised: what did the socio-political change, which took place in the Soviet Union between 1924 and 1937, mean for the development of the building type? In other words, how did the procedure of the selection, evaluation and sanction of architectural projects change together with the socio-political reality (as different organizations responsible for this procedure were established and abolished through 1924-1937)? Furthermore, with which motivation did the responsible organizations operate when they were making decisions in each case? Why in one case the favor was given to the project made in the neoclassical spirit, while in other it was the modernist design?