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### **The Houses of Soviets: Soviet Architecture and Socio-political Change of 1920-30s**

I am a PhD candidate in Art History at the Department of Art and Cultural Studies of Friedrich-Schiller-University of Jena. My doctoral project, titled “The Houses of Soviets: Soviet Architecture and Socio-political Change of 1920-30s,” examines the relationship between the architecture and the Soviet society during its formation in 1920-30s using the example of the construction and exploitation of the Houses of Soviets.

The Houses of Soviets were Soviet government buildings developed in 1920-30s. Their construction was closely related to the formation of the Soviet Union when the country’s administrative-territorial division was reconsidered and new states with new administrative centers were established. These administrative centers needed both governmental and educational buildings. As a result, the Houses of Soviet were often built as multifunctional constructions, which did not only house the Soviet government and Communist party organizations but also provided a space for socio-cultural activities such as libraries, cinemas and theaters. Regarding the style it is noteworthy that both the avant-garde architects and the advocates of traditionalism and neoclassicism designed and built the Houses of Soviets. This resulted in the plurality of different architectural forms from Constructivist constructions represented by the House of Soviets in Almaty (built by Moisej Ginzburg in 1927-31) and Elista (built by Iliya Golosov in 1927-33) to the traditionalist buildings, such as the Houses of Soviets in Makhachkala (built by Ivan Zholtovsky in 1925-33) and Yerevan (built by Alexander Tamanian in 1928-41). Most importantly, them being governmental buildings, the construction history of the Houses of Soviets is closely associated with the social and political transformations, which took place in the Soviet Union in 1920-30s. Among them are the rapid urbanization, the Cultural Revolution, the Sovietization of the periphery and the alternation of political system as well as everyday life. For that reason, the Houses of Soviets are the perfect objects for studying the relationship between the Soviet society and architecture.

This PhD project aims to fill the gap in the existing scholarly research: most of the studies on the Soviet architecture of 1920-30s focus mainly on the architectural concepts of Russian Avantgarde by discussing them formally as well linking them to the “utopian” model of society, which was developed in the early Soviet time and on which they were based. Little

attention is paid (in art history as well as the neighboring disciplines) to (1) the architecture built in periphery of the Soviet Union, (2) the plurality of the architectural concepts in the 1920s and 1930s, (3) the building practice at that time, (4) the decision-making process during which the architectural concepts were selected and evaluated, (5) how the architecture was used by the locals. One evident reason for the scarcity of scholarly publications on the subject is the lack of available data. For this reason, I conducted an archival research in Bryansk, Makhachkala, Nizhny Novgorod, Ivanovo, Elista in Russia, Almaty in Kazakhstan, Yerevan in Armenia and Minsk in Belorussia and collected the blueprints, design drawings, construction documents, articles in newspapers and photographs concerning the construction and exploitation of the local Houses of Soviets.

Through the analysis of the construction documents and the texts that marked the development of the Soviet architecture, culture and politics in 1920-30s, I investigate how the intention to construct the Houses of Soviets materialized through the cooperation and negotiation between different social agents involved in the design and construction processes. I also aim to consider in what way the negotiation processes and decisions concerning the constructions were similar or different with respect to different time and place. Furthermore, I examine how the form and function of the erected buildings correlate to the social and political transformations of 1920-30s. This way, I intend to demonstrate how the ideas about the Soviet society discussed by architects, cultural leaders and politicians spread to different regions of the Soviet Union and then were materialized in architecture.

My research contributes to the understanding of the Soviet architecture of 1920-30s and its relationship to the formation of the Soviet society in the periphery. It presents (1) the histories of each of the selected buildings. It also demonstrates (2) the development of the Houses of Soviets as the new building type for the newly established Soviet government. Finally, the research offers (3) a critical approach to the history of Soviet architecture in 1920-30s focusing on the social relations, during the construction, between the architects, central state authorities of the Soviet Union as well as the local governing bodies and considering it against the back drop of the socio-political change of the time.