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Under pressure: the images of the Italian Renaissance in the higher architectural education in the USSR in the age of Stalinism

Rationale

The history of Soviet architectural education cannot be viewed without the ideological context which shaped the curriculum, content of the courses and syllabuses, literature, illustrations, etc. On the one hand, Italian Renaissance was a great source of the inspiration for the soviet architects in 1930s – 1940s, on the other hand, it should had been presented to the public with great caution to serve the goals of the Soviet state. In my research I study the images of the Italian Renaissance in the USSR through the higher architectural education: graduate and post-graduate programs supported by the studies on architectural history.

Purpose of the study and research questions

The main purpose of this study is to reconstruct the image of the Italian Renaissance in the in the Soviet higher architectural education in the age of Stalinism (1933 – 1941) – through content of the courses on history of architecture, translations of the major Renaissance texts and illustrations used in the educational and publication process. The lower time boundary refers to the decree “On architectural education” published in 1933 which initiated the dramatic changes in the educational process and established the new institutions. The upper boundary refers to German’s invasion to the USSR, when the architectural process had been completely changed to meet the war needs.

The research questions are:

1. How Italian Renaissance was represented in the Soviet architectural curriculum in the age of Stalinism?
2. Which texts on the Italian Renaissance were available for Soviet architectural students and architects?
3. What were the sources of images that were used in educational process and publications?

Methodology and sources

In my research I am trying to combine the methods of cultural and institutional history to restore the full context of the Soviet higher architectural education in 1930s. I use the archival sources and the architectural press of 1930s to describe the general context of the architectural education: the creation of the Academy of Architecture in 1933 and the dramatic changes in the educational process in Moscow Institute of Architecture (MIA) and in the department of architecture in the Leningrad Academy of Arts. I also involve the archival resources to show the place of the Renaissance studies in the architectural process: for example, the documents on work of the department of the history and theory of architecture and the publishing process in the Academy of Architecture, or the discussion on the architectural heritage that took place in the press during the preparation of the First All-Soviet Congress of Architects (1937).

Preliminary results

During the last year I was mainly focused on the Moscow institutions: The Academy of Architecture and the MIA. I describe the history of the decree “On the architectural education” (1933) which established the Academy and stated the changes in the educational process in the MIA. I also describe the first years of the Academy focusing on the place of the Renaissance studies in the work of the department of the theory and history of architecture as well as their place in the study process for the post-graduate students of the Academy. Finally, I show the changes in the curriculum of the MIA and the place of the architectural history, Renaissance studies in particular, in the renewed study process.