

Building of the former Naryn restaurant, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Assessment of the architectural and historical value of the building

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Soviet Modernism

In the 1970s and 1980s, a unique collection of public buildings emerged in the countries of the former Soviet Union, as well as in those Eastern European countries which were influenced by the Soviet Union. These buildings are often characterized by an outstanding architectural quality and a distinctive design language representing the period of their origin and its political background. Despite their modern approach, they remind us of the monumentality of antique temples or the pride of the most beautiful classicist buildings, because their timeless monumentality is very balanced and coherent in itself.

These buildings are around 40 years old and therefore it might be easy not to consider them as historical monuments. Also classicist buildings had to go through times when their value was not recognized, and they have been replaced by so-called modern constructions. But soon after a lot of these historic buildings have vanished, those which survived became important monuments nobody would destroy today.

The same is the case with the buildings of the Soviet Modernism: They seem to be too young to be of "real value", but the cultural and historical relevance of the individual buildings as well as of the architectural style in itself can not be overrated.

During the last 10 years schools and institutes of architecture have begun to create inventories of these buildings and to examine the architecture of Soviet Modernism in a scientific way. In Switzerland and other European countries, buildings of this period which have been influenced by the Soviet Architecture are now under protection of National Heritage Associations.

Bishkek

In many cities of the countries of the former USSR, modernist architecture from the 1970s and 80s is a part of their distinctive cityscape. This is also the case in Bishkek. The city has some wonderful classic buildings, but its true architectural treasure is the remarkable concentration of buildings from Soviet Modernism in the northern part of the city center. Imagine for example the Ala-Too-Square without the splendid arcades facing the square, holding together this huge void and forming an arena as counterpart of the National History Museum. And there are many other public buildings in the immediate vicinity, which are absolutely unique from an architectural point of view: circus, art museum, sports palace, philharmony, theatres, parliament and also the former Naryn restaurant.

Naryn Restaurant

The Naryn restaurant, which has been erected in 1984, used to be a popular place to meet within the city of Bishkek. For this is not a coincidence: It is a well-proportioned building based on a clear structure. Standing on an artificial terrace, the building is raised above the everyday life of the busy

city. The large columns, lining up around the building, the semicircular windows of the upper floor and the white marble cladding further emphasize the very special character of this building within the city structure.

The visitor enters the building through the large external staircases and the terraces, leaving the city behind. Inside the building, large stairs lead him to the upper floor, where he finds himself in a spacious, magnificent banquet hall. But here, he can not only enjoy this unique space, but also a beautiful view over the city.

There is probably no other place in Bishkek with such a superb scenography both on the architectural and the urban level. Despite the neglected condition of the building it should not be forgotten that the Naryn restaurant is one of the most exceptional architectural masterpieces in the very centre of Bishkek!

Sustainable development

It is comprehensible that the authorities of Bishkek consider selling this perfectly located property in the centre to private investors. However the short-term, one-time financial gain faces the loss of culture, identity and, last but not least, the loss of public space and buildings. This is what will harm Bishkek's qualities in a long-term way.

Following a sustainable development of a city means to deal with its existing structures and preserve the cities' resources for future generations. Cities which are not taking into account their own history and cultural legacy cannot develop in a sustainable way and are giving away a lot of potential for future generations. Those outstanding buildings which have been erected in Bishkek in the last twenty years of the former Soviet Union have to be seen as a forming part of the city with great significance as a cultural heritage. Under all circumstances, they should be preserved for future generations.

If there is a need for development of housing or commercial projects in the city centre of Bishkek, it should not be at the expense of the architectural heritage and the identity of the city. There are possibilities to develop the centre of Bishkek without destroying these unique buildings as for example the Naryn restaurant.

Recommendations

The Naryn restaurant is an important cultural heritage of the city of Bishkek and an outstanding example of Soviet Modernist Architecture and should therefore be conserved and protected as an architectural monument by the office for National Heritage Preservation. Destruction or alteration of the building's external appearance should be prohibited. Possibilities for a future usage should be carefully evaluated and the urgent renovation of the building is to be carried out by competent experts.

We're convinced that this marvelous building would be a perfect location for museum, a conference hall, a restaurant or many more different purposes and has the potential to become a famous flagship in the heart of the city of Bishkek.

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