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## MODERN ARCHITECTURE OF KAZAKHSTAN: IDENTITY PHENOMENON IN THE WESTERN CITIES

**Abstract.** *The article is devoted to the phenomenon of identity in the modern architecture of Kazakhstan. Modern architecture is considered in the aspect of various concepts, in particular, the concept of «identity of place». An overview of the architecture of Western Kazakhstani cities and the definition of their genius loci, i.e. those features that make up the peculiarity of the spatial environment of the city.*

**Key words:** *modern architecture of Kazakhstan, the period of independence, the phenomenon of identity, the concept of the identity of the place.*

The program of spiritual modernization adopted in our country presupposes changes in the national consciousness. At the same time, openness and sensitivity to the best world achievements are very important. A special attitude to the native land, its culture, customs, traditions is the most important feature of patriotism. This is the basis of the cultural-genetic code that makes any nation a nation, and not a collection of individuals. The first president highlighted that if we want to be a nation with our own unique place on the global map of the XXI century, then we must implement another project – «Modern Kazakh culture in the global world». The architecture of the cities of Kazakhstan in the XXI century convincingly shows the successful implementation of this project. A special role in solving this problem is played by both the choice of theoretical research methods and the implementation of architectural analysis, since at present it is becoming key in understanding the architecture of independent Kazakhstan in the context of identity.

One of the most common architectural techniques is the use of the most common code elements of our culture, allowing us to immediately accept the message of identity. However, it seems to us that the most promising of the levels of identity are initial and reflective. For the first two levels, it is inevitable to take into account regional conditions; in order to achieve the highest level of creative reflection, a deep theoretical understanding of traditional architecture is necessary. Nowadays, the «citation» method is often used, when only one, maximum two compositional elements are used in architectural objects of a public nature.

The city, as a reflection of one of the variants of the socio-cultural situation in the process of the formation and development of a nation, is a unique phenomenon, in

time and space of which certain characteristics are formed that make it possible to define such a multi-component concept as the «image of a city». By it we mean the geographical, landscape, architectural and planning, historical, cultural and other features of the city that create its identity. The characteristics of community and differences adopted in the study define the identity of the city and make it possible to identify its image. Due to the vastness of the country's territory, in determining these characteristics, it is advisable to follow the geographical division into western, southern, eastern, central (northern) regions, differing in natural and climatic conditions, but united by a common historical background of the development of urban planning.

Western Kazakhstan (Atyrau, Mangystau, Aktobe, West Kazakhstan regions) is one of the most important economic regions of Kazakhstan, an oil production center characterized by difficult and even extreme climatic conditions. The region, being borderline, in historical retrospect was distinguished by the originality of the architectural school with unique underground mosques and Kazakh beits made of natural shell rock, while during the development of Soviet urban planning it turned out to be its experimental platform. We believe that it was the border location / state of the region (sea-desert, city-steppe) that dictated to a certain extent those architectural features that are observed in the development of the country's western cities during the period of sovereignty.

The city of Atyrau (until 1992 – Guryev city), founded in 1615, is today one of the centers of the oil industry in Kazakhstan. Atyrau fixes the border between Europe and Asia by its location, thereby acquiring the status of the geographical center of the Eurasian continent. Among other things, the city is of great historical interest.

Atyrau is located on the river Ural and has a planning structure due to the meandering nature of the river bed. Plots of winding land are given over to community centers and recreational areas, concentrated along the reservoir. The historical core of the city of the Soviet period was formed by three «peninsulas» formed by four bends of the river, at present, these are the microdistricts of Balykshy, Avangard-2,3, Zhilgorodok and the Caspian Sea. According to the master plan 2016, the residential zone receives a predominant northern development with a simultaneous expansion of the industrial zone to the southeast. The main city highways along the east-west axis are: Beibarys Ave., Satpayev / Abai, Gumarov / Auezov, Abai Kunanbayev streets; along the north-south axis: Bigeldinova / Kurmangazy / Zhastar ave., passing almost through the entire territory of the city and running parallel to the river bed of Ural, as well as Isatai Ave. locking up on Satpayev street. At the intersection of these streets are concentrated the main urban centers, key objects and the most interesting compositional solutions of the administrative and public centers, as well as the residential sector.

The transition to river recreation from Zhilgorodok was carried out through a public garden, which creates a kind of closed oasis, suddenly opening up to an open coastal area. The effect of the abrupt change in the landscape is enhanced by the sparse composition of the river bank, where the panorama of the buildings replacing each other is successively revealed. The polyclinic building, sunk in greenery (1967, renovation 2018), supports the exit to the embankment with the vertical accent of the corner

tower. Its compositional antagonist is the building of the district akimat, which fixes the angle of intersection of roads with a semicircular ledge of the order portico (1975). The corner location of the office building (originally - the House of Culture 1954, reconstruction) sets the frontal of the embankment, while the location of the object is such that it creates a connection with the transverse street line. Objects of the Soviet era are replaced by a number of buildings of the period of sovereignty: the Office of the NCOC (North Caspian Operating Company, 2016) and the Sports Complex «Atyrau» (2000). These objects support the frontal composition of the embankment development, however, they use different methods of unfolding this line of the coastal zone construction, which became widespread in the 1990s.

The left bank of the river Ural is organized by architectural nodes, distant from each other in space, formed from important administrative and public objects. And, if the right bank is a «communication» of the Soviet past and the present, then the left bank is a place where modern buildings of the period of independence were erected. The silhouette of the left bank is a calm flow of the frontals of buildings of medium and high storey. The right bank is formed by a dynamic combination of public buildings - high-rise and tall, for example, the intersection of the coastal line with the bridge is marked by high-rise dominants of three office buildings (Figure 1). These are active dominants of the city's skyline, revealing themselves in the coastal panorama. This ensemble is represented by variations of modernism, namely: the *co-existence* in a single space of objects demonstrates different time stages in the development of this style direction.

In such a way, along the northern and southern banks of the river, a dialogue, although rather rarefied in space, is being created. Thus, the southern coast is formed by the contours of single objects, while the northern coast demonstrates a return to the ensemble space organization. An attempt has been made to find an expressive form in the residential development of new micro-districts. In the central part of the city, there is a complex compositional interaction of buildings: against the background of a great stylistic diversity, dialogues, monologues and even conflicts between objects of different language take place. Some of them clearly dominate the development, such as the Atyrau Plaza multifunctional complex, whose postmodern monumentality is achieved by traditional tower-like architecture.

In the city has formed an ensemble at the intersection of the central streets of academician K. Satpayev, Isatay and Makhambet avenues, bearing a new code, symbolizing the historical stage in the status of a sovereign state. In this part of the city, a different version of the organization of public space has developed, with several points of attraction. Let's point to them – this is a monument to the so-called Zero kilometer of Atyrau – an object that fixes an important geographical and spatial place of the city on the world map. Behind it, on the south side, there is the memorial square of Isatay and Makhambet – this is an open ensemble deployed to the main thoroughfare of the city. We suppose that Isatai and Makhambet squares are a memorial to a new historical identity.



Figure 1. Atyrau. Panorama of the left bank of the Ural river

An example that clearly demonstrates the modern situation in the architecture of Kazakhstan, when not an environment is created, but separate objects that are indifferent to each other, is the place around the Imangali mosque complex (Figure 2), located next to the Isatay and Makhambet square. Here there was a very indicative destruction of the integrity of the compositional and stylistic unity of the environment. In our opinion, one of the main tasks of modern architecture in Kazakhstan is the inadmissibility of creating such examples of *non-participatory* architecture.

Aktau city is one of the youngest and fastest growing in Kazakhstan. Aktau is unique for several reasons: firstly, it is the only port in Kazakhstan where for the first time in the world they began to use completely artificially desalinated water. Secondly, an urban planning experiment for designing a large city in extreme natural and climatic conditions has been successfully implemented here. The Caspian Sea is the main natural city-forming source of the city's development. In compliance with, the main highways were erected parallel to the coastline; they were crossed by transverse streets dividing the city into quarters of approximately equal size. At the same time, several spatial nodes were laid, open to the sea to varying degrees. The difficult topography of the area influenced the spatial development of the city: the difference in elevation predetermined very interesting viewpoints opening from the intersections closest to the coast.



Figure 2. Atyrau. Mosque Imangali

During the period of independence, the ensemble of the administrative center of the city was supplemented with several objects, the architecture of which is indicative from the point of view of new searches in the 1990s-2000s. For example, on the southern section of the square, public buildings have been erected: the hotel complex «Tumarym», the shopping center «Alatau», the facades of which are laconic, with a minimum of detail.

In the northern and southern parts of the intersection, an arsenal of modernist techniques was used, then the avenue received an even more contradictory version of the coexistence of two different architectural objects. In the northern part of Abai Ave., the hotel «Holiday Inn» was built, demonstrating a paraphrase of classical architecture (Figure 3). This is a modern interpretation of the palazzo with the traditional choice of the overall composition (square) and material (red brick) for such objects. The arcade of the first floor and the measured rhythm of double window openings give the building a monumentality.



Figure 3. Aktau. The office of the Kazmunaigas company

If in the existing development new buildings are presented rather fragmentarily, then in the actively developing north-western microdistricts of the city, which appeared on the site of the ambitious project of Aktau City, there is a formation of a new modern environment in which objects of a new national identity have found their place. Numerous residential complexes, in contrast to similar buildings of the Soviet period, receive a bright coloristic solution that makes them unique. The absence of public squares in new micro-districts is also indicative, even near such important objects as the building of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan (Figure 4) or the Celebration Hall «Khan Shahar». Although these buildings are representative in nature and are located at the crossroads with a courdoner with a rich landscape, it should be noted that they do not form a structural urban junction where the city's highways converge.



Figure 4. Aktau. The building of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan

A historically formed feature of the development of Aktobe is the presence of two centers in the planning structure: along Abilkair-khan avenue and A.Moldagulova ave. Lomonosov St., along the main transport hubs leading to the old city center. The most dynamically developing part of the city is the city center in the new part of the city with the administrative center of the regional level. At the same time, the two-centered structure of the city gave rise to the planning discontinuity and amorphousness of the territory between them, which led to the creation of recreational zones and the construction of cultural objects in them.

The old and new parts of the city bear symbolic names – respectively Almaty and Nur-Sultan, which are the centers of attraction. The «Almaty» area is located along Kenes Nokin Avenue and is formed by small-quarter buildings, gravitating towards the winding river bed Ilel. The Nur-Sultan area is located to the north of A. Moldagulova Avenue and also has a small-scale planning structure that develops along the small river Sazdy. The «meeting place» of the two districts takes place on the territory between Abilkair-khan avenue and Lomonosov st., along which the most important transport hubs are located – the Sapar bus station and the Aktobe railway station.

There was formed a park ensemble with several cultural and religious objects between the G. Zhubanov and M. Mametova streets. Along Abilkair-khan avenue, there are buildings of a mosque with the symbolic name «Nur-Gasyr» and, through the park «Astana», two palaces: wedding of «Neke Saray» and art «Oner Saray». And, if the traditional for mosques centric-domed composition is reflected in the cult object, the facades of the other two objects are also solved in compositions interpreting the arched-domed theme of architectural monuments. So, for example, on the arched facade of «Neke Saray» in the center of symmetry there is a semitransparent dome. The continuation of the facade line of the wedding palace is further supported by a thorough arcade, marking a kind of entrance, a portal to the park area of the complex. The Palace of Art also continues the theme of the arched composition, but in a flat version, only hinting at the continuation of the general compositional theme. All three objects are spatially united

by a vertical symbolic stele dedicated to the Independence of Kazakhstan, which is the axis of the entire composition (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Aktobe. Public ensemble

The spatial composition is continued in the northern part of Abilkair-Khan Avenue: along the axis of the mosque – by the landscape Boulevard of Unity and Accord, closed by the St. Nicholas Cathedral; along the axis of the arch and stele of Independence of Kazakhstan – the park of the First President. This line along the street of M. Mametova and R. Sazdy is closed by a large object – the shopping and entertainment center «Keruen-city». From the north side along the street of Utegen Seitov gradually developed a business ensemble, consisting of a group of offices of large companies, hotels and administrative facilities. Thus, the public cult and leisure center has the character of a connecting link between the public and business parts of the city.

Master plan of Aktobe of 2015 predetermined the development of the city in the western direction. Here, on the left bank of the river Sazdy, several new micro-districts were built: North-West, South-West, Batys-2,3. The residential array of these micro-districts is built up with buildings of medium and high storey. The sectional housing of these neighborhoods is predominantly linear, rarely of a tower structure. At the same time, the facades of housing have the most diverse coloristic solutions: from restrained colors to a variegated color variety.

A significant artery of the river Ilek, along which all types of functional zones of the city are located (industrial, recreational, residential, communal), which fundamentally distinguishes the functional zoning of Aktobe from Atyrau, in which the industrial zone is located somewhat away from the main planning areas of residential and public nature. It is curious that the much smaller river Sazdy is actively included in the urban architecture of Aktobe. It is on its banks in the central planning area that the main leisure center of the city with the Keruen-city shopping center is being formed. Experts emphasize the importance of the river artery in maintaining the ecology of the city, which is a large industrial center of the country. In general, environmental issues, the

need to ensure comfort for the residents of Aktobe led to the decision to create a belt of recreational and protected areas around the city, an increase in the number of parks and squares, which changes the identity of a traditionally industrial city, gradually turning it into a modern large city convenient for living.

The oldest city in the country, Uralsk is founded in 1613, with its rich history has created a special, and seemingly recognizable identity, however, is changing. The changes concern the territorial development of the city in connection with the prospect of demographic growth. The complexity of such a spatial expansion is associated with the bizarrely winding pattern of the Ural and Shagan rivers. The historical part of the city of compact development is limited by a land peninsula formed by the intersection of river beds of two rivers. Therefore, the development of the city takes place outside the historical part, in the northern and western directions. The «flatness» of the urban planning is explained by the historically formed low and medium-rise buildings. In the new parts of the city, a micro-zoning system was established. In contrast to the historical center, in the northern microdistricts of Samal, Nur-Sultan, Baiterek, Zhana-Orda, residential buildings have an increased number of storeys. Today, modern Uralsk is, in our opinion, an oasis-type city, where planning zones are separated by considerable distances, spatial gaps and components of the natural landscape. The independence of each of the planning parts of the city to a certain extent is due to their development along the highways crossing the city in the north-east and north-west directions.

So, in the architecture of Atyrau during the period of sovereignty, the reception of quotation prevails. Several compositional variants of the ensembles of the coastal zone of the Ural River: 1) with a stylistically homogeneous solution, characteristic of the ideas of modernism; 2) with a contradictory stylistic and formal solution, created in the mainstream of postmodernist currents that have become widespread in the architecture of the country.

The modern architecture of Aktau is a kind of reflection of the processes of creative search that are characteristic of the state of the country's architecture as a whole. If the synthesis of neoclassical and traditional forms continues to prevail in the architecture of public buildings (the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan), then in the residential architecture a new language is emerging that uses synthesized elements formed within the framework of the principles of critical regionalism (Residential compound Green Plaza, Khazar Palace).

In the architecture of Aktobe, an active search for an adequate to modernity language is underway. The main arsenal of tools is taken from classical architecture. There are different variations in the embodiment of the concept of national identity: starting with the simplest type (Kazkommertsbank office); the method of citing or copying famous buildings of world architecture (Business Center «Mir»), up to creative reflection (Cultural Center «Anaga tagzym»). There are intermediate versions (Nurdaulet mosque), in which both the citation method and the modern interpretation of the composition of historical samples are applied.



*Статья посвящена феномену идентичности в современной архитектуре Казахстана. Современная архитектура рассматривается в аспекте различных концепций, в частности, концепции «идентичности места». Дается обзор архитектуры западноказахстанских городов и определение их *genius loci*, т.е. тех особенностей, которые составляют своеобразие пространственной среды города.*

**Ключевые слова:** *современная архитектура Казахстана, период независимости, феномен идентичность, концепция идентичности места.*

*Мақала Қазақстанның заманауи сәулеті сәйкестілік феноменіне арналған. Қазіргі заманғы сәулет әртүрлі ұғымдардың, атап айтқанда, «жер сәйкестігі» ұғымының аспектісінде қарастырылады. Батыс Қазақстан қалаларының сәулетіне шолу және олардың данышпан локустарының анықтамасы, яғни қаланың кеңістіктік ортасының ерекшелігін құрайтын ерекшеліктер.*

**Түйін сөздер:** *Қазақстанның заманауи сәулеті, тәуелсіздік кезеңі, сәйкестілік феномені, «жер сәйкестігі» концепциясы.*