
Integrate, Adapt, Collaborate: Comecon Architecture in Socialist Mongolia

Intégrer, adapter, collaborer : l'architecture du Comecon dans la Mongolie socialiste

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Integrate, Adapt, Collaborate: Comecon Architecture in Socialist Mongolia

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Introduction

The BUK-1 factory of prefabricated concrete panels is a large compound located in the south-western part of Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia. Constructed in 1963 by the Soviet Union, by the time of our visit in April 2018 the factory was about to reopen after more than twenty-five years of idleness. Under the new ownership of the Erel Group, it had been renovated and equipped with machinery from Belgian, German, and Italian manufacturers. Jargalan Erdenebat, the executive director of the Erel Group, explained to us the process of producing a wide range of concrete elements, including hollow core slabs, solid walls and ceilings, sandwich walls, interior walls, columns and beams, stairs and the reinforcements required for them.¹ Erdenebat argued that high-quality, large-scale, prefabricated concrete technology was a solution to Mongolia's housing shortage, and instrumental for the government's attempt to modernize the informal settlements, or ger districts, in Ulaanbaatar and other Mongolian cities. As he explained, the revived factory would assume its former role as an essential supplier of construction materials for the city: according to Erdenebat, "eighty percent of buildings in Ulaanbaatar were built with precast elements manufactured in this plant."²

1 Jargalan Erdenebat, interview by Nikolay Erofeev and Łukasz Stanek, Ulaanbaatar, 13 April 2018; see also: "New Living Space for the Mongolian Population—Precast Plant Successfully Opened," *Concrete Plant International*, vol. 4, 2018, p. 176-180. URL: https://www.ebawe.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Pdf-Ebawe/Artikel_Erel_en.pdf. Accessed 26 August 2021. We would like to thank Togos Khosbayar and Bolor Enkhbat for their invaluable assistance during our research in Mongolia, Badruun Gardi for assisting us with the transliteration from the Mongolian language, and the three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. Archival research at the Mongolian National Central Archives in Ulaanbaatar and translation of archival documents from Mongolian was supported by a Research Support Grant from The University of Manchester, UK.

2 Jargalan Erdenebat, interview by Nikolay Erofeev and Łukasz Stanek, Ulaanbaatar, 13 April 2018.

This example alone demonstrates the importance of the Soviet Union for the urbanization processes in Mongolia during the 20th century. Yet the BUK-1 factory was but one of many components of what the Soviets called the “material-technical base” for construction, or the network of organizations that included building-materials producers, construction companies, design institutes, and education and research centers. From the creation of the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) in 1924 until the end of the Cold War, this material-technical base in Mongolia was established and advanced with “technical assistance” from the socialist countries. They included the Soviet Union, followed after World War II by the People's Republic of China (until the mid-1960s) and the socialist states in Eastern Europe. By the 1960s, a significant part of this technical assistance was coordinated by the Comecon (Council for the Mutual Economic Assistance): the economic organization of the socialist states under Soviet hegemony, of which Mongolia became the first non-European member in 1962. This vast movement of people and resources—including construction materials, machinery, individual and type designs, and regulatory documents, standards, and building codes—shaped Mongolia's path “from feudalism to socialism, bypassing capitalism.”³

By studying these exchanges from the 1960s to the 1980s, this paper contributes to the scholarship on architectural mobilities between what during the Cold War was called the “Second” and the “Third” worlds.⁴ In recent

3 Sh. BIRA, *Mongolia's Road to Socialism*, Ulaanbaatar: Montsame, 1981, p. 8.

4 Recent publications include: Márta BRANCIK, “Exporttervezési munkák,” in András FERKAI (ed.), *Közti 66. Egy tervezőiroda történet (1949-1991)*, Budapest: Vince Kiadó, 2015, vol. 1, p. 393-453; Andreas BUTTER, “Showcase and Window to the World: East German Architecture Abroad 1949-1990,” *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2018, p. 1-21; Andrej DOLINKA, Katarina KRSTIĆ, and Dubravka SEKULIĆ (eds.), *Zoran Bojović: Tri tačke oslonca/ Three Points of Support*, Belgrade: Publikum, 2013; Young-Sun HONGM, “Through a Glass Darkly: East German Assistance to North Korea and Alternative Narratives of the Cold War,” in Quinn SLOBODIAN (ed.), *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, New York, NY; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015 (Protest, Culture and Society), p. 43-72; Anne-Katrin FENK, Rachel LEE, Monika MOTYLIŃSKA, “Unlikely Collaborations? Planning Experts from Both Sides of the Iron Curtain and the Making of Abuja,” *Comparativ*, vol. 30, no. 1-2, 2020, p. 38-58. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26014/j.comp.2020.01-02.03>; Monika MOTYLIŃSKA, Phuong PHAN, “Not the Usual Way?: On the Involvement of an East German Couple with the Planning of the Ethiopian Capital,” *ABE Journal*, no. 16, 2019. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/abe.6997>; Dubravka SEKULIĆ, “Energoprojekt in Nigeria. Yugoslav Construction Companies in the Developing World,” *Southeastern Europe*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2017, p. 200-229; Tanja SCHEFFLER, “Himmelskuppeln aus Jena: Die Architektin Gertrud Schille/Celestial Domes from Jena: The Architect Gertrud Schille,” in Christina BUDDE, Mary PEPCHINSKI, Peter CACHOLA SCHMAL, and Wolfgang VOIGT (eds.), *Frau Architekt. Seit mehr als 100 Jahren: Frauen im Architektenberuf/Over 100 Years of Women as Professional Architects*, Tübingen: Wasmuth, 2017, p. 227-233; Bernd SCHAEFER, “Socialist Modernization in Vietnam: The East German Approach, 1976-89,” in Quinn SLOBODIAN (ed.), *Comrades of Color*, p. 95-113; Christina SCHWENKEL, “Affective Solidarities and East German Reconstruction of Postwar Vietnam,” in Quinn SLOBODIAN (ed.), *Comrades of Color*, p. 267-292; Christina SCHWENKEL, *Building Socialism: The Afterlife of East German Architecture in Urban Vietnam*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2020; Łukasz STANEK, “Architects from Socialist Countries in Ghana (1957-1967): Modern Architecture and Mondialisation,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 74,

years, this scholarship has advanced our understanding of the emergence of modern architecture as a worldwide phenomenon after World War II, and offered a more differentiated view of urbanization processes during the Cold War. In particular, scholars have challenged the reduction of architecture's globalization to Westernization and Americanization; they have reconsidered urbanization processes in Africa, Asia, and South America beyond the effects of the colonial encounter with Western Europe and the globalization of capitalism; and they have foregrounded actors, institutions, and modes of collaboration beyond those inherited from previous historical periods. At the same time, scholarship on "global socialism," or the multiple, evolving, and often contradictory instances of collaboration between socialist countries and the newly independent countries, challenged the bipolar geographical imagination inherited from the Cold War period.⁵ Scholars pointed not only at bifurcations within the respective "camps," including the socialist one, but also made clear that most of the newly independent countries in Africa and Asia were neither Soviet nor American "proxies." Often, these countries exploited Cold War rivalries in order to achieve specific economic and geopolitical aims.⁶

While Comecon's support for Mongolia's material-technical base for construction was part of the architectural mobilities between the "Second" and

no. 4, 2015, p. 416-442. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/jsah.2015.74.4.416>; IDEM, "Mobilities of Architecture in the Global Cold War: From Socialist Poland to Kuwait and Back," *International Journal of Islamic Architecture*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2015, p. 365-381; IDEM, "Second World's Architecture and Planning in the Third World," introduction to Łukasz STANEK and Tom AVERMAETE (eds.), "Cold War Transfer. Architecture and Planning from Socialist Countries in the 'Third World,'" *The Journal of Architecture*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2012, p. 299-307. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2012.692597>; IDEM, "Socialist Networks and the Internationalization of Building Culture after 1945," *ABE Journal*, no. 6, 2014. URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/abe/1266>. Accessed 26 August 2021; IDEM, *Architecture in Global Socialism. Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020. See also: Taoufik SOUAMI and Eric VERDEIL (eds.), *Concevoir et gérer les villes: milieux d'urbanistes du sud de la Méditerranée*, Paris: Economica, Anthropos, 2006 (Villes).

5 Anne DIETRICH, "Zwischen solidarischem Handel und ungleichem Tausch: Zum Südhandel der DDR am Beispiel des Imports kubanischen Zuckers und äthiopischen Kaffees," *Journal für Entwicklungspolitik*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2014, p. 48-67; Artemy M. KALINOVSKY, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018; James MARK, Artemy M. KALINOVSKY and Steffi MARUNG (eds.), *Alternative Globalizations. Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020; Łukasz STANEK, *Architecture in Global Socialism*, *op. cit.* (note 4).

6 Elke BEYER, "Competitive Coexistence: Soviet Town Planning and Housing Projects in Kabul in the 1960s," *The Journal of Architecture* vol. 17, no. 3, 2012, p. 309-332; Łukasz STANEK, "An Image and Its Performance: Techno-Export from Socialist Poland," in Ákos MORAVÁNSZKY and Torsten LANGE (eds.), *Re-Framing Identities: Architecture's Turn to History, 1970-1990*, Berlin: Jovis, 2017, p. 59-71. See also: Elidor MËHILLI, *From Stalin to Mao: Albania and the Socialist World*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017; Oscar SANCHEZ-SIBONY, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

4 | the “Third” worlds, its dynamics was distinct in three important ways. First, the uninterrupted presence of the Soviets in the MPR lasted from the 1920s until the end of the Cold War, and thus longer than in other newly independent countries in Africa and Asia. In difference to many other developing countries which accepted Soviet assistance, the Soviet presence in the MPR was rarely challenged, in particular after the country severed its relations with People’s Republic of China in the wake of the Sino-Soviet split. Second, the overall share of Comecon technical assistance in Mongolia’s investments in the construction industry was unprecedented. This assistance decisively shaped the industrialization and urbanization of the country from the interwar period until the end of the Cold War, and by the 1970s the share of the Comecon states and, above all, the Soviet Union, was still estimated at 80% of the overall investments in the MPR’s economy.⁷ Third, once the Eastern Europeans joined the Soviets in providing technical assistance to Mongolia, this assistance was coordinated to a much larger extent than was the case in other newly independent countries during the Khrushchev and the Brezhnev years. This coordination included bilateral agreements between the countries concerned, as well as multilateral coordination by Comecon institutions. Among them, a key role was played by the Permanent Commission for Construction (PCC), created in 1958 in East Berlin with the aim of stimulating and coordinating inter-socialist division of labor in architecture, engineering, and construction, prepared by the standardization of construction materials, nomenclature, and regulations.⁸

The study of this long, intense, multilateral, and coordinated mobilization and implementation of architectural resources in socialist Mongolia offers an opportunity to advance current historical scholarship by looking beyond singular designs and construction projects and by considering instead the longer dynamics of state-socialist architectural mobilities in the MPR. This dynamics was conditioned by the broader political economy of the Comecon which, as scholars have pointed out, was evolving from the Soviet exploitation of the satellite countries during the immediate post-war years to their subsidization in later periods. In the course of this process, the Soviet objective of international economic integration often failed in view of the

7 L. MINJUURDORJ, “BNMAU-yn barilgazhilt, sotsialist èdyn zasgyn integrats,” *Èdyn zasgyn asuudal*, no. 6, 1977, p. 21-25. The scale of the developmental projects in Mongolia was greater than in Afghanistan and comparable with Soviet Tajikistan; see: Artemy M. KALINOVSKY, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*, *op. cit.* (note 5); Timothy NUNAN, *Humanitarian Invasion: Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018 (Global and International History).

8 Gerhard KRAFT, *Die Zusammenarbeit der Mitgliedsländer des RWG auf dem Gebiet der Investitionen*, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1977.

satellites' resistance and evasion.⁹ While much of this dynamics is confirmed by the archival material we discuss, our approach differs from that of political and economic historians. Instead of focusing on political leaders and high-ranking bureaucrats, we concentrate on mid-level professionals, in particular architects, planners, engineers, managers, and administrators in charge of the material-technical base for construction. In so doing, we study how these actors followed, exploited, and sometimes challenged the political economy of Comecon's technical assistance and negotiated it with feedback from design institutes and construction sites.

In what follows, we study the work of Mongolian, Soviet and other Comecon actors by introducing the concept of "concern." With this concept we aim at capturing long-term directives, guidelines, and obligations, whether they were formulated explicitly or implicitly, that conveyed the priorities, motivations, and aspirations of Comecon actors and institutions and their counterparts in the MPR. We reconstruct their "concerns" based on documents from Russian, German, and Polish archives, extended by Mongolian sources. They include policy outlines, professional communication, and minutes of meetings, which we complement by interviews with Mongolian and Russian professionals. Yet our understanding of the concept of concern extends from discourse analysis to a more general study of professional practices. Accordingly, our sources also include construction standards, architectural and urban norms, and technical conditions that guided the work of Mongolian and Comecon actors, as well as technical drawings of architectural and urban designs. In this way, we employ the concept of concern as a tool to understand the dynamics of work of foreign and local professionals in Mongolia across the political, economic, ideological, technological, and professional coordinates of Comecon's technical assistance.

After an overview of the impact of architectural exchanges between the Comecon countries and Mongolia on the development of Ulaanbaatar, we introduce the concept of concern and argue that the work of Comecon actors in Mongolia was informed by three concerns. They included, first, the concern for *integrating* Mongolian design and construction industries into a comprehensive network of organizations in charge of the urbanization processes; second, the concern for *adapting* foreign resources to the conditions on the ground; and, third, the concern for an increasing *collaboration* between Mongolian and other Comecon actors. We will show how these actors referred to the three concerns—although not always explicitly nor unambiguously—in

9 Randall W. STONE, *Satellites and Commissars. Strategy and Conflict in the Politics of Soviet-Bloc Trade*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996 (Princeton Studies in International History and Politics), p. 115.

6 | order to prioritize, substantiate, evaluate, evidence, and explain their work. While the concerns were referred to by the Soviets, Eastern Europeans, and Mongolians in order to build a consensus between the actors on the ground, Mongolian decision-makers sometimes proposed interpretations of the concerns in ways that gave them leverage in their negotiation with other Comecon professionals and institutions.

By studying how the three concerns informed the architectural production in the MPR, but also by accounting for conflicts around their interpretation and implementation, this paper complements the perspective of political and economic historians. At the same time, it expands a more common focus of architectural historians on individual buildings and singular designs. Beyond advancing the scholarship on Mongolian architecture and urbanization from the 1960s to the 1980s, we argue that the concept of concern may be of use to scholars who study the mobilities of architecture within various scales of global socialism, as well as those interested in worldwide urbanization processes across competing developmental regimes during the 20th century.



Figure 1: General plan of Ulaanbaatar. Giprogor (Moscow), 1971.

Source: S. MUNKHJARGAL, D. TSEDEV and S. LUVSANGOMBO, *Ulaanbaatar: Hotyn hogjil, buteen baiguulalt, tuhen zamnal*, Ulaanbaatar, 2006, p. 78.

Ulaanbaatar in the Socialist World

Laid out in the valleys of the Tuul and the Selbe rivers, Ulaanbaatar emerged from a monastery town of Khüree, also called Örgöö (or Urga) which largely consisted of felt houses (called gers or yurts) grouped around Buddhist monasteries, temples, and markets.¹⁰ The circular layout of the settlement

¹⁰ Valentin ТКАЧЕВ, *Istoriia mongol'skoi arkhitektury*, Moscow: MGSU Izd-vo Assots. stroit. vuzov, 2009, Ch. 6. See also: D. MAIDAR, *Arkhitektura i gradostroitel'stvo Mongolii*, Moscow: Stroizdat, 1971.

was incorporated into the planning of the city that followed the collapse of the Manchurian Qing dynasty (1911-1912) and the foundation of the Soviet-dependent MPR. The first master plan of the city, by then renamed Ulaanbaatar (“red hero”), was delivered by the Moscow-based Giprogor (State Institute of Urban Planning, 1954). The Peace Avenue, laid out parallel to the Tuul River and the transmongolian railway line (completed in 1956), was planned as the city’s backbone, connecting most of its districts (referred as *khorooolol* in Mongolian or *mikroraion*, plural: *mikroraiony* in Soviet documents).¹¹ At Sükhbaatar Square, the Avenue was crossed by a perpendicular axis that linked the governmental center with the recreational areas, which incorporated the former palace-temple complex. The size of the city envisaged by the plan for the 1970s was already surpassed by the late 1950s, at which time most of Ulaanbaatar’s population of 152,000 still lived in ger districts, in spite of the accelerated production of new housing.¹² Subsequent plans provided by Giprogor with varying levels of Mongolian participation (1963, 1971, 1986) laid out a further extension of the city along the Tuul river valley, maintaining the general decision to assign areas around the railway line for industrial development, and northwards of the line for housing, with additional residential neighborhoods on the southern bank of the Dund Gol river (a section of the Selbe river) (**fig. 1**). They accommodated a large portion of the city’s expanding population, even if ger districts continued to grow, in Ulaanbaatar and in other Mongolian cities (**fig.2**).¹³

A drive down the city’s main road, Peace Avenue, reads like a timeline of socialist architecture and urban planning. Its point zero is Sükhbaatar Square, once the site of the mausoleum (now demolished) of the Communist leaders Damdin Sükhbaatar and Khorloo Choibalsan. Inspired by Lenin’s mausoleum in Moscow, it was designed after Sükhbaatar’s death (1922) by architect B. Chimed (considered the “first Mongolian architect”) and Soviet architect B. Bezencev.¹⁴ Added to the mausoleum were the Government Palace and the

11 In order to avoid ambiguity with later nomenclature, and reflecting the majority of our sources, we are using the socialist-period names of the districts and refer to them with the term *mikroraiony*.

12 Balazs SZALONTAI, “From the Demolition of Monasteries to the Installation of Neon Lights: The Politics of Urban Construction in the Mongolian People’s Republic,” in Wasana WONGSURAWAT (ed.), *Sites of Modernity: Asian Cities in the Transitory Moments of Trade, Colonialism, and Nationalism*, Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 2016 (Humanities in Asia, 1), p. 169.

13 On Ulaanbaatar’s urban development, see: S. MUNKHJARGAL, D. TSEDEV and S. LUVSANGOMBO, *Ulaanbaatar: Hotyn hogjil, buteen baiguulalt, tuhen zammal*, Ulaanbaatar, 2006; on ger districts, see: Alexander C. DIENER and Joshua HAGEN, “City of Felt and Concrete: Negotiating Cultural Hybridity in Mongolia’s Capital of Ulaanbaatar,” *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2013, p. 622-650.

14 A. KHISHIGT, “Mongol-Zövlölytn zoorag töslym baigoollaga hamтын ajillagaa,” *Barilgachin*, no. 4, 1971, p. 4-7.

8 | National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet, the latter designed during World War II by Gerhard Kosel, a German architect who worked in the Soviet Union and later became the head of the PCC (with M. S. Shirov, 1942) (**fig. 3**).¹⁵



Figure 2: Prefabricated housing and a ger in Baganur.
Source: Photo by Łukasz Stanek, 2018.



Figure 3: Sükhbaatar Square in Ulaanbaatar. On the left: the Palace of Culture, TsNIIEP im. B. Mezentseva, Moscow (1988); on the right: National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet, Gerhard Kosel, M. Shirov (1942).
Source: Photo by Łukasz Stanek, 2018.

¹⁵ Gerhard KOSEL, “Intermezzo im Großen Vaterländischen Krieg—Das Theater für Ulan-Bator,” *Architektur der DDR*, vol. 34, no. 5, 1985, p. 297-300.

Reflecting the turn of Soviet architecture to modernism and its subsequent rethinking, buildings constructed from the 1960s to the 1980s abandoned the socialist realist idiom of the Theater. Those in the city center and its vicinity include the Palace of Culture, the House of Young Technicians, the Pioneer Palace, and the Wedding Palace (D. Lur'e, N. Stuzhin) (fig. 4).¹⁶ Besides the Soviets, architects and engineers from other Comecon countries also contributed to the urban landscape of Ulaanbaatar, with a hospital designed by a Czechoslovak team (Zdeněk Práda, Karel Hauer, Jan Řídký, design 1960s) and the Romanian-designed circus (Proiect București, 1970s) being among the most visible.¹⁷ Some of these buildings testify to inter-socialist collaboration, including one of the movie theaters in the city center which, in the recollection of a Polish architect, was based on a Soviet type-design adapted to the site by a Bulgarian architect working in Ulaanbaatar, and equipped with the help of socialist countries.¹⁸



Figure 4: The Wedding Palace in Ulaanbaatar, D. Lur'e, N. Stuzhin, TsNIIEP im. B. Mezentseva, Moscow, 1975. Source: Photo by Łukasz Stanek, 2018.

Public buildings designed by Mongolians evolved in similar ways. Until the early 1960s, Soviet-trained Mongolian architects interpreted the postulate of the “national character” in the idiom of socialist realism, as was the case

16 Other buildings in the idiom of socialist realism include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (V. Shul'gina) and the Choibalsan University (N. Shchepetel'nikov).

17 “Nemocnice s poliklinikou v Ulán-bátaru, Mongolská lidová republika,” *Architektura ČSSR*, no. 6, 1963, p. 347-348; National Central Archives of Mongolia (Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, later: UTA), f. 288, o. 1, d. 329, l. 1.

18 Wincenty SZOBER, “Architekci polscy w Mongolii,” *Architektura*, no. 11, 1965, p. 472.

10 | with the National Drama Theatre, designed by A. Khishigt (late 1950s), and the Ulaanbaatar Hotel, designed by B. Chimed (1961). The same postulate was then reinterpreted in modern forms by Mongolian architects with Soviet collaborators, as it can be seen in the Museum of the Revolution (A. Khishigt, 1971), the Zaisan Mount Memorial (A. Khishigt, 1971-1979) (**fig. 5**), and the Lenin Museum (G. Luvsandorj, design 1970s) (**fig. 6**). Some of these buildings were clustered with structures designed by Chinese architects and built by Chinese workers during the 1950s and early 1960s, among them the Central Department Store, the Bayangol Hotel, and the 5th housing district (**fig. 7**).¹⁹

Like the public buildings, the development of Ulaanbaatar's housing districts reflected the general tendencies of Soviet and Eastern European architecture and planning. Designed by Soviet institutes, joined by Chinese (until the mid-1960s) and Eastern European architects, and increasingly planned by Mongolian professionals, the evolution of these districts followed the typological shift from the kvartal layout to that of the mikroraiion.



Figure 5: Friendship Monument, Zaisan Mount, and the view of Ulaanbaatar, A. Khishigt and others (1971-1979). Source: Photo by Łukasz Stanek, 2018.

19 The Beijing Industrial Design Institute also designed the Central Stadium, the Bogd Khan Mountain Hotel (1959), and the Bogd Khan Mountain Guesthouse (1960), constructed by Chinese workers. See: Guanghui DING and Charlie Q. L. XUE, "China's Architectural Aid: Exporting a Transformational Modernism," *Habitat International*, no. 47, 2015, p. 137. On the Chinese involvement in Mongolia, see: Sergey RADCHENKO, "New Documents on Mongolia and the Cold War," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no. 16, 2007, p. 341-446.



Figure 6: The Lenin Museum, Ulaanbaatar, G. Luvsandorj (design 1970s).
Source: Photo by Łukasz Stanek, 2018.



Figure 7: Central Department Store, Gong Deshun, Beijing Industrial Design Institute (completed 1960).
Source: Photo by Łukasz Stanek, 2018.

The former was employed in the areas around the Sükhbaatar Square, while the latter typology, itself evolving, guided the expansion of the city to the east, including mikroraiony 12, 13, 14 and 15 (1965-1970), and to the west, the

12 | 3rd and 4th mikroraion (1975-1983).²⁰ The latter two were together referred to in the Soviet documentation as the “Gandan district,” as they were adjacent to the Gandan monastery, one of the few that survived the demolition of Buddhist monasteries in Mongolia by Communist authorities in 1937-1938.²¹ These residential areas reflected the development of the Soviet prefabrication systems and housing typologies. For example, the mikroraiony 12 and 15 began with the construction of five-story prefabricated blocks and later were extended by nine- and twelve-story towers with more complex volumes. They were equipped with social facilities distributed according to a normalized system of catchment areas, and they occasionally included a unique building, such as the Palace of Science and Culture in the 12th mikroraion (Mosproekt II, 1975).²² By the 1970s, urban layouts and apartment plans became more flexible and differentiated, as evidenced by the Gandan district. It included five 12-story buildings, laid out on a shamrock plan, and connected by a lower building that housed shops and services.²³

Not only were these structures designed and built with the assistance of the Soviet Union and its satellites, but the socialist countries provided much of the financing, materials, technologies, expertise, training, and labor that made these investments possible. While the most visible and most celebrated instances of Comecon’s technical assistance in Ulaanbaatar were buildings gifted by the Soviet Union, such as the Wedding Palace or the 12th mikroraion, most projects were funded by loans granted by the Soviet Union and its satellites. In line with Comecon’s foreign trade practice, many of them were repaid with Mongolia’s export products, including foodstuffs and raw materials. Based on loan agreements, intergovernmental commissions formulated guidelines concerning specific investments, which were then implemented by the responsible ministries in Ulaanbaatar and their counterparts in Eastern Europe.²⁴ These guidelines were followed by detailed contracts between state

20 For commission documents of mikroraiony 3, 4, and 12 see: UTA f. 288, o. 1, d. 820, 1017, f. 288, o. 1, d. 60-106; on mikroraion 5, see: Russian State Archive for Economy (Russian Federation, Moscow) (later: RGAE), d. 5, o. 1, l. 687, l. 73.

21 Balazs SZALONTAI, “From the Demolition of Monasteries to the Installation of Neon Lights,” *op. cit.* (note 12).

22 In 1965, type designs constituted 90% of the total of residential construction in Mongolia, *Desiat’ let raboty postoiannoi komissii SEV po stroitel’stvu*, Moscow: TSINIS Gosstroia SSSR, 1968, p. 19.

23 On the Gandan district, see: RGAE, f. 5, o. 5, d. 116, l. 73-78.

24 In order to reduce travel and communication costs, several Soviet organizations established branches in Mongolia, including the Gosstroj, the Gosgrazhdanstroi (State Committee for Civil Construction and Architecture), and the GKES (Committee for Foreign Economic Relations). See: Dashiin BAT, *Zurag tosol*, Ulaanbaatar: Munkhyn useg, 2016, p. 58.

enterprises and foreign trade organizations in the respective socialist country and Mongolia.²⁵ Since the 1960s, Comecon's PCC had played a decisive role in these negotiations. In particular, Commission experts wrote up proposals concerning the distribution among Comecon member states of particular tasks, including design, construction, and modernization of buildings and ensembles in Mongolia, their expansion, and the training of their personnel.²⁶

Communication between Mongolian and Eastern European institutions was facilitated by the fact that Mongolian organizations in charge of architecture, planning, and construction were based on Soviet models. The main planning institution was the State Planning Commission in Ulaanbaatar (the equivalent of the Soviet Gosplan), which produced investment plans and passed them on to the branch ministries, among them the State Committee for Construction (equivalent to the Soviet Gosstroï). The investment plans laid out by central institutions were executed by a network of state organizations which, together, constituted the material-technical base for construction in Mongolia.

Within this network, the Mongolian State Design Institute played a key role in terms of architectural and urban planning. The Institute emerged from a string of organizations established with the close assistance of the Soviets, starting with the foundation in 1929 of a drafting office in charge of construction plans executed by the first Mongolian construction cooperative (founded in 1926). Since the 1930s, Mongolian planning institutions played an increasing role in the production of design documentation, they employed a growing number of Mongolians, and accelerated the standardization and typification of designs.²⁷ The Institute was divided into specialized sections, including housing, urban planning, industrial architecture, rural architecture, as well as their supporting sections in charge of budgeting and surveys.²⁸ The institute established several regional branches in the capitals of aimags (provinces).²⁹

25 On Mongolian-Soviet agreements concerning the construction of agricultural buildings: UTA f. 288, o. 2, d. 7, l. 49; on Mongolian-Polish agreement concerning repair workshops, Archiwum Akt Nowych (Poland, Warsaw) (later: AAN), 2/2309/0/-/353; on Mongolian-Soviet agreement on economic aid and the construction of residential, agricultural, and industrial objects: RGAE, f. 339, o. 3, d. 2302, l. 273-279.

26 "Protokoll der Spezialistenberatung [...]" March-April 1973, Bundesarchiv (Germany, Berlin) (later: BA), DH1: 25038, 2 von 2.

27 A. KHISHIGT, "Barilgyn zoorag töslyin baigoollaga 50 zhild," *Èdyn zasgyn asuudal*, no. 5, 1979, p. 35-37; IDEM, "Mongol-Zövlölytyn zoorag töslyin baigoollaga hamтын ajillagaa," *op. cit.* (note 14).

28 Wincenty SZOBER, "Architekci polscy w Mongolii," *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 473; J. ZUKHAA, "Barilgyn zoorag tösöl," *Unèn*, no. 308, 22 December 1976, p. 2; L. TSERENDONDOG, "Zoorag töslyin baigoollaga 50 zhild," *Barilgachin*, no. 1, 1971, p. 2-4.

29 "Barilgyn zoorag töslyin товчо," *Unèn*, no. 56, 25 February 1978, p. 1; B. BAATARJAV, "Zoorag töslyin baigoollaga, tèrguun turshлага," *Unèn*, no. 4, 4 January 1980, p. 35-37.

14 | As Mongolian authors explained, the centralization of the institute allowed for the coordination of the planning and construction processes in the country, and the implementation of unified technical standards.³⁰ By the 1960s, it employed more than 500 people, including over 150 foreign specialists and experts, above all from the Soviet Union and Bulgaria, but also from China, East Germany, Hungary, and Poland (**fig. 8**).³¹ While many among them traveled to the MPR early in their careers, some were already successful professionals before coming to Mongolia. For example, Volia Kossarzhevskii, the head designer of the 15th mikroraion in Ulaanbaatar, had been chief architect at a Moscow-based design institute specializing in public buildings (TsNIIEP im. Mezentseva).³²



Figure 8: Experts at Mongolian State Design Institute: S. Munkhjargal, Dashiin Bat and others, 1968. Source: Dashiin Bat, *Zurag Tosol*, Ulaanbaatar: Munkhyn useg, 2016, p. 252.

During the first decades of the Institute's operations, most of its staff were trained in the framework of Soviet, and later Eastern European technical assistance. Some among them were recruited from other professions: a case in point was the career of D. Tsultem, presented in the Mongolian press

30 D. SAIN-ER, "Zoorag töslyn baigoollaga 50 zhild," *Barilgachin*, no. 1, 1971, p. 8-11.

31 Wincenty SZOBER, "Architekci polscy w Mongolii," *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 473; for the history of the institute, see: Dashiin BAT, *Zurag tosol*, *op. cit.* (note 24), p. 196. Interview with Dagshigdorj Chimed by Nikolay Erofeev and Łukasz Stanek, Ulaanbaatar, 10 April 2018.

32 RGAE, f. 5, o. 1, d. 687, l. 70a.

as “an exemplary Communist.”³³ After graduating from a teachers’ college in 1943 and working as a teacher for several years, Tsultem was trained by Soviet specialists in the financial planning of construction projects. He was then put in charge of budgeting several large investments at the Mongolian State Design Institute. Other paths to a professional career at the Institute led through scholarships that allowed Mongolians to study at architectural schools in the socialist countries, above all in the Soviet Union, but also in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, and Romania.³⁴ In order to facilitate architectural education in Mongolia, in 1973 the School of Architecture was established at the University of Mongolia in Ulaanbaatar. The first head of the architectural school, Mongolian architect Bandi Dambiinyam (himself trained in Moscow), explained in an article published in 1979 that the school’s curriculum was modeled according to the five-year specialist training at the Moscow State University of Civil Engineering.³⁵ Most educators at the School were trained at Moscow universities (around 60%, according to an estimation from 1982), and students were often sent to Soviet construction sites in order to gain practical experience.³⁶ After the School’s foundation, the numbers of architects in Mongolia began to rise quickly, and by 1987 Mongolia’s architectural union counted at least 150 members, trained either locally or in other socialist countries.³⁷

Soviet and Eastern European technical assistance was also decisive for the creation of the construction industry in the MPR. Since the formation of the first state building organization in 1926, the Soviets had supported the development of the Mongolian construction industry and supplied it with experts, machinery, construction materials, and mobile, mechanized construction brigades.³⁸ Central for this process was the foundation and advancement of Mongolian construction-materials industry and its supporting plants. For example, among more than 150 industrial facilities constructed with Soviet assistance between 1961 and 1973 were mining facilities and processing plants based on mineral raw materials, as well as factories, several

33 N. TSEVEGMID, “Duurialtai komunist,” *Unèn*, no. 287, 14 October 1979, p. 3.

34 See, for example UTA, f. 288, o. 2-29, d. 69.

35 B. DAMBIINIAM, “Arkhitekturnoe obrazovanie v MNR,” *Arkhitektura SSSR* no. 9, 1979, p. 15-17.

36 *Ibid.*; Ch. AVDAI, “Inzhener-tehnikyn mèrgèjltny uurhai,” *Unèn*, no. 275, 1982, p. 4.

37 Werner RIETDORF, “Bauen und Wohnen in der Mongolischen VR,” *Architektur der DDR*, no. 7, 1988, p. 19.

38 S. BUDSUREN, “ZHU-aas manai orny barilgyn uildverleld uzuulsen tuslamj,” *Barilgachin*, no. 1, 1971, p. 8-10; Wincenty SZOBER, “Architekci polscy w Mongolii,” *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 471.

16 | among them in the new industrial towns of Erdenet and Darkhan.³⁹ Besides the Soviets, other Comecon countries contributed too, including a Czechoslovak cement factory in Darkhan; a silicate factory in the same city and lightweight concrete and wooden-element factories in Ulaanbaatar, all three from Poland; and several Bulgarian brick factories.⁴⁰

Integration and Adaptation

The duration and intensity of Comecon's technical assistance in Mongolia, along with its multilateral and coordinated character, give us an opportunity to examine several questions that would be difficult to answer in any other location. What were the priorities, motivations, and aspirations of the foreign and local architects, planners, engineers, managers, and administrators who worked in the framework of Comecon's technical assistance for architecture and construction from the 1960s to the 1980s? How did these priorities, motivations and aspirations respond to the shifting political and economic directives across the chains of command of the respective party organizations and ministries in the MPR and abroad? How did the professionals and bureaucrats involved negotiate these directives with their experience on construction sites and in design offices in Ulaanbaatar during the three decades of their exchanges? What was the role of distinct bodies of architectural and planning knowledge in these negotiations? How were specific design concepts, methods, and guidelines introduced and implemented, and how were they shaped and reshaped in a confrontation with the differing professional traditions of the Comecon countries involved?

Inspired by debates in philosophy and anthropology, we begin answering these questions by introducing the concept of “concern.”⁴¹ In what follows, we argue that three areas of concern—integration, adaptation, and collaboration—consistently informed the work of foreign and local professionals and mid-level administrators involved in Comecon's technical assistance to Mongolia. While the concept of concern is ours, Mongolians, Soviets, and Eastern Europeans often referred to “integration,” “adaptation,” and “collaboration,”

39 MINISTERIUM FÜR BAUWESEN, *Zusammenarbeit der Mitgliedsländer des RGW auf dem Gebiet des Bauwesens. Zum 25. Jahrestag d. Rates für Gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe*, Berlin: Bauinformation, 1975, p. 29-33.

40 *Ibid.*

41 The concept of concern, referring to Martin Heidegger's concept of *Sorge* (care or concern), has been much debated in philosophy and anthropology; see for example: Tatjana THELEN, “Care as Social Organization: Creating, Maintaining and Dissolving Significant Relations,” *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2015, p. 497-515. DOI: [10.1177/1463499615600893](https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499615600893). Our discussion is inspired by but distinct from these debates.

although not always explicitly or unambiguously. The term “collaboration” was discussed frequently and explicitly, while “integration” and “adaptation” were used interchangeably with several other terms with similar connotations, often in reference to more general principles of architectural practice in the socialist countries. “Integration” reverberates with the Russian adjective *kompleksnyi* (*kompleksowy* in Polish, *komplex* in German), which in Comecon’s architectural discourse referred to the tendency towards “holistic integration and [...] comprehensiveness,” in the words of Michał Murawski.⁴² Beyond the architectural scale, this term conveyed a vision of socialist urbanization informed by what Kimberly E. Zarecor called “infrastructural thinking,” or the design and construction of territorial systems (infrastructure, production, transport, social services, recreation) at all scales, from architectural, through urban and regional, to international.⁴³ In turn, the term “adaptation” encompasses the architectural procedure of modifying type designs to local conditions (*priviazka*), which was at the core of Soviet design culture, and in itself conveyed the broad consensus within this culture that architecture and urban planning needed to be adequate to the local conditions.

We reconstruct the three areas of concern based on a range of archival documents, including policy outlines, professional publications, press accounts, official communications, reports from construction sites, and minutes of professional meetings. We extend these discursive sources with technical documentation: architectural drawings and urban plans; and regulatory documents for architectural and construction practices, including building norms, construction standards, and procedures for the division of labor between the actors involved. In this sense, rather than as a means to analyze the discourse of Comecon actors in Mongolia,⁴⁴ we use the concept of concern to understand the broader dynamics of their professional practices. In order to mitigate the fragmentation of archival sources, our basic procedure is that of juxtaposing texts and drawings from various archives in ways that allow for comparisons across longer time-spans.

42 Michał MURAWSKI, “Actually-Existing Success: Economics, Aesthetics, and the Specificity of (Still-) Socialist Urbanism,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 60, no. 4, 2018, p. 924-927.

43 Kimberly Elman ZARECOR, “Infrastructural Thinking: Urban Housing in Former Czechoslovakia from the Stalin Era to EU Accession,” in Edward MURPHY and Najib B. HOURANI (eds.), *The Housing Question: Tensions, Continuities, and Contingencies in the Modern City*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013 (Global Urban Studies), p. 57-78; see also: Kimberly Elman ZARECOR, “What Was So Socialist about the Socialist City? Second World Urbanity in Europe,” *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2018, p. 95-117. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144217710229>.

44 On (late) Soviet discourse, see Alexei YURCHAK, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

In what follows, we read these documents by focusing on how the professionals and administrators involved prioritised and substantiated investments, evaluated and evidenced design decisions, extracted resources across the chains of command, and made sense of their own work. We will show that, more often than not, the concern to integrate, adapt, and collaborate reverberated across these practices—even if the actors involved were not always able to agree on the specific interpretation of the three concerns, and often struggled to deliver on them. The aspirational dimension of the three concerns made them often ambiguous, and their specific meaning was subject to negotiation and disagreement. By the end of this paper, the review of a few of such disagreements will show how professionals and administrators, notably Mongolians, aimed to obviate the obstacles and exploit the opportunities of the political economy of Comecon's technical assistance.

As a starting point for evidencing these arguments can serve the 1966 report by a delegation of Soviet architects led by Mikhail Posokhin, chief architect of Moscow and head of the design institute Mosproekt II. After his inspection of Soviet architectural work in Ulaanbaatar, Posokhin was not impressed. Addressing the Department of Construction Abroad at the Soviet Gosstroj, he described the Soviet-designed and constructed 12th mikroraion (**fig. 9**) and compared it unfavorably with the Chinese-designed and built 5th mikroraion (**fig. 10**).



Figure 9: Mikroraion 12 in Ulaanbaatar (1960s), to which the Palace of Science and Culture II (on the left) was added in 1975, Mosproekt II, Moscow.

Source: *Information Mongolia: The Comprehensive Reference Source of the People's Republic of Mongolia*, Oxford, 1990, plate 10.

Posokhin pointed out the poor quality of the Soviet housing when compared with Chinese buildings in Ulaanbaatar.⁴⁵ Such comparison was a sensitive matter in the wake of the Sino-Soviet split, when both countries competed for the status of the progressive force in world politics, and actively sought to promote their paths to socialism among governments of decolonizing countries in Africa and Asia. In order to distinguish the Soviet approach to technical assistance from the Chinese one, a Soviet author argued in the early 1970s that Chinese development aid aimed at an incremental transformation of the national economy, in contrast to the vision of structural change that underlay the Soviet developmental approach.⁴⁶ The latter was more suited for newly independent countries, argued the author, given the scale of their developmental challenges.



Figure 10: Mikroraiion 5 in Ulaanbaatar, with a kindergarten, 5-story residential buildings and two towers of Bayangol hotel. Gong Deshun, Beijing Industrial Design Institute (design 1964).

Source: D. MAIDAR, *Arkhitektura i gradostroitel'stvo Mongolii*, Moscow: Stroiizdat, 1971, p. 71.

This contrast between Soviet and Chinese approaches to technical assistance appears plausible when buildings constructed in the course of the 1960s in Ulaanbaatar are considered: whereas the Chinese-designed buildings were constructed by means of conventional methods, many of the Soviet ones were based on an industrialized system of construction. The cornerstone of this

45 RGAE, f. 5, o. 1, d. 687, l. 73-80; the report also criticized architectural designs of Soviet buildings.

46 "Chinese Aid Criticised," *West Africa*, December 2, 1974, p. 1466.

20 | system was the house-building factory in Ulaanbaatar, which we described in the opening vignette of this paper. Donated by the Soviet Union as a gift to Mongolia in early 1960s, the factory was designed by the Moscow-based design institute Giprostroiindustriia to prefabricate elements of the I-464 building system—one of the most widespread large-panel technologies used in the Soviet Union.⁴⁷

The factory was conceived as an essential node within an integrated network of institutions in charge of the urbanization of the country, some of which already existed, while others were to be established in the future. Due to this factory's central role in Mongolia's material-technical base for construction, it was prioritized by decision-makers in Moscow and Ulaanbaatar over more spectacular buildings and more urgently needed facilities. The development of the factory during the 1970s and 1980s continued to be informed by the concern for integration. After its expansion and modernization in 1972,⁴⁸ the network of industrial plants centered on this facility included two other plants of prefabricated elements constructed by then and their supporting industries and infrastructures. This network was instrumental in the government's program to rehouse much of the country's population to new residences.⁴⁹

At the same time, the Soviets pointed out that the factory's integrative role in the development of Mongolia's material-technical base was predicated upon the adaptation of its technology to the local conditions. In the MPR, Soviet engineers performed such adaptation either by applying solutions from regions of the Soviet Union claimed to be similar to Mongolia, such as Soviet Buriatia, or by directly adapting Soviet technological systems to Mongolia. The latter path was chosen for the design of the Ulaanbaatar factory, based on the procedure of trying-in (*priviazka*). Following this procedure, Soviet engineers adapted the factory's standard design to seismic and soil conditions in Ulaanbaatar. Because it was one of the first attempts to export the I-464 system abroad, this adaptation process was long and challenging, resulting in delays in the operation of the plant.⁵⁰

47 Nikolay EROFEEV, "The I-464 Housing Delivery System: A Tool for Urban Modernisation in the Socialist World and Beyond," *Fabrications* vol. 29, no. 2, 2019, p. 207-230.

48 The prefabrication technology was modernized by the Moscow-based TsNIIIEP Zhilishcha, see: Archive of TsNIIIEP Zhilishcha (Archive of the Central scientific-research institute for experimental and typical design of housing, Russian Federation, Moscow), inv. 2620 "92-07S-1-UB," inv. 2131 "92-016S-1-UB."

49 Ayuushiyn DAVAA, "Osnovnoi rychnag razvitiia stroitel'nogo proizvodstva MNR," *Ekonomicheskoe sotrudnichestvo stran-chlenov SEV*, no. 2, 1977, p. 50.

50 Gosstroii identified technical adaptations to Mongolian realities as the main concern in the delivery of Soviet housing to the MPR: RGAE, f. 5, o. 1, d. 139, l. 149; d. 522, l. 55; RGAE, f. 339, o. 3, d. 2302, l. 36.

The construction and expansion of the factory in Ulaanbaatar from the 1960s to the 1980s not only exemplified the persistent concerns for integration and adaptation by Soviet and Mongolian decision-makers and professionals, but also their conviction that both concerns were interdependent. Yet rather than being limited to a singular project, however large, we argue that both concerns were constitutive for the overarching vision of urbanization supported by the Soviet Union and other socialist countries in the MPR.

Particularly useful in understanding this vision is the document titled “Unified technical conditions for the design of plants and other buildings constructed in the MPR with the technical assistance of the member states of the Comecon.”⁵¹ Published in 1976 by the PCC, thus in the midst of the accelerated involvement of Comecon’s member-states in Mongolia, the “Conditions” were made obligatory for all Comecon actors working in the MPR. The “Conditions” prescribed the application of a range of planning procedures, including standardization, modularization, typification, and, ultimately, industrialization. The document listed such general principles of modern planning as zoning and division of traffic, as well as more specifically Soviet and Eastern European planning procedures of coordinating economic and spatial planning in longer time spans (perspective plans) and larger scales (regional plans). Based on earlier Soviet norms for Mongolia, the “Conditions” also prescribed the typology of the mikroraion as the basic unit within a nested hierarchy of settlements and their respective social facilities, as applied in the urban design of the 15th mikroraion in Ulaanbaatar (fig. 11).⁵²

As was the case with the house-building factory in Ulaanbaatar, the concern for integration went hand in hand with the concern for adaptation. The urban and architectural norms stipulated in the “Conditions” convey both concerns in specific and concrete terms. These norms were introduced in order to facilitate an urbanism designed in an “integrated” or “comprehensive” (*komplex*) manner.⁵³ They were expected to coordinate “the spatial, constructive, sanitary and electrical solutions with a high standard of technology” and to guarantee a unified system of supply of social services on

51 *Einheitliche technische Bedingungen für die Projektierung von Betrieben und anderen Objekten, die in der Mongolischen Volksrepublik mit technischer Hilfe der Mitgliedsländer des RGW errichtet werden*, Berlin: Bauakademie der DDR, 1976.

52 *Ibid*; see also: *Edinye tekhnicheskije uslovia na proektirovanie predpriatii i drugikh ob'ektov, stroiashchikhsia v Mongol'skoi Narodnoi Respublike pri tekhnicheskoi sodeistvii SSSR*, Moscow: Glavstroiproekt, Promstroiproekt, 1965.

53 *Einheitliche technische Bedingungen*, *op. cit.* (note 51), p. 31.

22 | all scales and in all locations.⁵⁴ The introduction of such norms responded to the advice of Soviet professionals who listed the lack of universal standards among the main hindrances for the advancement of Mongolia's construction industry.⁵⁵ At the same time, the prescription of building standards and type projects was intended to enforce the adaptation of Eastern European designs to the climatic, seismic, economic, and technological specificity of the MPR, and the ways of life of the country's inhabitants. The "Conditions" required type housing projects to be responsive to "local climatic and living conditions, and the demographic composition of the population," while urban centers were to be designed as compact, "in order to account for the continental climate of the MPR."⁵⁶ Furthermore, and adding a third concern to those of integration and adaptation, the use of the "Conditions" by all actors in Mongolia, both local and foreign, would facilitate collaboration between them.

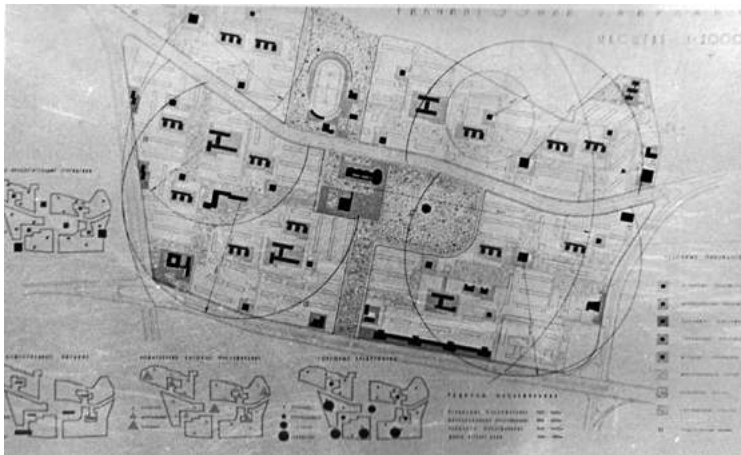


Figure 11: Schematic map of social facilities in mikraoraion 15 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolian State Design Institute, 1966. Source: RGAE, f. P-149, o. 1-1, d. 3238, l. 45.

Collaboration and Its Discontents

In 1974 Orony Tleyhan, Mongolian minister for the construction and construction-materials industries, addressed the participants of the PCC meeting in Prague. Tleyhan expressed gratitude for the technical assistance provided by the Soviet Union and other Comecon countries to Mongolia. Yet his phrasing stressed the local agency in these exchanges. He argued that

54 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

55 RGAE, f. 339, o. 3, d. 2100, l. 65.

56 *Einheitliche technische Bedingungen*, *op. cit.* (note 51), p. 36. See also: *Edinye tekhnicheskie usloviia*, *op. cit.* (note 52), p. 1-4.

with Comecon's support "the Mongolian people [...] led by the Mongolian Revolutionary People's Party transformed [...] a backward country based on livestock farming into a socialist country with a fast-growing, modern industry and large collective farms."⁵⁷

These statements conformed to the Comecon discourse, which stressed collaboration as its core premise and the defining experience of socialist internationalism. The principle of collaboration was referred to by the Soviets to distinguish their technical assistance from Western "development aid," which Soviet propaganda accused of prolonging colonial-era economic dependencies. By contrast, collaboration between the Comecon and less developed countries would allow the latter to fully participate in the economic exchanges within the socialist world⁵⁸—even if the negotiation of their specific roles in these exchanges and the division of labor within this world led to tensions among Comecon member-states. For example, while the Soviets encouraged Mongolia to develop its traditional areas of export (livestock farming and mining), the leadership of the MPR often contested this advice as leading to a perpetuated "backwardness" of their country, and instead requested technical assistance for industrial development.⁵⁹

Writing in 1977, Luujugin Lhamsurem, director of the State Planning Commission of the MPR, distinguished three modes of Mongolia's collaboration with other Comecon countries in architecture, planning, and construction. The first was the provision of machinery, equipment, technical documentation and design manuals by the socialist countries, as well as the training of Mongolian specialists in these countries, and the work of Eastern European experts in the MPR. As the second mode, he named turn-key projects constructed by socialist countries in Mongolia, in particular the Soviet Union, and handed over to the Mongolian authorities. The third mode of collaboration was construction projects, designed, built, and operated jointly by Eastern Europeans and Mongolians, in particular in the industrial towns of Darkhan and Erdenet.⁶⁰

57 MINISTERIUM FÜR BAUWESEN, *Zusammenarbeit der Mitgliedsländer des RGW auf dem Gebiet des Bauwesens*, *op. cit.* (note 39), p. 29. The name is spelled "Tleichan" in the East German sources.

58 Leonid S. YAGODOVSKY, *The World Socialist System—Its Role in the World Today*, Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1975.

59 Balazs SZALONTAI, "From the Demolition of Monasteries to the Installation of Neon Lights," *op. cit.* (note 12), p. 173.

60 Luujugin LKHAMSURIEN, "Pomoshch bratskikh stran v uskorenii razvitiia i povyshenii effektivnosti ekonomiki MNR," *Ekonomicheskoe sotrudnichestvo stran-chlenov SEV*, no. 1, 1977, p. 25-30.

Dashiin Bat, the former head of the Industrial Construction Department at the Mongolian State Design Institute, largely confirmed that these modes of collaboration were applicable to the work of the Institute, too. Recalling Comecon's technical assistance projects, Bat distinguished between the training of Mongolian architects as team members at Soviet design institutes (typically in Moscow), and the employment of foreign specialists in Mongolian institutions. He pointed out that the provision of complete buildings by the Soviets as turn-key projects was the most efficient but also the most expensive mode of collaboration. While the latter mode was preferred by Mongolian officials, the Soviets reserved this approach mostly for exceptional and highly visible projects, such as gifted buildings.⁶¹

Bat's comments make it clear that beyond political and ideological objectives, the concern for collaboration was also motivated economically. The Soviets required that Mongolians participate in the provision of resources for technical assistance projects, above all labor. This included the agreement about the construction of Ulaanbaatar's house-building factory, according to which Mongolia agreed to provide up to 65% of the laborers. However, the authorities were unable to deliver on this obligation,⁶² and labor shortages became a huge challenge after China withdrew most of its workers from the MPR in the wake of the Sino-Soviet split.⁶³ Accordingly, by the 1960s, Soviet and Mongolian officials discussed various measures to train and involve Mongolians in the housing delivery process.⁶⁴ Following the agreement signed by the head of the Mongolian State Committee for Construction Damdinjav Mairdar and the head of the Soviet Gosstroj I. Novikov in 1965, the Soviets stepped in to train local construction cadres. They opened training centers for the building trades at Mongolian construction sites and at the house-building factory in Ulaanbaatar. Training sessions were also offered by the joint Soviet-Mongolian brigades.⁶⁵

Training was a priority of Comecon's technical assistance to the MPR more generally. This priority was reflected in individual contracts of Eastern European architects, technicians, and foremen. For example, the contract signed by Józef Musiał, a Polish bricklayer-foreman, who worked in Mongolia

61 Dashiin Bat, interview by Nikolay Erofeev and Łukasz Stanek, Ulaanbaatar, 10 April 2018.

62 RGAE, f. 339, o. 3, d. 2100, l. 65.

63 Balazs SZALONTAI, "From the Demolition of Monasteries to the Installation of Neon Lights," *op. cit.* (note 12), p. 169-170.

64 RGAE, f. 339, o. 3, d. 2302, l. 161-64, 273-279.

65 RGAE, f. 339, o. 3, d. 2302, l. 33.

in 1968 and 1969, listed the supervision and training of Mongolian workers among his chief duties.⁶⁶ Accordingly, knowledge of Russian—the language in which Comecon’s organizations delivered the documentation of technical assistance projects⁶⁷—was an essential criterion in recruiting Eastern European staff for contracts in the country. Since the 1970s, their communication with each other and with their Mongolian counterparts was facilitated by various publications issued by the PCC, notably the monumental *Dictionary of Civil Engineering in Twelve Languages*, including Mongolian.⁶⁸

In addition to linguistic obstacles, Mongolians and foreigners also faced other challenges which reveal the uneven and unequal character of their collaboration. For example, in 1964 the joint Soviet-Mongolian brigades were able to account for only 47% of the expected construction output.⁶⁹ In order to catch up with the plan, Soviet military labor was tasked with helping out on the construction sites.⁷⁰ Accordingly, by 1965 almost 3000 military laborers contributed to the construction of Soviet projects, among them mikroraiony 12 and 15 in Ulaanbaatar.⁷¹ Soviet soldiers and laborers often lived in military camps, which limited their opportunities for everyday contacts with Mongolians, thus contradicting Comecon’s propaganda that such contacts were a core experience of socialist technical assistance. This was confirmed by Ludmila Samsonova, an engineer from Leningrad, who was employed by a builders’ brigade of a military organization in charge of the implementation of type-housing projects for both military and civilian uses in Mongolia.⁷²

66 AAN 2/2309/0/-/362, p. 2-5, see also: AAN 2/1154/0/25/526.

67 *Einheitliche technische Bedingungen*, *op. cit.* (note 51), p. 9.

68 *Dictionary of Civil Engineering in Twelve Languages*, Moscow: Russian Languages Publishers, 1979; *Dvanáctijazyčný stavební slovník*, Prague: SNTL, 1980; *Dicționar pentru construcții în douăsprezece limbi*, Bucharest: 1980; *Dvanadesetezičen stroiteljen rečnik*, Sofia: Dărž. Izd. Tehnika, 1980; *Dvenadcatijazyčnyj stroitel'nyj slovar'*, Moscow: Izd. Rus. Jazyk, 1981; *Zwölfsprachiges Wörterbuch Bauwesen*, Berlin (East): Bauakademie der DDR: 1981; *Dictionnaire du bâtiment et du génie civil en douze langues*, Moscow: Ed. “Langue Russe”, 1982; *Dwunastojezyczny słownik budownictwa*, Warsaw: Arkady, 1983; *Tizenkét nyelvű építési szótár*, Budapest: Akad. Kiadó, 1983. We were unable to locate the volumes in Mongolian, Serbo-Croatian, and Spanish. See also: Łukasz STANEK, “Paper Cybernetics. Notes on Comecon’s Dictionary of Civil Engineering in Twelve Languages (1979),” *Pidgin (Princeton University School of Architecture)*, no. 25, 2019, p. 80-90.

69 RGAE, f. 339, o. 3, d. 2100, l. 66.

70 On Soviet soldiers in Mongolia, see: Ram RAHUL, *Afghanistan, Mongolia, and USSR*, New Delhi: Vikas Pub. House, 1987, p. 65-67; Sergei RADCHENKO, “The Soviets’ Best Friend in Asia: The Mongolian Dimension of the Sino-Soviet Split,” *Wilson Center Working Papers*, no. 42, 2003.

71 RGAE, f. 339, o. 3, d. 2302, l. 37, 129.

72 Ludmila Samsonova worked in 1985-88 in the military unit “73 939.” Interview with Ludmila Samsonova, by Nikolay Erofeev (over Skype), 18 June 2018.

26 | Further tensions in daily contacts between Soviet and local experts stemmed from the fact that the former enjoyed access to consumer goods distributed in special shops and social services which were not available to ordinary Mongolians.⁷³

The challenges of collaboration notwithstanding, a review of the design and construction of Ulaanbaatar's housing projects supported by socialist countries shows a growing involvement of Mongolians. This included workers and technicians, but also architects, engineers, and planners. A comparison between the design processes of the mikroraiony 12 and 15 illustrates this point. The 12th mikroraion was planned by the design institute Mosproekt II and the role of the Mongolian State Design Institute was limited to the provision of topographical, geological, and engineering data for Soviet experts.⁷⁴ The mikroraion was constructed as “turn-key,” fully equipped and operational, by workers from Soviet construction firms, supervised by Moscow-based institutions.⁷⁵ By contrast, the design of the 15th mikroraion was delivered by planners at the Mongolian State Design Institute, who were advised by Soviet experts.

Such experiences of collaboration and feedback from completed buildings resulted in lessons for both Soviet and Mongolian architects. The Gandan district evidences several such lessons (**figs. 12, 13**). Its designers at Mosproekt and Giprogor drew larger kitchens, additional storage rooms, and a balcony which was used to freeze meat supplies during winter (**fig. 14**). The prefabricated system used for the construction of these buildings was expanded to include ornamental slabs that referred to vernacular decoration, based on studies of ornamental motives and the architectural heritage of Mongolia, carried out by Soviet and Mongolian scholars (**fig. 15**).⁷⁶ By the 1980s, the Mongolian architectural critic Niamosoryn Tsultem was arguing that MPR architects were capable of taking over. He criticized several buildings designed by Soviet specialists in Ulaanbaatar's city center during the earlier periods for not paying attention to the “national character” of the country.⁷⁷ Yet this

73 Alexey V. MIKHALEV, “Soviet Experts in Mongolia: Between International Mission and Colonial Practices,” *Sensus Historiae*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2013, p. 177-194.

74 RGAE, f. 5, o. 1, d. 686, l. 66.

75 The construction was supervised by the Moscow City Hall Administration, RGAE, f. 339, o. 3, d. 2302, l. 37.

76 See, for example: D. MAIDAR and J. PIUREV, *Ot kochevoi do mobil'noi arkhitektury*, Moscow: Stroizdat, 1980, p. 41-50.

77 Niamosoryn TSULTEM, *Arkhitektura Mongolii—Mongolian architecture—Architecture de la Mongolie—La architecture de Mongolie*, Ulaanbaatar: State Publishing House, 1988; quoted in: Balazs SZALONTAI, “From

critique in itself testified to the impact of Soviet architectural culture, in which the concept of “national character” (or “national tradition”) was a central criterion of geographical difference, particularly relevant for the development of architectural and planning practices in Soviet Central Asia.⁷⁸

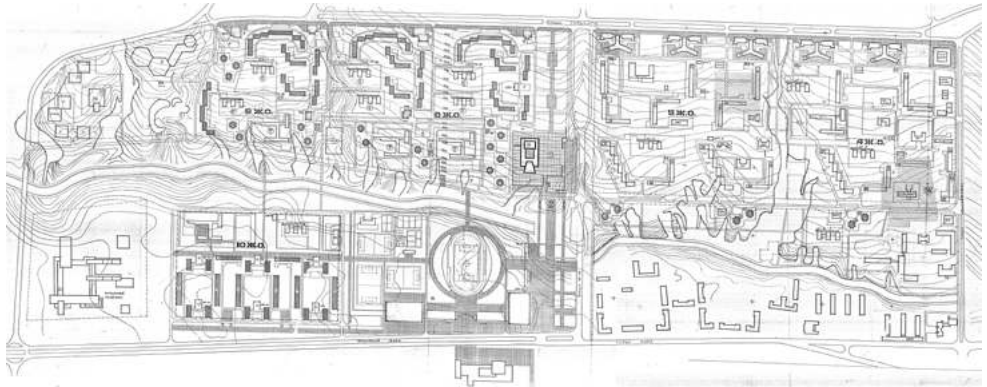


Figure 12: Master plan of the Gandan residential district (mikroraiony 4 and 5) in Ulaanbaatar (Mosproekt II, Moscow). Source: National Archive of Mongolia, f. 5, o. 5, d. 1, l. 2.



Figure 13: Residential buildings in the Gandan district, 1978-1983. Source: Photo by Łukasz Stanek, 2018.

the Demolition of Monasteries to the Installation of Neon Lights,” *op. cit.* (note 12), p. 175.

78 Igor DEMCHENKO, “Critical Post-functionalism in the Architecture of Late Soviet Central Asia,” *ABE Journal*, no. 13, 2018, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/abe.4509>; Boris ЧУКХОВИЧ, “Orientalist Modes of Modernism in Architecture: Colonial/ Postcolonial/Soviet,” *Études de Lettres*, no. 2-3, 2014, p. 263-294. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/edl.728>; see also: Łukasz STANEK, “Socialist Worldmaking: The Political Economy of Urban Comparison in the Global Cold War,” *Urban Studies*, October 2021, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980211050178>.

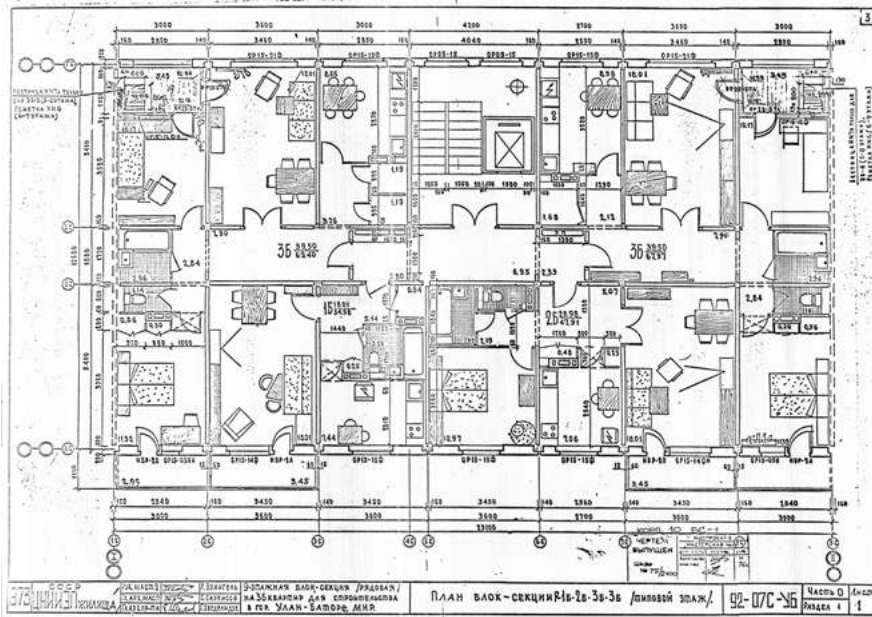


Figure 14: Residential building type 92-07C-UB for production in Ulaanbaatar, TsNIIEP Zhilishcha, Moscow, 1973. Source: National Archive of Mongolia, f. 5, o. 5, d. 136, l. 3.



Figure 15: A residential building in the Gandan district, 1978-1983. Source: Photo by Łukasz Stanek, 2018.

This brief overview of the housing districts in Ulaanbaatar points at the ways in which their designers and builders across three decades largely shared an overarching concern for integration, adaptation, and collaboration.

At the same time, this overview makes it clear that the three concerns did not describe a static ideal but rather a dynamic and open-ended process. Such a process was implied by the previously discussed “Unified technical conditions,” which suggested that with the increasing modernization of Mongolian cities, new architectural typologies would need to be designed. A comparison of Ulaanbaatar’s housing layouts confirms this tendency: while in the 1960s the layouts of buildings designed with the I-464 system had been adapted for the use of solid fuel cast-iron stoves to cope with Mongolia’s lack of centralized heating and electricity infrastructure, apartments in the Gandan district built during the following decade were fully integrated into such infrastructural networks.⁷⁹ Comecon decision-makers were aware that such advancement of design and construction required that the professionals involved be given opportunities for innovation and experimentation. This was the role of “experimental designs” which, in line with the Soviet practice, allowed planners to test new construction methods, building materials, and architectural layouts. Experimental designs were one more area in which Mongolian professionals were increasingly taking over from the Soviets: while in the early 1960s experiments were carried out in the Soviet Union prior to their implementation in Mongolia, by the next decade most of them were conducted in the country.

The narrative that accompanied Comecon’s technical assistance to Mongolia often suggested that the three concerns were intertwined and reinforced each other: collaboration between professionals from socialist countries was expected both to facilitate the integration of the Mongolian construction industry and to allow for a “better consideration of national and other features of the country.”⁸⁰ However, the interpretation of the three concerns and of the principles of their implementation was subject of negotiation and, sometimes, led to disagreements between Mongolian, Soviet, and Eastern European actors. When requesting funding from the Comecon for extension, adjustment, and modernization projects, Mongolian bureaucrats pointed out the need to integrate new investments into the existing network of institutions and their better adaptation to the conditions on the ground. These arguments were substantiated by the language of the Comecon documents and the authority of Soviet experts—and yet they were sometimes challenged by representatives of Eastern European countries.

79 TsNIIEP Zhilishcha developed an amended system I-464-UB for Ulaanbaatar. See: RGAE, f. 339, o. 3, d. 2302, l. 70; RGAE, f. 5, o. 1, d. 139, l. 85, 111.

80 RGAE, f. 339, o. 3, d. 2302, l. 206.

A case in point was a document titled “Proposals and fundamental measures for a perspective development of the construction and construction-materials industry as well as design and research capacities of the MPR in the period until 1990,” prepared in 1973 by the Mongolian Ministry of Construction.⁸¹ The document, which referred to a previous Soviet report on the same subject, included a vision of a massive expansion of Mongolia’s construction industry, and a “shopping list” of plants the Mongolians requested the Comecon countries to construct. The list specified six plants to be requested from the Soviet Union, three from Czechoslovakia, two from East Germany, and one from Poland. In a letter sent to the East German Ministry of Construction, Gerhard Kosel argued that the “Proposals” misrepresented the report of the Soviet experts who had recommended that the future collaboration with the MPR was based on decreased rather than expanded transfers from Comecon countries.⁸² In this and other instances, professionals and decision-makers from socialist countries often resisted Mongolian proposals of developing the material-technical base for construction in the country, even if these proposals were framed in the language of the Comecon and were based on the interpretations of the three concerns. Comecon’s experts sometimes saw Mongolian requests as unreasonable and motivated by the will to “impress.”⁸³ Such orientalizing perceptions revealed a racialized gaze cast by some Soviet and Eastern European professionals on their Mongolian counterparts.

Resistance to the increase in requests from MPR officials was particularly strong among managers of Eastern European companies. They were under pressure from state and party leaderships to fulfil production plans in their home countries and, by the 1970s, to deliver on the export quotas and the obligatory “hard currency plans.” (The latter were deployed in an attempt to finance the debts of many Eastern European satellite countries with Western financial institutions, and resulted in the expansion of commercial contracts of Eastern European architects and building companies into the Middle East, North Africa, and elsewhere).⁸⁴ For example, in March 1970 one of East Germany’s combines refused a request from the Ministry of Construction in East Berlin to send 17 specialists to a meat processing plant in Ulaanbaatar, and argued that their enterprise’s capacities were already stretched to

81 “Zu einigen Problemen des Bauwesens der MRV [...]” BA DH1: 25038, 2 von 2, p. 4.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 4-5.

83 Balazs SZALONTAI, “From the Demolition of Monasteries to the Installation of Neon Lights,” *op. cit.* (note 12), p. 17; see also: Alexey V. MIKHALEV, “Soviet Experts in Mongolia: Between International Mission and Colonial Practices,” *op. cit.* (note 73).

84 Łukasz STANEK, *Architecture in Global Socialism*, *op. cit.* (note 4), Ch. 4-5.

the breaking point by the deployment of personnel to a carpet factory in Mongolia's capital.⁸⁵

Conflicts around resources continued after their allocation. The Mongolian authorities were in charge of budgeting and financial management of each investment, and Eastern European representatives in Ulaanbaatar were eager to dispel any ambiguity in this respect. A case in point was the experience of a group of ten Polish architects who arrived to Mongolia in 1962 to work, initially, as one team. Yet when several of their designs were rejected by Mongolian institutions and Soviet advisors, the architects were distributed across various sections of the Mongolian State Design Institute.⁸⁶ The architects objected to this decision, and yet the Polish embassy refused to support them. Critical of their "individualism" and their uncooperative attitude, embassy officials were concerned about the dissatisfaction of the Mongolian authorities with the "Polish team." Accordingly, its dissolution was accepted by the officials, in particular as this reorganization meant that all responsibility for the design decisions of the Polish architects was ceded to the Mongolians.⁸⁷ In several other cases, when Mongolian authorities modified the design documentation delivered by Eastern European countries, their representatives used these changes as an excuse to withdraw from the investment in question.⁸⁸ These examples suggest that while the three concerns were generally shared by Mongolian and Comecon actors, they often interpreted them in diverging ways in order to request more resources or, on the contrary, to resist such requests.

Conclusions: Comparative Histories of Architectural Mobilities

The city of Ulaanbaatar was reshaped beyond recognition during the socialist period. Yet the growth of new housing neighborhoods and social and technical infrastructure was accompanied by an even faster expansion of the ger districts, and the living conditions in many parts of the city remained poor. In 1983, a report by the Central Committee Secretary P. Damdin offered a shocking picture of several districts where poor sanitation resulted in a constant danger of epidemics and high infant mortality, while public transport, and water and power supply were often insufficient and

85 Letter from Eichstädt to Junker, 24 March 1970, BA DH1: 25038, 2 von 2, p. 1.

86 AAN 2/1154/0/25/526, 106-103 [sic]. Their work included the design of the 4th and 5th mikroraiony, planned where a decade later the Soviet-designed Gandan district was constructed.

87 *Ibid.*

88 AAN 2/2309/0/353, p. 21.

32 | low quality.⁸⁹ As scholars have shown, Damdin's report testified not only to rivalry within the Communist Mongolian Revolutionary People's Party, but also reflected broader dissatisfaction of the inhabitants of Ulaanbaatar who voiced their anger in demonstrations against the regime in 1990, followed by the end of socialism in the country.⁹⁰

While the political transition resulted in the removal of some of the most visible symbols of the socialist rule in Ulaanbaatar, notably the mausoleum of Sükhbaatar and Choibalsan, the path-dependencies of socialist urbanism are decisive for the city's future. Beyond monumental public buildings and large housing districts, they include an ambiguous heritage of the material-technical base for construction in Mongolia. For example, the prospects for the new iteration of the prefabricated concrete panels produced by the modernized BUK-1 factory are enhanced by the persistence of socialist-era transport infrastructure, including road and rail networks, but also by the familiarity of the professionals with large panel technology. At the same time, as Jargalan Erdenebat pointed out during our visit to the factory, the re-introduction of this technology requires alleviating the concerns of Mongolians who remember, and sometimes continue to face, the technical failings of the Soviet panel systems.⁹¹ During our research stay in Ulaanbaatar, we often heard a similar mixture of appreciation and criticism about the architectural heritage of the MPR, notably about the housing districts, which are valued for their urban layouts but denounced for their building technology. A critical appreciation of this heritage, including its limitations and potentials, is a crucial precondition for the solution of Ulaanbaatar's current challenges, from the inefficient transportation network to the unsustainable levels of air pollution, exacerbated in winter by the use of coal-fueled stoves in the ger districts.

This paper argued that the urbanization of Ulaanbaatar during socialism cannot be understood without accounting for the exchanges in architecture, planning, and construction between the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Mongolia. By reviewing a range of buildings as well as design, regulatory, and bureaucratic paperwork circulating between professionals and decision-makers from the MPR and other Comecon countries, we conceptualized their priorities, motivations, and aspirations as informed by three concerns.

89 This is how the Hungarian embassy in Ulaanbaatar summarized the report, quoted in: Balazs SZALONTAI, "From the Demolition of Monasteries to the Installation of Neon Lights," *op. cit.* (note 12), p. 176.

90 *Ibid.*

91 Jargalan Erdenebat, interview by Nikolay Erofeev and Łukasz Stanek, Ulaanbaatar, 13 April 2018.

These concerns included, first, that of *integrating* all elements of the material-technical base for construction with the goal of producing a system of functionally synchronized scales of urbanization. Second, the concern for dynamic *adaptation* of foreign precedents to local conditions, in particular climatic and geological. Third, the concern for *collaboration*, which included a progressive delegation and devolution of tasks to Mongolians. In difference to a well-known slogan of Western development aid, the aim of Comecon experts was not to make themselves obsolete, but to continue collaborating with Mongolian organizations as full-fledged contributors to Comecon's economic exchanges. Not always complementary and rarely unambiguous, these three concerns were interpreted and negotiated by Mongolian, Soviet, and Eastern European actors within an uneven dynamics of subsidy and exploitation that characterized the political economy of the Comecon.

As we understood them, the three concerns bypassed the conventional dichotomies of the historiography of architecture and urban planning in socialism. Beyond the opposition between “pragmatic” and “ideological” motivations often attributed to state-socialist decision-makers, the concept of concern shows how professionals and administrators translated, interpreted, negotiated, exploited, and sometimes challenged the political, economic, technological, ideological, and professional coordinates of Comecon's technical assistance in Mongolia. At the same time, beyond the dichotomy between “creative freedom” and “political decision,” often invoked by critics of socialist architecture, we argued that technological know-how, professional knowledge, and disciplinary cultures played an important role in these exchanges. In particular, we suggested that procedures of typification, standardization, and industrialization were a means not simply to deliver on the three concerns, but rather to formulate, specify, and negotiate them. Finally, the three concerns conveyed a normative vision of urbanization in the socialist world in ways that bypassed the Western-Marxist dichotomy between “bureaucracy” and “utopia.” This vision of socialist urbanization as integrated, adapted, and collaborative was dynamic, since the need to account for existing conditions and path-dependencies was constantly confronted with the need to respond to evolving levels of economic resources and the evolution of everyday life in socialism.

While we formulated the three concerns based on archival documents pertaining to Cold War Mongolia, this conceptualization may be useful for comparative architectural history more generally. We would like to end with two suggestions for such uses. The first relates to the scholarship about architectural mobilities between the “Second” and “Third” worlds during the

34 | Cold War. These mobilities straddled a wide spectrum: beyond the southern members of the Comecon (Mongolia, Vietnam, Cuba) they also included countries which pursued specific versions of socialist development, such as Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah (1957-1966); countries belonging to the “World Socialist System,” such as Ba’athist Iraq that benefited from preferential foreign trade agreements with Eastern Europe; and even countries with elites hostile to socialism, such as Nigeria or the Gulf states.⁹² The concept of the three concerns suggests a way to differentiate these exchanges from the perspective of mid-level administrators and professionals, rather than by means of broad-brush geopolitical and geoeconomic distinctions. It may be particularly useful for studies of architectural exchanges in countries where the Soviet presence was interrupted because of a regime change, such as Ghana in 1966, and thus where the priorities and motivations of the parties involved may be difficult to understand on the basis of only partially realized investments.

Secondly, the three concerns may be useful for studying architectural mobilities not only across global socialism, but also across other developmental regimes during the Cold War. While the Soviets contrasted their approach to colonial developmentalism, the three concerns often resembled the declared aims of colonial governments after World War II. These similarities included the belief that new investments needed to be planned as part of an economy integrated both locally and with the colonial metropole; the understanding that architecture and urban planning needed to be adapted to the specificity of the local conditions (exemplified by the British “tropical architecture”); and the commitment to the “indigenization” of the colonial economies and governments through an expanding collaboration with the local elites. Yet the dynamics of these processes were distinct from what we discussed in this paper, as they differed in terms of political economies, positionalities, and modes of collaboration available to local and foreign actors. Unpacking these similarities and differences in architectural, planning, and construction mobilities may offer a more diversified perspective on 20th-century developmental regimes and the specific spectra of welfare and violence that they entailed. Contrary to many Eastern European protagonists of this paper, who perceived the MPR as isolated and peripheral, we argue that as a crucial node of Comecon’s technical assistance, Mongolia offers a vantage point for a more comparative understanding of the urbanization processes during the Cold War, and their architecture.

92 Łukasz STANEK, *Architecture in Global Socialism*, op. cit. (note 4).

Abstract

This paper conceptualizes the uneven dynamics of architectural mobilities between member states of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) and socialist Mongolia, a member of the Comecon since 1962. These long, intense, multilateral, and coordinated exchanges decisively contributed to the development of the “material-technical base” for construction in Cold War Mongolia, including planning institutions as well as construction and construction-materials industries. Based on archival research and interviews in Mongolia, Russia, Germany, and Poland, we introduce the concept of “concern” and argue that the priorities, motivations, and aspirations of the professionals involved were informed by three concerns. They included, first, the concern for integrating Mongolian design and construction industries into a comprehensive network of organizations in charge of the urbanization processes; second, the concern for adapting foreign resources to the conditions on the ground; and, third, the concern for an increasing collaboration between Mongolian, Soviet, and Eastern European actors. We study how these actors followed, exploited, and sometimes challenged the political economy of the Comecon, and how they negotiated it with feedback from specific investments. We argue that the concept of the three concerns is useful for studying architectural mobilities in global socialism and across competing 20th-century developmental regimes.

Index by keyword: architecture in socialism, housing, construction industry, construction materials, Comecon

Geographical index: Asia, East Asia, Mongolia

Chronological index: Cold War, 20th century

Zusammenfassung

Der vorliegende Beitrag fasst konzeptuell die uneinheitliche Entwicklung von Mobilität in der Architektur zwischen Mitgliedsstaaten des Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) und der sozialistischen Mongolei, die seit 1962 Mitglied des Comecon war. Der lange, intensive, multilaterale und koordinierte Austausch trug entscheidend zur Herausbildung der „materiell-technischen Grundlage“ für das Bauen in der Mongolei während des Kalten Kriegs bei, was auch die Planungsbehörden, das Baugewerbe und die Baustoffindustrie mit einschließt. Gestützt auf in der Mongolei, Russland, Deutschland und Polen durchgeführte Archivrecherchen und Interviews stellen wir hier das „Anliegen“-Konzept vor und erläutern, dass es drei Anliegen waren, die die Prioritäten, Motivationen und Zielsetzungen der beteiligten Fachleute bestimmten: Erstens das Anliegen, die mongolische Gestaltung und Bauindustrie in ein umfassendes Netzwerk von für den städtebaulichen Prozess zuständigen Organisationen zu integrieren, zweitens das Anliegen, fremde Ressourcen an die Bedingungen vor Ort anzupassen, und drittens das Anliegen, dass mongolische, sowjetische und osteuropäische Akteure verstärkt zusammenarbeiten sollten. Wir untersuchen, wie diese Akteure die Wirtschaftspolitik des Comecon verfolgten, nutzten und bisweilen in Frage stellten, und sie durch Feedback aus bestimmten Investitionen überwinden. Unserer Ansicht nach ist das Konzept der drei Anliegen auch außerhalb der Mongolei nützlich, wenn man Mobilitäten von Architektur im globalen Sozialismus und den im 20. Jahrhundert miteinander in Konkurrenz stehenden Regierungen von Entwicklungsländern untersuchen will.

Schlagwortindex : Sozialistische Architektur, Gehäuse, Bauindustrie, Baumaterialien, Comecon
Geographischer Index : Asien, Ostasien, Mongolei
Chronologischer Index : 20. Jahrhundert, Kalter Krieg

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la desigualdad de desarrollo en materia de arquitectura observada entre los estados miembros de Comecon (Consejo de ayuda de economía mutua) y la Mongolia socialista (miembro de Comecon desde 1962). Estos intercambios intensos, multilaterales, y coordinados en la duración han contribuido de manera decisiva a formar la “base técnica material” del sector de la construcción en la Mongolia de la guerra fría, e incluido las instituciones de planificación y la producción industrial de materiales de construcción. Basándose en archivos y en estudios, al mismo tiempo que con entrevistas en Mongolia, en Rusia, en Alemania y en Polonia, los autores definen tres “asuntos” que han orientado las prioridades, las motivaciones y aspiraciones de los profesionales implicados : integración de las industrias mongoles del diseño y de la construcción dentro de una red constituida de organizaciones encargadas del proceso de urbanización ; la adaptación de contribuciones exteriores a las condiciones del terreno ; y la gran colaboración de Mongolia, la Unión Soviética y otros participantes del este europeo. Estudiamos la manera que estos colaboradores han seguido, explotado y a veces desafiado la política económica de Comecon, y como han negociado la vuelta atrás de inversiones específicas. Más allá de Mongolia, estos tres asuntos se muestran pertinentes para estudiar la arquitectura dentro del mundo socialista y la competición que ha opuesto los regímenes de los países en vía de desarrollo en el siglo veinte.

Índice de palabras clave : arquitectura socialista, alojamiento, industria de la construcción, materiales de construcción, Comecon

Índice geográfico : Asia, Asia Oriental, Mongolia

Periodo : siglo xx, Guerra fría

Résumé

Cet article analyse les inégalités de développement en matière d'architecture observées entre les états membres du Comecon (Conseil d'aide économique mutuelle) et la Mongolie socialiste (membre du Comecon depuis 1962). Ces échanges intenses, multilatéraux, et coordonnés sur la durée ont contribué de manière décisive à former la « base technique matérielle » du secteur de la construction dans la Mongolie de la Guerre froide, y compris les institutions de planification et la production industrielle de matériaux de construction. En se basant sur des archives et des recherches, ainsi que sur des entretiens en Mongolie, en Russie, en Allemagne et en Pologne, les auteurs définissent trois « enjeux » qui ont orienté les priorités, motivations et aspirations des professionnels impliqués : l'intégration des industries mongoles de la conception et de la construction au sein d'un réseau constitué d'organisations en charge des processus d'urbanisation ; l'adaptation des apports extérieurs aux conditions du terrain ; et la collaboration accrue de la Mongolie avec l'Union soviétique et d'autres acteurs est-européens. On étudie la façon dont ces acteurs ont poursuivi, exploité et parfois contesté la politique économique du Comecon, et comment ils ont négocié des retours sur investissement spécifiques.

Au-delà de la Mongolie, ces trois enjeux s'avèrent pertinents pour étudier l'architecture au sein du monde socialiste et la compétition qui a opposé les régimes des pays en voie de développement au cours du vingtième siècle.

Index de mots-clés : architecture socialiste, logement, industrie de la construction, matériaux de construction, Comecon

Index géographique : Asie, Asie de l'Est, Mongolie

Index chronologique : xxe siècle, Guerre froide

Riassunto

Il presente articolo analizza le disuguaglianze in materia di sviluppo architettonico osservate tra gli stati membri del Consiglio di mutua assistenza economica (Comecon) e la Mongolia socialista (membro del Comecon dal 1962). Questi scambi intensi, multilaterali e coordinati sul lungo periodo hanno contribuito in modo decisivo a formare la “base tecnico-materiale” del settore dell’edilizia in Mongolia durante la Guerra fredda, comprese le istituzioni di pianificazione e la produzione industriale dei materiali da costruzione. Sulla base di archivi, ricerche e interviste in Mongolia, Russia, Germania e Polonia, gli autori definiscono tre preoccupazioni che hanno orientato le priorità, le motivazioni e le aspirazioni dei professionisti coinvolti: l’integrazione delle industrie mongole del settore della progettazione e della costruzione in una rete di organizzazioni responsabili dei processi di urbanizzazione, l’adattamento dei contributi esteri alle condizioni locali e una maggiore collaborazione della Mongolia con l’Unione sovietica e altri attori dell’Europa orientale. Analizzano quindi il modo in cui questi attori hanno perseguito, sfruttato e talvolta contestato la politica economica del Comecon, e la maniera in cui hanno negoziato ritorni sugli investimenti specifici. Al di là della Mongolia, questi tre preoccupazioni si rivelano pertinenti per studiare l’architettura all’interno del mondo socialista e la concorrenza che ha contrapposto i regimi dei paesi in via di sviluppo nel corso del Novecento.

Parole chiave : architettura socialista, alloggiamento, industria delle costruzioni, materiali da costruzione, Comecon

Indice geografico : Asia, Asia Orientale, Mongolia

Indice cronologico : xx secolo, Guerra fredda