

Description for the general public

Hardly urbanized Siberian territory was supposed to give a lot of opportunities for realization during Soviet experiment without compromises with the past. Not traditional, rising for centuries, unrestrained but rationally planned and created from scratch – this is what was supposed to be a new socialist city.

However, the City of the Sun on permafrost (Igarka by Ivan Leonidov) was never created. No one ever established a house-commune for Siberian miners (Anzhero-Sudzhensk by Nikolai Kuzmin). Although around mines and steelworks of Kuzbass Region indeed grew numerous teeming cities, none of them became the promised "garden city" (V. Mayakovsky). Sincerely enthusiastic foreign specialist (Ernst May, Bauhaus architects) left the USSR disappointed, some of them harassed. Avant-garde vision of the city was replaced by Socialist Realism, which in turn retreated in favour of the late Modernism – another "the only true" socialist language. Rationally planned to the last detail, compromise-proof structure of the Soviet modernity was being forced to the unwanted changes, thanks to which mobilizational role of culture could be still exploited.

The project aims to describe the nature of these breakthroughs in the context of the European modernity project. Unlike the scholarly investigations of Nazism, Soviet studies are dominated by approaches that perceive local mentality and culture as sources of Soviet totalitarianism. By contrast, the planned research will focus on its universal aspects. The notion of the Modern Project – a European idea par excellence – will be used as the key concept to interpret Soviet culture. By investigating the above-mentioned concepts, the research will arrive at a better understanding of the Soviet experiment, utopian identity and European culture as well.

The research will concentrate on analyzing case studies of above mentioned cities. In order to make complete the analyzing material two four-week preliminary research in Russian libraries and archives are being planned: to the Novokuznetsk and Novosibirsk (Autumn 2017), and Moscow and St. Petersburg (Spring 2018). Primary sources to be analyzed are official documents of local and central authorities, propaganda descriptions of the cities, architectural and local press, a city in art (film, literature) and art in a city, ideological writings and the urban space as it was.

The methodological approach will involve semiotics, both the classical one (U. Eco, R. Barthes, The Tartu–Moscow Semiotic School) and the later urban semiotics findings (R. Ledrut, M. Gottdiener, A. Lagopoulos, H. Lefebvre). Criticism of modernity – widespread in thinking about Western culture – will be applied to analysis of Soviet culture (T. Adorno, Z. Bauman, M. Foucault, J.-F. Lyotard).