

## Planning a model Soviet city: Transforming Vladivostok under Stalin and Brezhnev

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### **Abstract:**

This article examines the two major projects for transforming the city of Vladivostok during Soviet times. The first was to make it a Stalinist city during the 1930s, and would have resulted in an almost complete reconstruction of the historic Tsarist city into a model of socialist city planning. The second project, beginning in the 1960s and continuing on into the 1980s, did transform the city dramatically according to mature socialist planning guidelines, and succeeded in making the city more livable than at any time in its past. This article compares the two plans and contrasts their successes and failures, their underlying goals and ideologies, and considers what the legacy of the two periods is for today's post-Soviet city.

**Keywords:** *Urban transformation, planning history, architecture, cultural heritage, Soviet city*

### **Introduction**

The eras of Stalin and Brezhnev were times of profound change for the peoples of the Soviet Union. Entirely new industrial cities were built in what had been empty steppe and uninhabited forests. Older cities were transformed into new urban conglomerations that bore the mark of socialist planning and Soviet ideological theories of urban living. Moscow was intended to be, and to a great extent did become the socialist metropolis, and its new wide streets, impressive government offices and apartment buildings, its monuments to revolutionary heroes, and its infrastructure improvements became models for other Soviet cities to follow. One city that looked to Moscow for inspiration was the USSR's principal naval, industrial, and administrative center on the Pacific Ocean, Vladivostok.

Vladivostok changed substantially during the Stalinist era, though it did not experience the wholesale reshaping called for in the centrally-approved master plans of the 1930s until the post-war era. None the less, the city experienced a fundamental transformation during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Vladivostok's economic and industrial infrastructure was greatly improved, providing opportunities for economic expansion and the realization of some of the long-standing dreams of the city's population which dated back more than half a century. Vladivostok's inhabitants, from the beginning among the most cosmopolitan in the country, were subjected

to significant social and political engineering during the Stalinist era. In the early 1930s, for example, Vladivostok's Koreans found themselves the recipients of a Stalinist Palace of Culture, intended to be the first step in the wholesale improvement of their section of the city. By the late 1930s, however, they were subjected to forced exile into Central Asian areas less militarily sensitive than a city located only a few dozen kilometers away from Japanese-occupied Manchuria and Korea. Ethnic Russians and Ukrainians were arrested and executed for potential treason, and the city's principal cultural institutions were purged of anyone suspected of less than perfect loyalty to the Revolution and to Stalin. Ironically, at the same time, plans were drawn up for the complete rebuilding of the city into a model of socialist urban planning in the Russian Far East, and the preeminent example in East Asia and along the Pacific Rim of what was seen to be superior Soviet urban planning. The architectural and planning legacy of the Tsarist past was to be modified, adaptively reused, and in many cases completely ignored in the process of creating a new Soviet city. The plans for that transformation, and their imperfect realization, within the context of Vladivostok's overall historical development as a city, will be the focus of the first part of this article.

### **The 1920s and the period of the new economic policy (NEP)**

On October 25, 1922 the Bolsheviks established political and military control in Vladivostok without any serious fighting. With the exception of Red Cross workers, American military forces had left by late spring 1920, and the Japanese army was finally withdrawing from the city in October 1922. On November 14, 1922 what had been known as the Far Eastern Republic was incorporated into the RSFSR, and control of Vladivostok's military and political structure fell into the hands of Bolshevik functionaries, soldiers, and revolutionaries who had little experience in urban government or administration.

During most of the 1920s Vladivostok remained a city with an urban core and periphery that were essentially wooden and one-storied. As before, its large foreign population was reflected in the sophisticated commercial economy of the city and region. Of almost fifteen hundred businesses operating in Vladivostok at the beginning of NEP, for example, two-thirds were foreign, and only one-third Russian. Most of the ships calling at the port were Japanese, with Soviet ships second in volume, and British ships third. The Bolsheviks discovered they had to operate as capitalists once they nationalized the city's hotels, restaurants, and port, and they found themselves competing with local and foreign capitalists still allowed to do business in the city because of the mixed nature of the NEP economy. Many private firms continued to exist, often in the same locations as before the Revolution, and trade with Manchuria was to be of particular importance to the city's economic health, with the Manchurian railway maintaining its significance as a transportation and communications lifeline to the outside world.

New construction was limited during the 1920s. There were few architectural or town-planning experiments of the sort envisioned or debated in Moscow, and there was no real discussion of the nature of the new Soviet city among Vladivostok's inhabitants. There was some destruction in the city during the 1920s, and there were some infrastructure improvements: the city's bus routes were expanded; additional telephone lines were made available; and

radio transmission to Vladivostok and its region began on January 1, 1926. In addition, some streets were given new names (Aleutskaja Street became October 25th Street, and in 1924, the city's main street, Svetlanskaia, became Leninskaia to honor Lenin in the year of his death.) Finally, the city was reorganized into three sections, the Central District, the First River District, and the Egersheld District, in order to be administered more efficiently.

As was most of the new Soviet state, Vladivostok during the 1920s was undergoing a period of transition, a time when people still lived in many ways in the past, and were not yet prepared to create the new world the Bolsheviks had promised. The architectural legacy of the past was reused and adapted to new purposes, and no substantial new projects were envisioned or executed. Vladivostok waited for the future as did the rest of the country. What it would be given during the next era, the age of Stalin, was a new vision of itself, and a plan for a city that even the most ambitious promoters of the pre-revolutionary era would have had difficulty imagining. As it happened, the plan's overall ambitiousness was matched only by its failure to be realized during the lifetime of the great dictator.

### **Destroying the past: The first years of Stalinist transformation**

The beginning of the Five Year Plans meant that the Soviet Union was launching a concerted effort to catch up with the industrial strength of the West and to prove that socialist techniques of economic development were superior to those of a capitalist system subject to extreme economic cycles. Industries were created and new towns established where none had existed before. At last, the old world of the past was to be replaced with a new world created according to communist precepts and ideals. In Vladivostok much was to be built as part of this process, but much was also to be destroyed, in some cases in order to provide space for the new, in others, simply to remove anything that would remind the populace of the accomplishments of their pre-revolutionary past. In the biggest city of the Russian Far East, the first impact of the new Stalinist tempo of economic and political transformation was to be felt through destruction rather than construction.

Already by the mid-1920s, the Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas had been closed. In 1930 the doors of the city's remarkable Lutheran Church were locked, with the building eventually to be reopened as the Museum of Pacific Naval History only in 1950. The city's Catholic Church was closed and used to store archival materials for the Primorye Region. A serious blow was dealt the city's architectural heritage when the Pokrovsky Cemetery Church and the principal city cemetery were destroyed on Easter 1935, to be replaced by the new Park of Culture and Rest. Various statues of sportsmen and monuments to revolutionary heroes were placed around the new park (Stalin's over the old church's altar, most notably, though statues of Lenin and Dzerzhinsky were also erected in the park), and a dance platform was built over the site of some of the graves of Vladivostok's early residents. Most importantly, Vladivostok's Cathedral, closed in 1932, was demolished in 1938, to be replaced by a residence for the head of the territory, then after the war, in 1947, by an art school and club (A. I. Poretsov, architect).

There was also some reconstruction and remodeling of the historicist buildings of the past that were in the best repair. A significant investment in capital projects was called for by the Krai executive committee in 1929, and

the foundations for what would become the Primorgrazhdanproekt (Primorye Civilian Project) Institute were laid. In Vladivostok, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union during these years, certain parts of the pre-revolutionary era were felt to be usable and could be appropriated by an architectural esthetic that mixed past styles with current ideological dogma. The interior of the railroad station was repainted with suitably heroic Stalinist murals by G.A. Grigorevich. New, upper floors were added to existing buildings, and expansion into adjacent spaces took place. The former Governor's residence was made the House of Pioneers in 1939. New historicist structures helped the city take on some of the appearance of other Soviet urban centers as it lost some of the internationalist character that had helped define it in pre-revolutionary times. The Palace of Culture of Railroad Workers, built on Partizanskii Prospekt in the First River District between 1927 and 1933, was one of the first such buildings in the city (P.A. Golosov, V.D. Kokorin, and I.Ia. Kolli, architects). New Stalinist rococo apartment blocks were put up in the central part of the city, as models for subsequent structures of similar design. One proposed project not realized was an enormous apartment complex to have been built along Leninskaia on the site of today's Monument to Civil War Heroes. Opposition to the proposal was voiced by the young architect, E.A. Vasiliev (the designer of the new Park of Culture and Rest), who wrote in the press that the project was poorly conceived because it would cut the city off from Golden Horn Bay, and that it did not consider the new principles of Soviet city planning then being developed. The structure was never built, and significantly perhaps, it was Vasiliev who was selected to head up the team putting together the plan for "Bolshoi Vladivostok" as the decade progressed.

Some new monuments appeared, and there was an enormous expansion of the number of factories and industrial plants in Vladivostok, and it changed fundamentally, from being a city of soldiers, sailors, and merchants into a city of workers. New tram lines and bus routes reached out to these new industrial regions. Construction of a new airport was begun in the Second River region in 1932, and in 1934 the first regular flights between Moscow and Vladivostok were initiated. The telephone exchange was rebuilt, for four thousand subscribers. A new water supply plant opened in 1934, and a new electrical power station began operation in 1935. And as part of the city's wholesale reorganization, Vladivostok's districts were given new names, taken from three of Soviet Russia's new revolutionary heroes: the city was now divided into the Lenin, Frunze, and Voroshilov regions.

What was most striking and most exciting about Vladivostok's urban history in the 1930s, however, was the city's new general plan, a project that was initiated in 1934, and one which promised to turn the city into a model Soviet urban center on the Pacific and to make it one of the USSR's great port cities, while at the same time confirming its position as the Soviet Union's "forpost" on the Pacific, the "Kronshtadt" of the Russian Far East.

### **Planning a model Soviet City**

Evgenii Aleksandrovich Vasiliev spent much of the 1930s coordinating the creation of a general plan for Vladivostok that would transform the city, particularly the central section of its urban core, that part of Vladivostok most defined by its Tsarist past. Vasiliev had arrived in Vladivostok only in 1931, as a member of the team from Giprogor, the State Institute for the Planning of Cities. Helped by P.A. Golosov and M.N. Khazakian, Vasiliev developed

a plan that would be a mirror of the planning and development decisions made for Moscow during these years and that promised to produce a city unlike any other on the shores of the Pacific. A preliminary plan was completed in 1935, and a more complete version was published in 1938.

The plan called for the creation of a central focal point for the city: at the top of Eagle's Nest hill would be erected a seventy-meter lighthouse, visible for thirty-one miles, that would dominate the city from all directions. On top of the lighthouse a statue of Lenin would be erected, and below it would be located the city's museum of the revolutionary movement. From the lighthouse, wide stairways would lead down to the city's central water front. At strategic locations on the slopes of the hill would be placed new executive and administrative buildings for the growing bureaucracy. On Sukhanov Street, below the monument, would be located a semicircular square with the two towers of the Palace of Soviets facing downhill, toward the bay. Approximately in the middle of the complex a six-thousand seat open-air amphitheater would be constructed, in an area whose geography (between Lazo and First of May Streets) seemed to demand such use, it was felt. The hills on each side of the amphitheater would have monuments open to Leninskaia. The hillside above Pushkinskaia Street was already open, but the one above the post office building would be exposed by "moving" the post office to Suifunskaja Street (by implication, destroying the older, Tsarist building). Below Leninskaia, between Lazo and First of May Streets, would be formal open space leading down to the harbor, where two large rostral columns and a stairway with socialist realist sculptures would be placed.

Golosoov was given the task of designing the central area of the city, and he ensured that every major street was given an orientation to the statue of Lenin on Eagle's Nest hill. A new Sea Station was to be constructed in a neo-classicist multi-columned Stalinist style. The station would be located at the corner of Leninskaia and Kitaiskaia Streets, at the south end of a semicircular colonnade, facing Kitaiskaia. It would lead along a viaduct to a second station on the harbor itself, where passengers could board ships for destinations throughout the world. The area of today's Sports Harbor, the site of the former *rynok*, or market, was to be entirely redesigned as well, becoming a classically-inspired recreational and cultural complex that would take advantage of its picturesque location on the shore of the Amur Gulf. This new Palace of Culture would face a large square, from which two semicircular moles with walkways and columns would enclose an area to be used for water-borne activities and ceremonies. Two new streets would lead from the square, one to Cape Burnyi in the south, the other to Kuperova Pad in the north. The seaside area of Kuperova Pad would be devoted to beaches and recreational facilities as part of an extension of the Central Park of Culture and Rest. The park's existing nine-hectare area (the former cemetery) was to become the children's sector of the park, while the park as a whole was to be expanded to an area of seventy-five hectares. Part of the motivation of the plan was to guarantee that Vladivostok would remember where its loyalties lay, of course. It was a long way from Russia's outpost on the Pacific to Moscow, and Soviet citizens in the Primorye needed to be reminded, it was believed, that they were participants in a great social and political experiment, and not ordinary people living in an ordinary country. Above all, they were never to forget that their cultural and political ties connected them with Moscow and Europe, not with the East Asia that was so close geographically and so dangerous from a political and strategic perspective.

While much of the project seemed focused on grandiose monuments and bureaucratic edifices, it was also decided to improve the city in more fundamental, mundane ways. Vladivostok's extraordinarily steep streets were to be reoriented and regraded in order to make them more usable. The hundreds of small private houses in the city would be replaced with apartment blocks at least four or five stories high, and a minimum of thirty per cent of the new residential areas would be devoted to open space through provisions for parks, playing fields, children's playgrounds, and public flower gardens.

The city itself was to be expanded to five regions: Central (Egersheld and the city center up to Pushkinskaia Street, with seventy-five thousand residents), Voroshilov Factory (on the north shore of Golden Horn Bay and in the valley of the Obiasneniia River, with ninety-three thousand residents), Cape Churkin (the Goldobin Peninsula, with eighty thousand residents), First River (seventy-six thousand residents), and Second River (eighty-six thousand residents). There was also to be greater rationality in the layout of streets. October 25th Street would become the city's principal western avenue, a forty-meter wide boulevard stretching from the city center north along the Amur Bay to the Sedanka railroad station. Organizing the city on the east would be Lugovaia Street, connecting Cape Churkin with the Second River region and the suburbs. A third central avenue would stretch from central Leninskaia through a tunnel to the First River region, then on to the Second River region, the Second River park, and eventually to the airport. Several tunnels would have to be bored through hills, and public transport would need to be expanded significantly. "Bolshoi Vladivostok" was to house 440,000 inhabitants. Five theaters with seats for nine thousand people were to be built. A grand central theater with 2,500 seats was to be constructed on Suifunskaia Square. Nine motion picture theaters with 8,250 seats were planned, as were nine clubs for 16,600 people. Three new libraries with a total of 900,000 volumes were planned, and a new central library of 500,000 volumes was to be built. A Central Philharmonic for two thousand spectators was envisioned, as was a circus for 2,500. A new House of the Red Army and Fleet, a House of Art, a House of the Press, and a Museum with four departments (history of the revolutionary movement, regional studies, polytechnics, and the applied arts) were all planned for the new city as well. And of course, extensive facilities were also projected for children belonging to the Young Pioneers and other related organizations. New clinics, hospitals, and public baths would be supplemented with parks and green spaces in order to make the city a healthier place for all its citizens.

Some parts of the project were realized as the 1930s progressed. The eight-story Narkomfishcheprom (People's Commissariat of Fishing Industries) Building at Leninskaia and Kitaiskaia was finished in the later years of the decade, as was the Torgport (Commercial Port) Building on Kitaiskaia, and the Hotel Dalstroy at Kitaiskaia and Dzerzhinskaia Streets. N.S. Riabov designed a new five-story medical school building on October 25th Street. N.V. Sergeevskii designed the new four-story Sevmorput headquarters on the same street, as well as a new classroom building for the Far Eastern State University, and A.L. Zasedatelev built the new House of Naval Officers on Svetlanskaia in 1937. Between 1937 and 1940 A.I. Poretsov and N.A. Bigachev constructed two multi-story apartment buildings on October 25th Street, on the site of the pre-revolutionary Great Northern Telegraph

Company. Both were neo-classical in inspiration, and monumental in execution, including one with statues of a worker, a collective farm woman, a Red sailor, and a border guard surmounting it. Two additional multistory apartment buildings were designed by N.S. Riabov along Leninskaia, part of the plan to rebuild the street between Gaidamak Square and Lugovaia Street. A third apartment building, stretching around the corner at Pushkinskaia Street, was completed by A.I. Zasedatelev in 1939. Finally, the new Sudostroitel (Ship Builder) Stadium (now the Avangard Stadium) was constructed on the site of Maltsevskaja Square in 1938.

All in all, it was an ambitious project. Vasiliev travelled frequently to Moscow, and there certainly were intensive discussions of the project there. The plans evolved and were evaluated, reexamined and reassessed as the urban planning esthetic of the USSR evolved during the 1930s. In the end, however, very little of the Vasiliev-Golosov plan was actually implemented. Continuing Japanese aggression in East Asia had always made the realization of the project questionable in any case, and the outbreak of war in Europe meant that the USSR's budget for building was instead redirected toward defense. The plans for a new Vladivostok were dropped for the time being, only to be resurrected in the 1960s.

### **The architectural and planning legacy of the stalinist era**

To a great extent, Vladivostok today shows few physical signs of its Stalinist past. Many older Tsarist buildings no longer exist, but most of the city's new construction took place in the post-Stalin era. New streets, avenues, and residential suburbs may have been envisioned during the Stalin years, but they were realized only in the vernacular of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. While some individual buildings in the city are typical of Stalinist historicism and monumentalism, it could be argued that far more damage to Vladivostok's architectural legacy and visual integrity was done during the Brezhnev era than during the time of Stalin. Despite the megalomaniacal plans of the 1930s, Vladivostok's historic center survived remarkably well during the Stalin years. Certainly in comparison with other Russian cities, the Stalinist transformation of Vladivostok was haphazard at best, and the Stalinist buildings that remain today add some variety and historical texture of their own to the city in a way that the internationalist functionalism of late communism does not.

Had the Second World War not taken place, Vladivostok might have destroyed its historic center and become a typical new Soviet city like so many in the former Soviet Union. Because it was so far away from Moscow, however, only limited funds were available for its reconstruction at a time when other cities and towns were being completely remade. As a result, from the standpoint of architecture and planning, "Stalinist Vladivostok" was less a reality than a dream, less a physical fact than an imaginary place.

### **Hopes for *bolshoi Vladivostok* under Khrushchev**

By the end of the fourth decade of Soviet rule, it was recognized that while Russia had recovered in many ways from the dislocations and destruction of World War II, the quality of life of Soviet citizens had not grown better. In many urban areas throughout the USSR, impressive plans were laid for a significant improvement in the lives of the nation's urban population. Vladivostok was one such area.

The main impetus for expansion in the city came after a visit to Vladivostok by Nikita Khrushchev in 1959. On his way back from his famous visit to the United States, Khrushchev had stopped in the city. Looking around him, he remarked that "Vladivostok is a fine and beautiful city, but it can and must be made better, more beautiful, more comfortable." It was this kind of encouraging signal, in essence a blessing by the Soviet leader, that made it possible for city planners to begin preparing, yet again, for the entire reconstruction of the city. It would prove to be the most ambitious plan for the city's rebuilding in Vladivostok's history.

By 1961 planners from Vladivostok and Leningrad had put together an extensive and complicated series of projects that would have an impact on every section of the port city. Because of the shortage of housing in the old, central sections of the urban area (typical of all Soviet cities at the time), rapid mass-production of suburban pre-fabricated housing was to be emphasized. One deficiency the planners noted in the city as it existed in 1960 was that there was so little green space, and their designs incorporated extensive projects that would reintroduce vegetation into the city through provision for parks, trees, and other "greening" projects. New regional recreation areas would help restore to the city some of the native vegetation lost during the predatory expansion of the nineteenth century. A new stadium was built on the site of Vladivostok's first private land holding, and other recreational facilities were planned for and built in other sections of the city.

The city's living space was doubled, and while there came to be some criticism of the fact that the quality of construction on the new apartment buildings was not what everyone would have liked, none the less people were provided with new housing with toilets, electricity, and running water that they did not have to share with anyone but their immediate families. For the importance of all this to be appreciated, it must be remembered that until 1955 only about three or four of the main streets in the city were even paved with asphalt, and housing was deplorable at best. By the mid-1960s Vladivostok was becoming genuinely modern. By 1968 the first twelve-story buildings in the Soviet Far East were being constructed, in the area of the former Korea Town. It was a striking transformation of the city.

### **Realities of *bolshoi Vladivostok* under Brezhnev**

Nikita Khrushchev's forced retirement in 1964 had no significant impact on the central government's commitment to the expansion of Vladivostok. The city's development continued at a brisk pace throughout the next two decades. Much that had been planned under Khrushchev was finally completed under Brezhnev and his successors. No project symbolized this improvement better than the development of the Sports Harbor to the west and south of the new Dynamo Stadium. The stadium itself had first been built by Japanese prisoners of war, but was rebuilt twice afterward by Soviet laborers. Nearby there was to be a new oceanarium (opened only in 1991, it was the first in the Soviet Far East) and along the bay to the north, a floating *Delfinarium* for beluga whales and dolphins. A new yacht club was built on a breakwater stretching out into the bay, and an enormous Olympic sports complex was constructed adjacent to the stadium itself. The Sports Harbor was transformed into the city's principal beach, and on warm weekends the area was crowded with citizens swimming, watching sports competitions,

sailing, listening to music, or simply enjoying the view or the sunshine. The beach itself was expanded to the south, and a new seashore swimming complex served the entire city as well as the residents of the new *mikroraiony* being constructed behind the coastline.

Two other significant projects were underway in the central sections of the city during the mid-1970s as well. On the square facing the railroad station a new post office building and long-distance telephone station was being constructed. The post office was functional in design and undistinguished on its exterior, though it was decorated by a massive mosaic inside. What was lost was the pre-revolutionary headquarters of the military commander of the fortress, a building that was a substantial example of late-Tsarist architecture, but one that possessed no genuine uniqueness of its own. To the east, farther along the bay, a World War II submarine was placed on a pedestal in 1975 to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of victory over the Japanese. This was to be the first component of a memorial complex that would include an eternal flame and a series of *bas reliefs* located on and around several stairways and terraces leading from Leninskaia Street down to the bay. This area would become the principal location for celebrations of military anniversaries in the city, particularly naval ones, and had a dramatic orientation to the bay and the sections of the city surrounding it. Just up the hill, on Leninskaia, a monument to merchant marine sailors lost in World War II was constructed in 1967, with an eternal flame added in 1975. A decade later, this segment of the harbor would be expanded by the construction of a new ferry terminal intended for trips to the islands in Peter the Great Gulf and by the completion of the *Krasnyi Vympeľ* memorial ship complex and a new monument to the first Russian sailors who set foot on shore in 1860. This area became one of the city's principal memorial centers, its aim being to aid the residents of Vladivostok in developing a sense of belonging to the historic fabric of their city.

Vladivostok was becoming a large and important city, and from a distance the new housing complexes were impressive and ambitious. Up close, they suffered from careful examination. The quality of construction was never high, and the need to fulfill the "plan" in record time meant that quality was always less important than quantity and speed of completion, and the first residents of the new high-rise apartment complexes paid the price for the inadequacies of the Soviet planned economy. Ironically, it was those residents of the city who lived in the old historic center who were most satisfied with their living situations, not because of the comfort of their sometimes older apartments, but because of the vitality, variety, and convenience of the central city that surrounded them.

Context and size relationships were always a problem for architectural projects in the former USSR, and the ambitious plans for Vladivostok resulted in as many grandiose and out of scale structures and spaces as they did in other Soviet cities. Monuments and memorial complexes were particular temptations, and Lugovaia Square, with its memorial to Admiral S.O. Makarov, was typical of the enormous and often poorly-maintained urban spaces to be found throughout the Soviet Union on its fiftieth anniversary in 1967. The functionalist addition to the old pre-revolutionary, Siberian *moderne* Churin and Company store on Leninskaia Street, executed in the early 1970s, was a deliberate contrast to the architecture of the past in much the same way the Palace of Congresses in the center of Moscow's historic Kremlin had been. They both were intended to mark the

divide between the world of the past and the idealized, scientifically rational world of the future, and they both ended up looking out of place. The decision to build in such a modernist style in Vladivostok was a significant one because of plans to redesign entirely the city's main street, Leninskaia, by connecting it more effectively to the hillside and the bay, to open it up to the water, to widen it, and to plant trees that were to give it a more pleasant, "natural" feel. It was a project that did not bode well for other sections of the city's historic center, and the new ten-story city administration building of 1977, located on Okeanskaia Street only a few blocks from Leninskaia, suggested that other larger-scale projects were in preparation.

For decades, writers and politicians had lamented the city's lack of a large open assembly area. It was argued that a central open space such as that provided by Red Square in Moscow was needed. Without it, many felt, the city seemed unfinished. The result was that the once pleasant, park-like plaza to the south of Leninskaia, facing the harbor, was converted to a large paved square lacking any vegetation. It was dominated by a monument to the heroes of the Civil War, dedicated in 1961, but expanded significantly later when statues were added to make the previously understated memorial far more dominant within the context of the empty openness of the new space.

It was this square that was to be the new center of the city, and an ensemble of huge new buildings was to be built around it. On the east side of the square a modern functionalist administrative structure for the city's shipping industry would be erected. To the west would be the House of Soviets, the central administrative tower for the Primorskii Krai government, with a large meeting hall adjacent to it. Designed by Moscow architect E.G. Rozanov in a typical late-Brezhnev style, and completed in 1983, this eighteen-story building would overwhelm the center of the city. Dehumanizing and intimidating, the building became a symbol of the overweening power of the Soviet state in the late communist era, and remains to this day an example of the worst of Soviet architecture and urban planning. These buildings all originated with the Khrushchev plans of 1960-61, and while the designs of the 1960s were somewhat different from those of 1980s, the spirit behind them was the same. If anything, the Brezhnev plans for the overall reconstruction of the city were more restrained than those adopted during the time of Khrushchev, probably because the later planners had a more realistic understanding of budgets and financial limitations.

### **Dealing with cultural heritage under Khrushchev and Brezhnev**

Many of the sketches used to illustrate the *Bolshoi Vladivostok* plan during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras showed little of the old city center remaining. The Stalinist plans of the 1930s anticipated the destruction of many of the city's most unusual historic structures, and the sketches of the 1960s and 1970s focused only on the new functionalist buildings to be constructed in the city, with historical structures disappearing into the mists so characteristic of the Muraviev-Amursky Peninsula.

In reality, however, architects and planners (and certainly the city's residents) felt that substantial numbers of historic, pre-revolutionary buildings and parks should be preserved. As has been noted, some of the city's neighborhoods underwent wholesale destruction, though most of the buildings demolished had little architectural value when compared to the

potential use to which the sites could be put for other, generally more socially-responsive purposes. This is particularly true for the Sports Harbor area, for example (the *Milionka* district had little to recommend it in the postwar period) and for the northern shore of the Bay of the Golden Horn immediately adjacent to Leninskaia Street. Other parts of the city also saw individual historic buildings preserved, though had the most ambitious parts of the plans been executed, they too would probably have been torn down and replaced by newer buildings constructed in late-Soviet style.

By the 1970s, the inconsistencies of realizing the city's urban plans were striking. The Orthodox Cathedral and Cemetery church had been destroyed, while the Catholic and Lutheran churches remained. Structures associated with the large pre-war Korean and Chinese populations had disappeared, but the former Japanese Consulate and a Chinese businessman's house (the "Green Bricks") were two of the most striking structures in the city center. Elsewhere local traditions influenced buildings reflecting the city's maritime location: one typically Russian wooden house not far from the city center used sand dollars as design motifs incorporated into the window frame designs.

All the architects and planners appeared to recognize the uniqueness of the city's main street. Despite the grandiose House of Soviets, with its enormous square and monument to the establishment of Soviet rule, Leninskaia retained more of Vladivostok's original character than any other part of the city. To a great degree, this was true because so little had been done to alter the street's built form since the time of Stalin. Most of the buildings situated along the street could have been recognized by someone who had left the city in 1917 and not returned until 1980. Many were in deplorable condition, but many others were well-maintained and subject to regular *remont*, or repair. The old Kunst and Albers department store remained the city's principal retail center, and the pre-revolutionary Post Office continued to play that role even after construction of the new central post office near the railroad station. Certain buildings maintained something of their pre-revolutionary purposes, though others had been adapted to new uses (the Japanese Consulate, just up the street from Leninskaia on Okeanskaia Street, had become a hospital, and the red brick Lutheran Church was used as a naval museum). Even the few buildings constructed along the street in Stalinist times had taken on a quality of historical patina by the late 1970s because of their pseudo-historicist inspiration and despite some of the unsavory activities associated with them. While some unfortunate projects were executed along the street during the 1970s and 1980s (the modern addition to the Churin and Company Store and the billboards honoring local socialist heroes put up in front of the attractive and undoubtedly comfortable workers' housing built in pre-revolutionary times by Kunst and Albers are the best examples), on the whole Leninskaia was treated with respect and even affection. Leninskaia remained the street that defined what Vladivostok had been, and it shaped the vision of what the city center would continue to be. It was the place where Vladivostok's built heritage could be best appreciated.

The most important focal point of Vladivostok's preservation of its heritage was the Arseniev Museum, housed in an impressive pre-revolutionary commercial building. With its extensive holdings emphasizing the region's natural and human history, it is still visited by school groups, tourists, and

residents who wish to learn more about their city's past. It is the treasury of what Vladivostok was.

Overall it can be said that during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years, destruction of the city's architectural heritage was limited. While many new projects were initiated and completed, for the most part, they resulted in a city whose amenities for its citizens were notably improved. Better theaters, cleaner beaches, improved access to transportation, and of course mass-produced housing made life tangibly better than it had been. Cultural performances by folk dance and music groups were encouraged and promoted, though these tended to be primarily of Slavic traditions, part of the central government's efforts at reminding citizens of their European rather than Asian cultural roots. The city's natural heritage left much to be desired, however. Most notably, natural vegetation in the city was lacking, water quality in the Bay of the Golden Horn and in the Amur Gulf was deplorable, and the air was often unpleasant to breathe. Soviet citizens were accustomed to these everyday realities, of course, but in Vladivostok there appeared to be little eagerness or ability to solve these problems by the local administration.

Despite what is commonly believed, Soviet citizens in the years before Gorbachev's *glasnost* did have opportunities to express their views about the transformation of their cities, and in Vladivostok even in the 1930s lively discussions about urban planning projects were recounted in newspapers. Citizens clearly cared about what happened around them, and valued the historical continuity signified by the exceptional buildings located in Vladivostok's center. In the end, in most cases, the authorities decided which course they wished to take, but they clearly were influenced by the strong views of citizens who wished to maintain their connections to earlier times and periods in the city's history, even though few of them would have wanted to return to pre-revolutionary conditions of living.

### **The late Soviet era**

When Mikhail Gorbachev visited Vladivostok in 1986, he found a city that had been fundamentally changed by communist rule. It had more and better housing than at any time in its history: thirty new *mikroraiony* had been built since the 1950s, with more than seven million meters of living space. The city's infrastructure, public utilities, and transportation system were much improved from what they had been in the past; a new hotel nearing completion, the "Amur Bay," would be one of the largest in the Soviet Far East, and a new Pioneer Camp to the north of the city along the Ussuri Gulf was as extensive as any elsewhere in the Soviet Union, and indeed, was considered to be one of the country's best. *Perestroika* meant that it would soon be possible for a foreign firm to be hired to remodel the Sea Station (a project of the Italian firm Tegola Canadese), and the former outpost and military fortress was becoming a window to Asia and the booming economies of the Pacific Basin. Warships of the United States navy made an official visit to the city in 1990. Yet at the same time all these positive developments were taking place, as John Stephan has pointed out, there was extensive prostitution because of the large number of sailors with hard currency in the city; it could take longer waiting in line to buy an Aeroflot ticket to Moscow than the flight itself took; fresh fruits and vegetables were frustratingly difficult to find in winter; families were living on ships in the Bay of the Golden Horn because there was not enough housing for them on

shore; citizens could wait decades for an apartment; and the city's sewage treatment consisted of pouring raw sewage into Peter the Great Bay. Unfortunately, conditions did not improve with the collapse of communism.

### Conclusions

Despite its remarkable planning history, Vladivostok is fortunate to have as much historical texture in its city center as it does. While the city did suffer the destruction of religious sites typical of the Stalinist period, it was spared the extremes of Stalinist city planning that affected many Soviet cities. The city also avoided the fates of so many cities in the European parts of the USSR during the Second World War. Finally, it was fortunate to undergo most of its rebuilding during the Brezhnev era, a time when appreciation for the architectural heritage of the past could at times, and indeed sometimes frequently did, take precedence over the utopian plans of the Khrushchev period. The result is that while much was lost, much remains. Many unique buildings have been saved and put to new use. Creative joint-venture projects have preserved a number of pre-revolutionary structures which might otherwise have fallen into serious disrepair. There is a general understanding that it is Vladivostok's historic center which lends the city much of its character, and that even some of its Stalinist-era structures add to its uniqueness. Vladivostok's citizens have been more sensitive to the natural heritage of their city's location, and while the environmental damage of a century and a half will be difficult to ameliorate, there is general popular desire to accomplish what can be done in an area of great natural beauty. Similarly, while the Stalinist plans for reconstruction focused on heroic and ideologically-charged buildings, squares, and public spaces, the primary energy of the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras was directed toward improving the living standards and the quality of life of the city's residents. This is particularly true of the extensive suburban developments of the 1970s and 1980s.

Today the potential is great for the city to realize its possibilities as a unique architectural and planning site on Russia's Pacific Coast. How it does this will be one of Vladivostok's greatest challenges, but it will be able to build on many of the architectural and planning decisions of the communist era which in the end preserved more of the city's heritage and character than it destroyed, that left the city a set of plans that could be adapted by its post-Soviet residents, and that in the end could help Vladivostok become a city for its people rather than for its ruling elites and their ideological passions.

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