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Independent Landscape
Pavilion of the Republic of Armenia

la Biennale di Venezia

15. Mostra
Internazionale
di Architettura
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Independent Landscape

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15th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

Անկախ կենսապատկեր

Հայաստանի ազգային տաղավար

Վենետիկի բիենալեի 15-րդ միջազգային ճարտարապետական ցուցահանդես

Commissioner: Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Armenia, Vartan Karapetian

Curator: Sarhat Petrosyan

Venue: Holy Cross Armenian Church, Mekhitarist Congregation; Calle dei Armeni, San Marco 965/A, Venice

Website: www.independentlandscape.am / www.venice2016.am

With the support of Ministry of Culture of Armenia, Boghossian Foundation, Renco S.p.A. and Vahe Gabrache;
in partnership with the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies, Mekhitarist Congregation, Embassy of Armenia to Italy
and urbanlab Yerevan.

Dear Friends,

This year on the 21st of September the Republic of Armenia will turn 25.

The past quarter of a century were years when the dreams of the citizens of the Republic of Armenia and Armenians all over the world came true. In order to truly appreciate the significance of this we should stop for a moment to value the road that we passed and think about the future.

The achievements of Armenia of La Biennale di Venezia in 2015 hold us to a higher standard: the pavilion of a country that won the Golden Lion should hereinafter be worthy of previous achievements.

In the Armenian pavilion at the 15th International Architecture Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia we will attempt to show the spatial transformations of the Armenian landscape in particular in the areas of urban development and architecture by creating a specific bridge that would make the dialogue aimed at the re-evaluation of tangible heritage possible. The goal of our pavilion titled Independent Landscape is to eventually come to a point where we would be able to understand the inherited and bequeath the understood and discover and demonstrate the cultural layer of our landscape.

Hasmik Poghosyan

Minister of Culture
of the Republic of Armenia



Independent Landscape

Անկախ կենսապատկեր

Independence is an opportunity and a challenge at the same time. This duality is reflected in all dimensions of public life. The tangible spatial manifestation of this challenge and opportunity is the alteration of the landscape, the footprint on the landscape. A quarter of a century of national independence is a period of sufficient length and symbolic value to afford us a chance to understand the footprint of post-soviet and independent Armenia and point out expectations for the future.

The Pavilion of the Republic of Armenia at the 15th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia will announce the launch of a unique landscape mapping laboratory of independent Armenia, which will focus on the study and reinterpretation of spatial transformations and its variations from 1991 to present.

The ongoing results of thematic research will be uploaded on www.independentlandscape.am website that will immediately appear on the screens of the pavilion, to highlight the importance of the process and in-progress work as the result itself.

The categorization and presentation of these will, once again, underline the need to carry out research on current issues and not examine them in primarily historical

context. This is especially important given that the tendency prevalent in the Soviet era theoretical analyses of architecture and urban landscapes was to put everything in a historical perspective leaving out modern or contemporary interpretations and research.

This pavilion comes to showcase that at this very day and every day human activities alter the landscape. This alteration has a great potential and ambition to be transformed again and later be recognized as cultural value, which will then require to be safeguarded by society and the state.

This means that all building activities, modifications, expansions, additions and immortalization activities have to be carried with great caution and accountability.

In Armenian society today, more than ever, post-independence urban development projects and their consequences, mostly taking place in the center of the capital Yerevan, are being discussed on different media platforms.

Through re-evaluation of this holistic approach we propose to start a completely new dialogue aimed to redefine the paradigm "bequeath the inherited" to "understand the inherited and bequeath the understood".

Sarhat Petrosyan

Curator

People's Square

Ժողովրդական հրապարակ

In 1990, on the verge of Armenian independence, in the Bem journal of the Union of Theatre Professionals of Armenia Levon Abrahamian published an article titled "Ritual, Pre-theatre and the Theatre Square", with attending photo illustrations by Zaven Khachikyan. Now after a quarter of a century they retell the story.

From Theatre Square to Freedom Square

Sometimes the architect as a creator strives to create a somewhat unusual construction. However often his successors, editors and even those for whom the building was intended consider it to be utopian and alter the original project. In other cases, however, the ideas of the architect suddenly come to life and the role that the architect originally intended for those buildings plays out in a completely different way. This was the case with one of the most significant works realised by Alexander Tamanian - The Opera and Ballet Theatre.

The Opera and Ballet Theatre is indeed one of Tamani-ans most enigmatic buildings. It reflects the perceptions of the architect of the mystic connection between space and its historical and cultural roots. Tamanian was convinced that in the place where he wanted to realise his colossal idea once there used to be a pagan temple of song and love, even though until today no evidence supports that assumption. His conviction must have been so strong that he destroyed the Gethsemane Chapel, dating back to medieval ages and situated in that location. However Tamanian did not have an anti-religious agenda. It might have been that his intention was to build a

new Soviet temple of song and dance in allegedly the precise location of the pagan prototype of the temple. The Opera and Ballet Theatre is also an illustrative example of how even the great architect could not avoid yielding to the temptation of following Soviet totalitarian architectural tendencies of the 1930s.

The new interpretation of the pagan temple of song and love Tamanian saw in the project of a People's House and all the drafts of the project reflected the idea that the participants of celebrations and the audience were supposed to join in the celebrations. Probably it was this significant feature of an archaic celebration that linked Tamani-ans project designs for the construction of the Peoples House initiated in 1926 with the colossal project of the construction of the Moscow Palace of Soviets launched in 1931. In its last 1934 project design the Peoples House acquired some of the external features of the Palace of the Soviets, including the huge monument to Lenin. This was yet to be followed by other developments, which however unravelled already without the participation of the architect himself. This next stage is an evidence of how crucial is the role of an editor even

if it concerns the works of the greatest architects. After the death of Tamanian, the construction of the building was finalized by his son Gevorg Tamanian. The latter edited the project by substituting the open air hall with the current symmetric part of the philharmonic theatre, thus taking away the possibility for the public to join in the celebrations, but saving the building from falling a victim to totalitarian architecture.

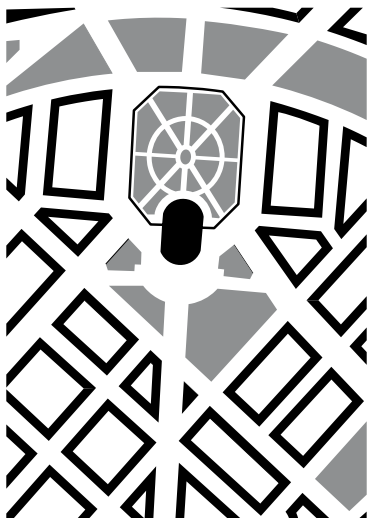
Although editorial touches of the son from a constructive perspective stripped the building of the festivity intended by the father, Tamanians idea eventually came to life, though in a completely different way. This happened in 1988 when the Square of the Opera and Ballet Theatre became the venue for continuous mass demonstrations, which being political in terms of content, in terms of structure and typology where an archaic festival, which fell right into the line with the popular celebration imagined by the architect. Even the name Theatrical of the architectural design of the Square, which until then was not widely used was compatible with one of the most

significant features of an archaic celebration - theatricality. The archaic festival predicted (or maybe intended) by Tamanian lasted for nine months - from the end of February till the end of November 1988. Throughout this period a specific carnival civic society was operating in the square, one that is remembered with great nostalgia by the participants. In the last two decades the Theatre was surrounded by newly constructed buildings, which however should be viewed not as editing but rather as a threat that the city will be totally stripped off the vision of the architect. However, even now in times of unrest people gather at the Theatre Square designed by Tamanian, which now is called Freedom Square, to ensure that festive all permissiveness turns into freedom, and the carnival civil society that happened here many years ago turns into a real one.

During the next six months Zaven Khachikyan will shoot urban and night life at Freedom Square.

Text by
Levon Abrahamian
Anthropologist

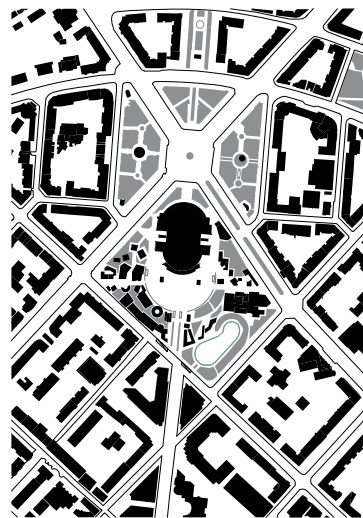
Photos by
Zaven Khachikyan
Documentary Photographer



People's House and surrounding areas
from the Master Plan by Alexander
Tamanyan approved in 1924



Opera and Ballet Theatre on Freedom
Square, Situation Plan of 1988



Opera and Ballet Theatre on Freedom
Square, Situation Plan of 2016



Karabakh Movement Demonstration,
Freedom (previously Theatre) Square,
Yerevan, October, 1988

Karabakh Movement Demonstration, Freedom (previously Theatre) Square, Yerevan, June, 1988







Karabakh Movement Demonstration management table at an old cafe area, Freedom (previously Theatre) Square, Yerevan, May, 1988



Announcement wall, Karabakh Movement Demonstration, Freedom (previously Theatre) Square, Yerevan, September, 1988



Signing a petition during Karabakh Movement Demonstration on the steps of Opera and Ballet Theatre, Freedom (previously Theatre) Square, Yerevan, May, 1988

Visiting Post-Earthquake Gyumri

Այցելելով հետ երկրաշարժային Գյումրի

Throughout the 20th century Gyumri saw two major earthquakes and if the earthquake of 1926 only ruined some houses and became history, that of 1988 not only rocked the entire city but also its soul.

Gyumri is the second largest city of Armenia, located 122 km to the north from the capital Yerevan on the border with neighbouring Turkey.

Experts note that in contrast with other settlements of Armenia Gyumri has a rich architectural and urban development heritage, which is holistic and uninterrupted. This rich heritage mainly refers to the part of the city built in the 19th century.

According to the general plan of Gyumri developed in 1980s the city was supposed to expand not towards the adjacent black earth area, but by building small satellite towns outside the city itself, while the old city center according to the government decree was supposed to become "Kumayri" historical-cultural reserve museum. However among other things, the earthquake destroyed also the longterm development project of Gyumri.

The most disastrous blow of the Spitak earthquake of the 7th of December 1988 came on Gyumri: 17 out of 24 thousand victims were in Gyumri, 526 buildings were destroyed, including schools, factories, residential buildings etc. The buildings that were destroyed by the earthquake had been mainly built in 1980s, whereas the old city remained intact and currently around 1'100 monument buildings are still preserved.

The USSR declared that the disaster zone will be recovered in 3 years, and tempted by this perspective the Armenian authorities artificially expanded the area and volume of the disaster zone by destroying damaged but still operational buildings. A decision was made not to reconstruct the destroyed quarters, since these areas were used for the temporary shelters for those who lost their homes (there used to be 64 blocks of temporary shelters).

The already finalised general plan of Gyumri was put aside and a new one with a completely opposite concept emerged. According to the new plan the new districts were to be built not in Benjamin with seismically stable rocky ground (to the south east) but on the arable lands of adjacent Marmarashen (to the north west) where the ground was that same clay with running subterranean waters.

About 400 acres of Marmarashen arable land was removed and instead two districts were built - Ani and the Austrian one - the district with town houses. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 the builders left leaving behind dug out foundations and incomplete buildings.

The Soviet builders left in Gyumri a huge number of construction equipment: 427 cranes, 44 concrete mixer trucks etc. The new authorities did not develop any new plan and allowed for all the construction materials and equipment to be plundered.

Already in 2000s another new quarter was built next to Ani - Mush 2. However even today the unfinished buildings of early 1990s are still scattered over 200 acres of area. At one point some of the buildings of these half constructed islands far away from other districts were completed to provide housing for the homeless Gyumri people.

One of these islands is Shirakatsi quarter which comprises 3 four floored buildings. The nearest school and grocery shop are one kilometre away. The addresses of these buildings are 67, 68, 69. But what about 66? The residents point to an unfinished building closing up their courtyard that they try to protect from looting. The other unfinished buildings look as if they were nibbled: the poor crack the cement with hammers to take out and sell the metal.

There are about 10-12 families leaving in the three buildings, the others have locked up their houses and left and those who stayed regret that they abandoned their temporary shelters and moved into the apartments.

Until early 2000s there were about 17 thousand people living in temporary shelters, now there are about 2'700 families. Before the earthquake about 260 thousand people lived in Gyumri, according to the most recent census the population of Gyumri now is 118 thousand. With the decrease of the number of the population the birth rate went down too, and at one point in 2001 more people were dying than there were born.

During the next months students of the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies originally from post-earthquake Gyumri will contribute to this story.

Text by
Vahan Ishkhanyan
Investigative Journalist

Photos by
**Students of the TUMO Center for
Creative Technologies in Gyumri**
Workshop led by Katharina Roters



Mush 1 district built in late 1980s,
Gyumri, 2016; Photo by Katharina Roters



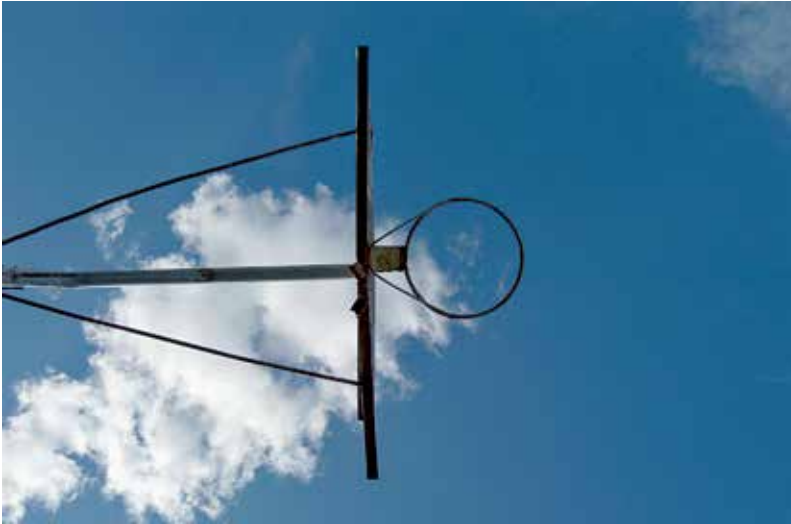
Mush 2 district built during 2008-2014,
Gyumri, 2016; Photo by Katharina Roters



Semi-occupied residential building, built in late 1980s, Mush 1 district, Gyumri, 2016;
Photo by Katharina Roters



Playground in Mush 1 district,
built in 2000s, Gyumri, 2016;
Photo by Katharina Roters



Shirakatsi district, Gyumri, 2016;
Photo by Martin Manukyan



Semi-occupied residential
building, built in late 1980s,
Mush 1 district, Gyumri, 2016;
Photo by Elena Ghandilyan



Mush 2 district built during
2008-2014, Gyumri, 2016;
Photo by Martin Manukyan

Shrinking Cemeteries

Սպառվող գերեզմաններ

For centuries, the traditional Georgian graveyards were simple and modest, while in Soviet times the graves became overly decorated, adorned with marble tables and benches, statues, bikes and even cars. The Soviet Georgians were confident in one thing only the grave belonged to them, therefore they were zealously taken care of and protected. People built and decorated them as if they were real estate property. The authorities turned a blind eye to the graveyard eccentricities. Soviet regime principles had not extended to the Georgian graveyards.

Dato Turashvili, The Blue Jeans Generation (Flight From the USSR)

The Cemetery Landscape of Armenia: Tradition and Modernity

The cultural landscape of Armenia was largely shaped by the naturally mountainous rocky habitat and the system of beliefs that originated therein, according to which any somewhat separately standing or by one characteristics or another differing cliff, rock or cluster of rocks was ascribed with creative power and eternity. Acres of open air halls of cave paintings, long rows of Menhirs (standing stones), dragon stones, phallic pillars, Urartian carved pillars and boundary stones of king Artaxias (Artashes) brought together nature and culture, juxtaposing natural forms with artificial volume and sculpture, and viewing from a distance with up-close observation. It is for this monument component that the landscape is recognisable and indigenous from a distance, and in immediate vicinity tangible and worshipped.

The tradition of appropriating space through monuments and pillars was used also by Christianity. The

Christianisation of space was accomplished by mounting cross stones in the squares of settlements, on the crossroads, on the tops of hills and in ancient sanctuaries. Carved pillars became the most intimate and affordable way for the believers to communicate with God, to immortalise the memory, to hope for the salvation of the soul. Most of the up than hundred thousand cross stones that were preserved up to this day were placed over graves, all of them in west-east direction (Second Coming of Jesus). Medieval cemeteries were placed on the upper side of settlements, becoming the dominant of their landscape. The cemetery consisted of a church located on the highest ground and family graveyards reflecting the approximate structure of the settlement itself. Ascribing cross stones with the power to help all believers was conditioned by the goal to make the graveyard a worship place for any believer.

The medieval Armenian community perceived itself as a society consisting of living as well as the dead, which ensured the care and safety of this cultural landscape. The main narrative behind the sculptured reliefs of cross stones and headstones was not grief but rather the heavenly delight awaiting the deceased.

Armenian cemeteries of this particular structure and optimistic imagery were sustained until the 20th century. The militant Soviet ideology turned many of this old cemeteries into arable lands and construction material. The new graves were more adjusted to the terrain, the road, the direction of the funeral procession was no longer significant. The imagery became more schematic - a star, hammer and sickle, portraits. Only in the 1960s, parallel to the national awakening, works aimed at the preservation of medieval cemeteries were initiated by the local government: some of the most significant cemeteries were partly reconstructed and fenced. A new wave of cross stone making started. At the same time the period of Khrushchev thaw created conditions in which cemeteries were reflecting the social status and prestige of the living. For example, in some of the villages of

Gegharkunik region, where seasonal works outside the country are widely spread and the men spend only a few months back home, cemeteries became sanctuaries of a kind, that are mostly sumptuous constructions, sometimes even mausoleums. In terms of cemetery landscape graveyards of the earthquake zone are also quite remarkable since they mostly emerged in emergency situations. These cemeteries can be characterised by direct planning, equal allocation of space, specific imagery - collapsing buildings, people trapped in ruins, mourning people. As a result of such factors as the predominance of the prestige component, imagery of grief and mourning and the absence of the narrative of salvation and solace altogether contemporary graveyards became highly personified and socially insignificant. They now turned into a platform to reaffirm the social status and prestige of those alive and a specific arena of competition. Virtually, the contemporary cemetery, aside from the few still remaining parts in the old tradition (which disappear very quickly), are the most extravagant and lacking any conceptual solution component of contemporary Armenian urban landscape.

Text by
Hamlet Petrosyan
Culturologist

Photos by
Vahan Abgaryan



Old Nork Cemetery, Yerevan, 2016



Shahumyan Cemetery, Yerevan, 2016



Nubarashen Cemetery, Yerevan, 2016



Yerevan Municipal Cemetery, 2016



Charbakh Cemetery, Yerevan, 2016





Shahumyan Cemetery,
Yerevan, 2016



Cemetery of Noradus village, which is adjacent to largest pre-served Khachkar (Cross-Stone) site with 450 of them dating back to 9-17cc, Gegharkunik region, 2016



Cemetery of Spitak town, where the devastating earthquake of 1988 happened, Lori region, 2016



Cemetery of Spitak town, where
the devastating earthquake of 1988
happened, Lori region, 2016

Expanded Housing

Առաջ տված տներ

Expanded Housing is a study aimed to map peculiarities of these expansions and try to understand social and psychological roots of this continuous and endless urban morph.

In the past century the urban fabric of the serving capital city of Armenia Yerevan has gone through transformations influenced by four different socio-economic systems that have all left their traces. It went through vernacular (from a western viewpoint) of Persian Empire era, to European urban (from all viewpoints) of post-feudal of the Russian Empire, then to 70 years of strict and centralized planning of the Marxist-socialist Soviet Union and eventually to private ownership and open market driven democratized urbanscape of independent Armenia for the past quarter of century.

In the context of urban development, democratization of urban space has a contradicting duality, which has to be balanced through public institutions and legal tools. Dramatic shifts in authority systems can be seen a catalyst of change in the footprint of building activities, but often the mindset and everyday life of a society clash with system transformations, creating irregularities in the official context of development.

Such irregularities - an integrated, but often ignored part of Yerevans city-scape, emerged in 1970s when the soviet government as the sole provider of housing for citizens planned to double the housing rights of each citizen, which resulted in massive urbanization of Yere-

van. In order to fulfil the plan, local authorities permitted expansion of the existing living space by covering balconies with glass walls, triggering the first wave and phase of Expanded Housing through Shoushabands. These expansions took different forms and emerged in different waves and phases, from privatization of backyards to commercialization of basements and sidewalks, and every separate type was triggered by different socio-economic sub-regulations, such as the 1980s Perestroika or regulations in private car ownership.

The most extravagant and sophisticated, the pinnacle of these expansions is the upward growth of the attic-living spaces, called Mansards, which are typical of post-independence Armenia and often the monopoly of rich or upper middle class.

The study Expanded Housing launched in the framework of Independent Landscape Pavilion of the Republic of Armenia at the 15th Architecture Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia aimed to map peculiarities of these expansions and try to understand social and psychological roots of this continuous and endless urban morph. Expansions are the result and real-time traces of human activity in densely built environment of the

city. Meanwhile they might represent the ignorance and unawareness of city dwellers as well as the authorities, towards certain aspects and logic of common life in an urban area. An ancient logic which should, and often is translated into formal legislation for regulation of the urbanscape.

Shoushabands, Adjacent houses, Mansards and other examples still remain a challenge for the authorities, but they also reflect and represent the clash between the official purist and planned approach and the reality of Expanded Housing developments of the urban environment. Cognition, comprehension and evaluation of these examples will potentially help to ease these clashes and contradictions.

The following phases of Expansion will be monitored:

- 1.** Shoushabands (glass covering in local jargon), expansion of living space through covering balconies;
- 2.** Adjacent houses, expanding into backyards, a continuation of the previous phase;
- 3.** Private garages (covered car parking), built in backyards, result of ease of car ownership;
- 4.** Private gardens, built in backyards, result of economic hardship and unemployment;
- 5.** Commercialization of basements, result of open market emergence and privately owned businesses;
- 6.** Ground floor residential space to commercial, a continuation of the previous phase;
- 7.** Sidewalk window-cases, after the previous phase;
- 8.** Mansards, result of seeking more luxurious living.

Text by

**Sarhat Petrosyan,
Sevada Petrossian**

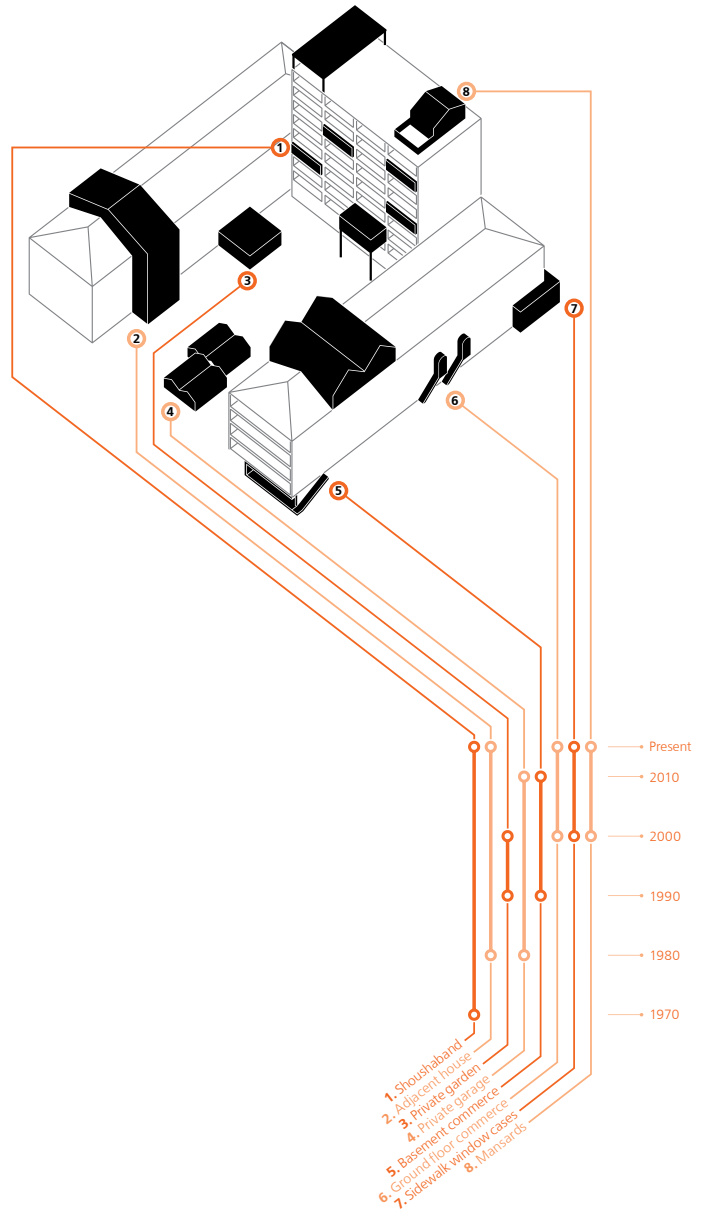
Co-Founders of urbanlab Yerevan

Photos by

Arthur Lumen



"Expanded" Urban Fabric, Yerevan, 2016



Mansard (attic), rooftop of a 1970s
9 storey residential building, central
Yerevan, expanded in 2000, 2016







3 storey mansard (attic) on top of 4 storey residential building, central Yerevan, expanded in 2000s, 2016



A courtyard view, expanded in 2000s,
Yerevan, 2016



Shushabands (glass covered balconies) of a 1980s
9 storey residential building, Yerevan, 2016



Mansard (attic) on top of a 5 storey residential building, central Yerevan, expanded in 2010s, 2016



An adjacent construction to a 5 storey residential building, expanded in 2000s, Yerevan, 2016

ReThink Metsamor

Վերալյցելուն Մեծամոր

Metsamor is a company town of Nuclear Power Plant which for me is the crystalized phenomenon of Armenia's recent history – from late Soviet and early independent Armenia. It is a clear soviet modern program with some local national elements that failed with the collapse of Soviet Union when the central financing was stopped and the power plant was shut down as a result of environmental activism the power plant. In 2007 I had a chance to be part of the team developing new master plan for the town when I discovered this ashy crystal.

Sarhat Petrosyan

An Overview of Metsamor Architecture

It indeed is very rare that an architect has the fortune of designing even a small town, let alone a city entirely, from drafting the master plan to various but specific residential, cultural and public structures, sports facilities, adjacent structures etc. One of these rare cases is the town of Metsamor, which was designed in 1967-1986 by the third studio of Armenian State Project Institute (ArmGosProject) under the supervision of Martin Mikaelyan. This overview is based on his papers.

According to architect Sargis Gurzadyan, among other representatives of Soviet architects of that generation Mikaelyan was the most prolific author, even if his research and teaching activities, publications and participation in competitions are left out. And still his most remarkable features are his professional and stylistic principality and consistency, one of the manifestations of which is the realization of Metsamor in the spirit of modernism and utilising local building methods (including prefabricated elements) and local building materials.

The north-south slope terrain of the town designed for the workers of the Armenian Nuclear Power Plant conjoins Yerevan - Armavir (then Hoktemberyan) highway with an urban scape where the two poles are mountains Ararat and Aragats. According to the plan this small town was supposed to have three residential micro districts, city centre shaped by public buildings of communal importance, a medical centre and a zone of structures for public utilities.

Public buildings of the city centre, such as the Culture House (1975-86), a hotel, Communication Centre, administrative buildings (1974-77), are yoked to each other through yard passages. These structures then conjoin the public park, where the administrative, commercial and sports zones follow each other up to the small artificial lake of the city.

The expressiveness of the mentioned buildings is accomplished through the combination of such elements as the different colours of tuff, undisguised reinforced concrete

elements protecting from the sun, glass and vegetation. The quality of the building, unfortunately, is low, in which regard the architect voiced his concerns on many occasions. On the small hill in the central part and to the north and upwards from the community centre along its axis it was planned to build a water tower with observation decks and a museum about nuclear power.

Vertical to the central axis to the east and to the west it was planned to build two residential districts in two stages. The two districts to the west were built based on the already designed four types of residential buildings, which having a precise solar orientation, are interwoven in every micro district shaping long rows of yards opening into each other and circling a much wider inner space of every micro district, where schools and kindergartens are located. The knots of the construction perimeter of five storeyed residential buildings are highlighted by nine storied sections, which are surrounded by service blocks ensuring equal accessibility for the districts. In relation to the streets the structures are positioned freely, thus lacking any facade dominance, the unprecedented character of this approach for the entire country is mentioned by the architect in his notes (1967). In the second stage of

building a similar micro district, which was already designed by the same architect, it was intended to introduce at least two more types of residential buildings one of which multi-storey, this time with entrance halls.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union the construction of the town was not completed. Basically only one of the micro districts and the structures in city centre were completed and commissioned and it was in this period that the architect reviewed the plan of the second part and split it into land allocations for separate houses. The existing buildings from the very beginning underwent alterations made by residents all across the district. Later some small scale construction was done, mainly contradicting the described plan, in particular by building service units on the account of green areas of the micro district. As for the city centre complex the intended construction of a museum was substituted by building a church.

Misak Khostikyan is one of the members of the working group of the project ReThink Metsamor, realized by urbanlab Yerevan in cooperation with by the South Caucasus Regional Office of Heinrich Böll Foundation. He also closely worked with Martin Mikaelyan in early 90s.

Text by
Misak Khostikyan
Architect, Art Critic

Photos by
Katharina Roters
Visual Artist



Panorama of Metsamor town, 2016



Sport Complex facade detail,
Metsamor town, 2016

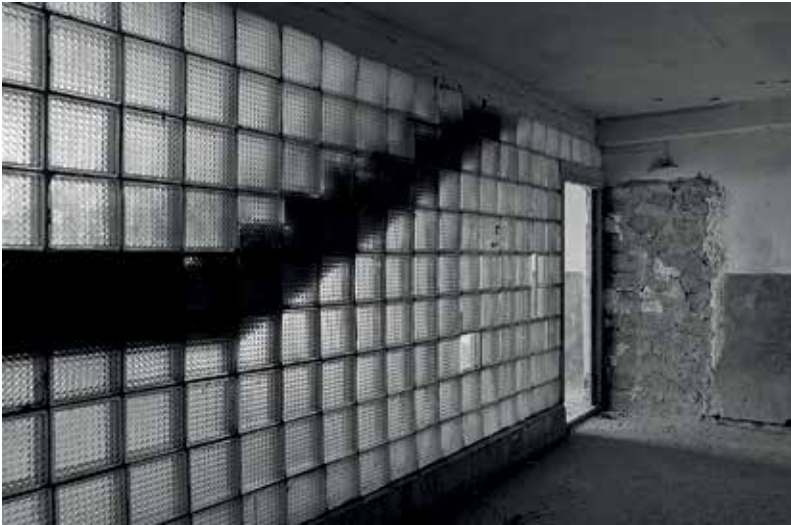


Balcony detail,
Metsamor town, 2016





An abandoned artificial lake
in Metsamor town, 2016



Dormitory staircase,
Metsamor town, 2016



Kids swimming pool of the Sport
Complex, Metsamor town, 2016



Dance studio of the Cultural House,
Metsamor town, 2016



The church is completely embedded in the urban fabric of the city with its entrance within a sotoportego, leading to a hall with separate entrances to the Church and to the Hospice.

Chiesa di Santa Croce degli Armeni

Սուրբ Խաչ հայոց եկեղեցի

Santa Croce degli Armeni or Holy Cross Armenian Church is the national church of the Armenian community in Venice situated in Calle degli Armeni. For the first time it houses a public exhibition in the framework of La Biennale di Venezia.

The documented presence of Armenians in Venice extends into the distant past, dating almost to the origins of the city. By the 12th century, this presence in Venice intensified, as the city became a key port for trade with Europe. The Armenians, mostly merchants, became one of the Venetian Republics wealthiest foreign communities.

In 1253 Venetian nobleman Marco Ziani bequeathed a house belonging to him in the district of San Zulian to be used as a hospice for the local Armenian community. He entrusted administration of the property to the Procurators of San Marco de Citra, thus ensuring that management of the property would be in the hands of one of Venices most important public bodies.

In 1496 the community was given the permission to erect an altar and chapel dedicated to the Holy Cross in the same building. As reported by the Armenian voyager Simeon Lehatsi, who toured the Mediterranean in the years 1608-18, the Armenian Hospice and the Church of Santa Croce remained the heart of the Armenian community in Venice throughout the centuries. In his description of the church, he recounts that the structure included also rooms for guests, a refectory and a number of cells for the monks.

In 1682 a wealthy merchant from the powerful Mirman family was granted permission to expand the chapel into a full-fledged church with the addition of a small belfry. The church was radically remodeled by the architect Antonio Pastori and was opened in 1688.

In 1740 the administration of the property was entrusted to the Mekhitarist Congregation of Armenian monks, based on the Island of San Lazzaro in the Venetian lagoon.

The Church has three altars, all of them bearing paintings by Venetian baroque artists. The central one is dedicated to the Holy Cross (painting by Andrea Celesti), the altar to the right is dedicated to the founder of the Armenian Church, Saint Gregory the Illuminator (painting by Gregorio Lazzarini), meanwhile the altar to the left is dedicated to the Assumption (painting by Andrea Celesti). The pictorial cycle decorating the ceiling, depicting the evangelists and scenes from the life of Christ are attributed to Alberto Calvetti.

The Church also houses the tombs of many of its notable benefactors and parsons. He lived as a Lion, died as a Swan, will rise as a Phoenix recites the inscription of Mirmans tombstone.



Photo by Tatevik Mnatsakanyan

Sarhat Petrosyan, born in 1981, is currently the founding director of urban environmental think-tank urbanlab Yerevan. He holds M.S. degree in Architecture and Ph.D. in Urban Planning from National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia. Since 2004 until present he holds the position of an Associate Professor at the Chair of Urban Planning of the same university.

Sarhat has been consulting and cooperating with several local and international organizations working in the field of landscape protection and urban development, among which Council of Europe, European Union, World Bank Group, Armenian Government, OSCE, etc. He was involved in urban activism for more than a decade by trying to enhance and improve the decision making processes by promoting inclusiveness and transparency. His fields of interest are urban design qualities and policies on urban development. He is author of more than fifteen publications and several articles and papers. In 2011 he was elected as a board member of the Union of Architects of Armenia.

Special thanks to Alen Amirkhanian, Anna Ghazarian, Armine Bachachyan, Khachik Abrahamyan, Nvard Yerkanyan, Ruben Arevshatyan, Svetlana Sahakyan, Vahe Budumyan and all supporters and partners of the Independent Landscape.



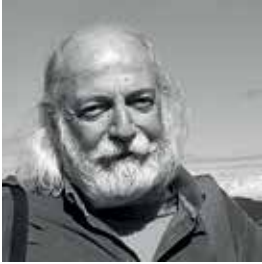
Arthur Lumen is a photographer and a filmmaker based in Armenia. Known for his attention to detail and unconventional approach to the creative process, Lumen specializes in documentary, portrait and wedding photography (www.lumenwedding.com). In 2012, he was awarded a Documentary Photography Project grant by Open Society Foundation for Landslide in Armenia project when over 18 months he documented the daily realities confronted by communities living in landslide zones.



Professor **Hamlet Petrosyan** specialises in Armenian archaeology and cultural anthropology with focus on traditional world-perception, identity and behaviour, monuments and iconography. He holds a doctoral degree in History and is the Head of Department of Cultural Studies at Yerevan State University. He is also the supervisor of Tigranakert archaeological mission in Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh Republic). He has more than 100 publications, including "Khachkar: the Origins, Functions, Iconography, Semantics" (2008) and "The Ideology and Iconography of Cross in Early Medieval Armenia" (2004).



Katharina Roters is a visual artist based in Budapest. Her first photo project Yerevan Concrete took place in 1999 in Yerevan. In 2014 she carried out her famous project entitled Hungarian Cubes which won her DAM Architectural Book Award. Katharina is a participant of a number of projects, exhibitions and presentations in Germany, Hungary and abroad.



Levon Abrahamian is the Head of the Department of Contemporary Anthropological Studies at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography and a Professor of Anthropology at the Yerevan State University. Dr. Abrahamian was 2015 spring term visiting professor of Anthropology at University of California Berkley.



Photo by Anahit Hayrapetyan

Misak Khostikyan was born in 1964 and currently is teaching at National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia and Kojoyan Design School in Yerevan. He also taught Art History in American University of Armenia and philosophy at the Institute of Contemporary Art. Misak has designed and built several private houses, carried out several interior design projects and participated in a number of art exhibitions. He is author of theoretical articles and some literary pieces and was co-editor of the magazines A-Actual Art and Cord.



Sevada Petrossian graduated from the National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia in 2003 with a Masters degree in architecture and urban planning. He is one of the co-founders of Yerevan based SP2 | architecture and planning firm. Sevada is also board member and coordinator of architecture activities at Armenian Centre for Contemporary Experimental Art in Yerevan.



Vahan Abgaryan was born in Yerevan in 1982. He considers himself a self-taught photographer and has been into photography since 2010. He is mostly interested in personal photo projects and street documentary photography. Vahan seeks for photographs that have harmony of colours, shapes and light and prefers to take real life photos capturing live and natural moments.



Photo by Karen Mirzoyan

Vahan Ishkhanyan was born in 1964, Yerevan. He has worked in various print and electronic media as an editor and correspondent. Currently he is the editor of the literary magazine Inkagir (www.inkagir.org) and columnist at tert.am online periodical. Vahan has authored five books, among them a book of selected works "Hairless" (Anmaz) and "Who Are they: the Armenophone Muslim Hamshen Armenians" published in 2014. He also produced two documentary films: Expectation and The Women of Saint Michael.



Zaven Khachikyan was born in 1955, in Meghri, Armenia. He has M.S. and Ph.D. in Physics from Yerevan State University. Since 1982 his main area of interest was documentary photography. In 1988 he got Armenia's Young Communist Union Prize as the best photojournalist for the coverage of the 1988 movement, as well as the events preceding and following it. He has participated in various projects and exhibitions.

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Cover Photo by Arthur Lumen

Translations by Sona Hovhannisyan

Coordinators: Armine Shahbazyan (Yerevan), Genni Fortunato (Rome) and Yesai Nahapetyan (Venice)

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Website by Helix LLC

Exhibitor: SP2 | Architecture and Planning; Vost Carpenters (Vanadzor)



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