



Shukhov Tower, Moscow, 1922 by Vladimir Shukhov

A world renowned engineering marvel and masterpiece of constructivist architecture, the radio tower designed by Vladimir Shukhov has garnered much attention lately. Citing the “dangerous” condition of the 92-year-old tower, in early February 2014 the Russian Ministry of Communications announced their plans for the 160 m structure: a two stage reconstruction-restoration, with the dismantling of the tower followed by reassembly at a new location. This has been deemed the *de facto* destruction of the tower by both experts and public opinion in general and has led to the Russian and international community to rally behind the campaign for the preservation of “Russia’s Eiffel Tower”.

Vladimir Shukhov’s 1899 patent for metal lattice shells has been used in numerous designs around the world, as the resulting structures are both strong and light. Shukhov’s invention was debuted at an industrial exhibition in Nizhniy Novgorod in 1896 with a 25 m hyperboloid tower. But it is the radio tower on Shabolovka Street in Moscow that is the most well-known, which made its first radio broadcast on March 19, 1922.

The proposal to remove the tower from the Moscow skyline has drawn criticism from engineers, architects, activists, and local residents for a multitude of reasons. The soaring tower is not only a familiar Moscow sight; it’s also a part of Russian history, a beacon of patriotism, and a symbol of progress, industrialization, and mass communication. From a preservation point of view, a reconstructed

tower would lose its authenticity as a historical landmark. Not to mention that the tower is a registered monument.

Be that as it may, the tower sits on the balance sheet of the Ministry of Communications and so as owners of the tower they have framed the issue as a matter of safety, claiming that the advanced corrosion only allows for one possible solution: dismantlement.

Joining the efforts of the Shukhov Tower Foundation, numerous architectural organizations including **docomomo** International and ISCOMOS ISC 20C, cultural institutions, public figures, historians, architects, activists and concerned citizens have offered their support to the tower. So while the campaign for the preservation of the tower has been going on for many years, the imminent threat of losing the tower has sparked a wave of



publications, petitions, exhibitions, and other events related to promoting the tower and protesting its destruction.

The Shukhov Tower has some passionate, dedicated people on its side with a great number of initiatives being put forward to spread the message: Shukhov Tower should stay where it is. Graphic designers have lent their talents in designing posters and other printed materials. Volunteers have been collecting signatures and passing out informational leaflets, reminding that the tower “is our pride, it is our history”. An online petition against the demolition of the tower currently has over 17,000 signatures.

Surrounding the Shukhov Tower is a large concentration of 1920–1930s *avant-garde* architecture. Tours, lectures, kid’s programs, guidebooks — all dedicated to sharing the

history of this special neighborhood and the ingenuity of the tower’s engineering, are demonstrating the viability of a Shabolovskaya cultural cluster.

Since February media attention on the issue has been nonstop. An open letter signed by prominent architects and specialists from around the world was sent to Vladimir Putin in March expressing their opposition against plans to dismantle the tower, making this not only a local issue but also guaranteeing international attention.

Four months of campaigning, and activities have not subsided. At the end of May a city-approved rally was held in defense of the tower, where veteran activists like architectural watchdog Archnadzor, newly created initiative groups, local residents, and concerned citizens all gathered in a show of support. By

this point, the message is only being repeated: Shukhov Tower is a masterpiece, it should be restored without disassembly, and remain in its historic location.

The fate of the tower will be decided at an official level, but the public has rallied to show that it is not indifferent to what goes in their city. Shukhov Tower is their tower. ■

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