

SHIFTING PARADIGMS BETWEEN MODERNISM AND TRADITION

The Case of Tashkent

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ABSTRACT: The global dissemination of modernist architecture reflects an intricate interplay between universal principles of design and regional adaptations, often shaped by sociopolitical ideologies and local traditions. Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, serves as a compelling example of this phenomenon, illustrating the fusion of global and socialist modernist ideals with Central Asian heritage. This paper explores the emergence of Tashkent's modernist architecture, focusing on its transformation in the 20th century through three interconnected dimensions: a brief theoretical framework focusing on the global origins and regional responses of Modernism, its reinterpretation in Tashkent's Soviet-era urban development, and the localized adaptations that integrate regional decorative and architectural elements, climate-responsive features, and cultural narratives. The study traces Modernism's journey from its European roots to its adoption in socialist and postcolonial contexts, emphasizing how, in the second half of the 20th century, Tashkent became a laboratory for architectural innovation. Through the analysis of emblematic buildings, the paper highlights how modernist principles were reimagined to address regional conditions and to integrate Eastern ornamentation and traditional spatial practices. Despite the rich cultural synthesis achieved in Tashkent's modernist heritage, these buildings face challenges in preservation due to post-Soviet identity shifts and rapid urban development. Thus, the paper concludes by examining emerging conservation efforts, highlighting the importance of these architectural achievements in advancing a deeper understanding of the dynamic interaction between global modernism and local influences. Tashkent's 20th-century architectural legacy not only represents a significant chapter in the history of modernist architecture but also serves as a unique lens through which to reconsider the complexities of cultural identity, globalization, and architectural preservation.

KEYWORDS: Tashkent, Soviet Modernism, traditional and modern, global and local.

INTRODUCTION: This paper examines the interaction between modernity and local traditions in the development of modernist architecture in Tashkent. It provides a comprehensive analysis of how the universal principles of the Modern Movement were reinterpreted and adapted to the cultural, political, and environmental context of Uzbekistan, particularly through the city's transformation under the framework of socialist modernization. By tracing Tashkent's 20th-century architectural development, the paper explores not only how these modernist buildings reflected and reshaped local identity but also their significance at the time of construction and in the present day. Specifically, it investigates the role these buildings played during their creation, when Tashkent served as a "shop window" for socialism, showcasing the Soviet model to decolonized countries, and their contemporary significance as pioneering examples of preservation for modernist heritage in Central Asia.

In particular, this study engages with ongoing debates on the Soviet architectural legacy in post-Soviet societies. These discussions center on the re-evaluation of Soviet-era heritage, addressing the complexities involved in attributing cultural and historical value to these buildings and the challenges of preserving them. Many of these structures embody a synthesis of ideological, artistic, and regional influences, making their study crucial for understanding broader narratives of 20th-century architecture, urban development, and identity. As post-Soviet states continue to critically reassess their historical legacies, the preservation of modernist architecture in cities such as Tashkent emerges as a pressing concern in heritage conservation.

The paper is based on the results of the research project *Tashkent Modernism XX/XXI*, which employed a multi-layered methodology to investigate the architectural legacy of Soviet Modernism in Tashkent, focusing on buildings

constructed between the 1960s and 1980s. Grounded in the principles of the Burra Charter, the methodology combined historical research, on-site analysis, and diagnostic investigations. A selection of 25 representative buildings served as case studies. Historical research involved the collection and examination of diverse sources, including bibliographic references, archival materials, and oral testimonies, allowing for the reconstruction of each building's development and transformations. This was followed by detailed documentation of the current condition through site inspections, surveys, diagnostic tests, and comparative analyses between original and as-built states. Findings were synthesized into inventory forms accompanied by individual statements of significance, which informed the development of tailored conservation strategies, addressing both material and functional aspects. The outcomes were further developed during the preparation of the World Heritage nomination dossier, reinforcing the broader goal of recognizing and safeguarding Tashkent's modernist architectural heritage.

The paper is organized into three main sections, each addressing critical aspects of Tashkent's modernist architecture within its socio-political and cultural context. The first section explores the origins, global spread, and regional adaptive responses of Modernism. The second section delves into how global modernist influences were integrated with local Central Asian traditions in Tashkent's architecture. The third section examines the challenges and opportunities in preserving this heritage, as these buildings reflect the city's role in the 20th-century processes of modernization, globalization, and cultural preservation.

GLOBAL ROOTS AND REGIONAL ADAPTATIONS OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE

Influenced by the Industrial Revolution and emerging as a response to its consequences, Modernism utilized prefabrication and mechanization to explore new possibilities in form and structure. Emphasizing functionality and standardization, modernist architecture was seen as embodying modern life, thought, and production with a moral agenda to advance social and political goals. Consequently, it was celebrated as an International Style, embodying an optimistic vision of globalism where global interests were prioritized over national ones (Hitchcock and Johnson, 1932). Within the polemical discourse of the Modern Movement, its new forms, spatial concepts, and technological advancements were regarded as universal knowledge that transcended national borders, embodying the spirit of the age with an inevitable influence on all societies (Conrads, 1970).

Modernism extended beyond its European origins, often serving as a nation-building tool in newly independent countries, where "modernity became the nation's

new identity" (Lu, 2011, p. 13). The widespread adoption of modernist architecture was facilitated by its neutral and universal aesthetic as well as increased global mobility. Lu notes:

"On the other hand, Modernism traveled in the name of knowledge transfer, overseas aid, and new forms of cooperation among newly independent countries. Successful modernist design proved effective in helping the nations that offered it to create expanded spaces in the global political arena, as well as bringing international recognition and faster-paced modernization to the host societies."
(2011, p. 9)

Socialist internationalism emerged as an alternative to capitalist-driven globalization (Stanek, 2020, pp. 30-31). Influenced by the USSR, Eastern European countries actively contributed to global urbanization by offering planning, construction, and architectural expertise to newly independent nations in Africa and the Middle East, thereby shaping localized forms of Modernism beyond the Western paradigm (Stanek, 2020, pp. 30-31). Within this geopolitical context, Tashkent, the capital of the Uzbek SSR, was envisioned as a domestic and international showcase of the USSR's modernization achievements through socialism (Colla, 2024, p. 258). It was designed to become a political, economic, and cultural hub, serving as the "capital" of international socialism and a counter-model to imperialism for Central Asia and newly independent nations in the Global South (Stronski, 2010, p. 7; Kalinovsky, 2013, pp. 199-200).

However, modern architecture was not entirely detached from its eurocentric and Western roots. This influence often resulted in the replication of similar materials, techniques, lines, surfaces, volumes, and even colors, often disregarding local spatial and social traditions, cultural heritage, and environmental contexts. This universal approach led to a phenomenon of *placelessness* (Relph, 1976), where modernist architecture appeared identical regardless of location, aligning with Augé's (1995) concept of *non-places*, in which architectural uniformity makes it difficult to discern specific cultural or geographical identities.

The one-size-fits-all nature of Modernism sparked debates in subsequent decades. The theory of multiple modernities challenges the notion of a singular Western modernity and suggests that modernity manifests in diverse, context-specific ways (Eisenstadt, 2000, p. 2). In architecture, this concept underscores how different regions have reinterpreted and adapted modernist principles based on their unique cultural and socio-political realities.

Kenneth Frampton (1983) critiqued the perceived universality of Modernism by advocating for *critical regionalism*, which integrates modern design principles with local materials, traditions, and landscapes to create architecture that is both contemporary and contextually grounded. Frampton argued that an over-reliance on international styles risks erasing cultural identity, whereas a sensitive approach to placelessness allows modern architecture to resonate with its surroundings (1983, p. 26). Such approaches were already being practiced in various regions, including Tashkent. Early modernist buildings, such as the Panoramic Cinema by a team lead by Vladimir Berezin (1960-64), featured pure modernist forms. However, in subsequent decades, traditional ornamentation became more prominent in the pursuit of a national style (Chukhovich, 2012, p. 217). This shift is evident in buildings such as the State Museum of History (lead architect Evgenii Rozanov, 1968-70), and the Peoples' Friendship Palace (lead architect Evgenii Rozanov, 1971-81), which reflect a synthesis of modernist design with local cultural references.

Unlike the homogeneous Modernism often associated with Western globalization, socialist architectural globalization produced hybrid forms of modern architecture that addressed local climates, geological constraints, cultural needs, and political aspirations (Stanek, 2020, p. 36). This phenomenon is evident in Tashkent, but can also be observed in regions such as Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Lu, 2011).

In Tashkent, Modernism was blended with ornamentation rooted in traditional motifs, climate mitigation measures typical of the region, and spatial configurations characteristic of Uzbek culture. This synthesis produced a distinct modern architectural language unique to the city.

TASHKENT: A CITY AT A CROSSROADS

During the Soviet era, Tashkent became a focal point for urban experimentation and socialist ideals, emerging as a paradigm of modernization and development within both the USSR and the broader socialist bloc (Stronski, 2010, p. 7). The Soviet leadership sought to present socialism as an alternative to Western models of progress, positioning Tashkent as the symbolic capital of international socialism in Central Asia (Colla, 2024, pp. 257-258). This ambition placed the city at the intersection of three key trajectories: modernist ethos, socialist ideology, and the cultural heritage of Central Asia. This confluence drew upon the region's artistic and cultural legacy to create a dynamic, multidimensional urban identity.

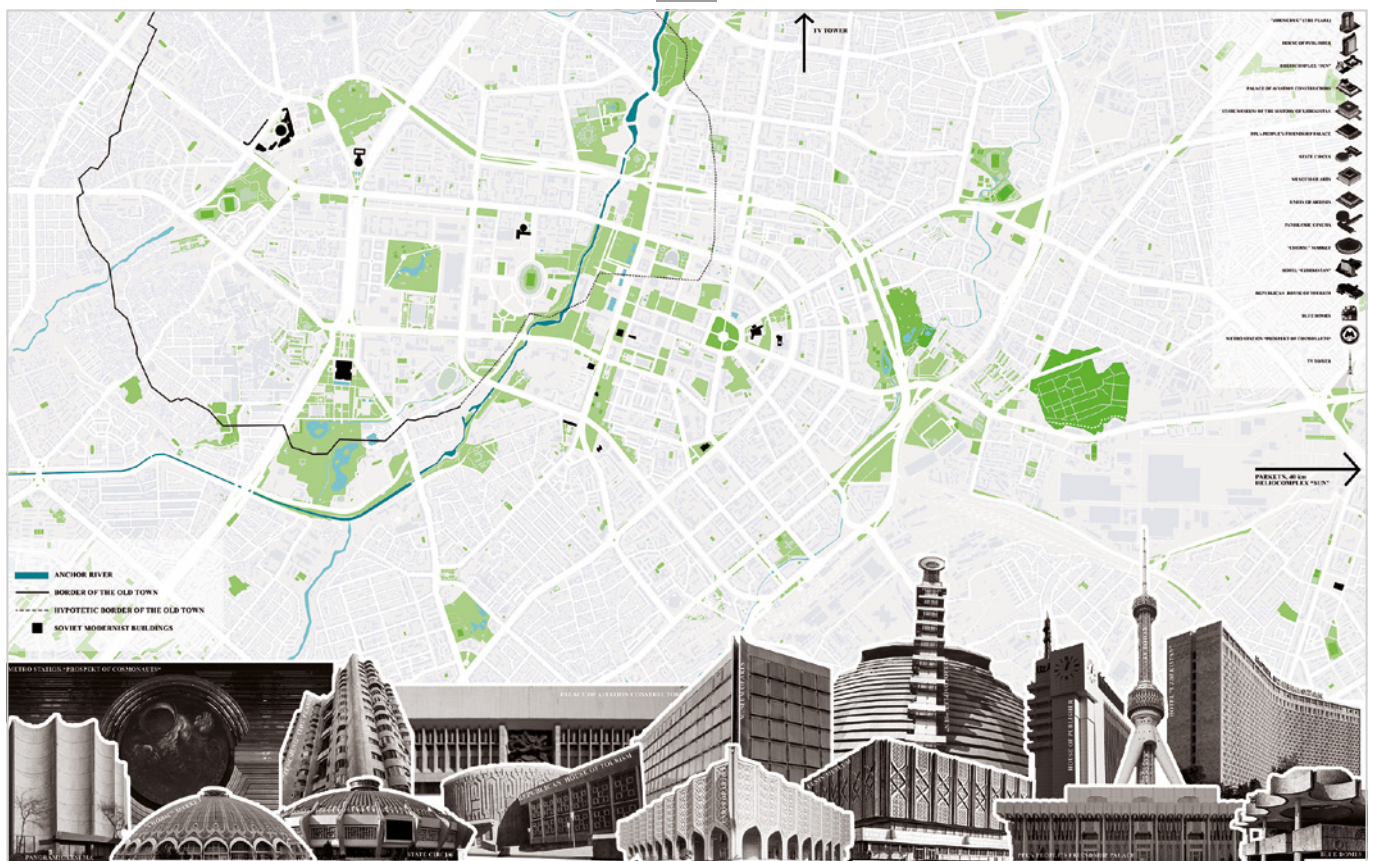
The earthquake that hit Tashkent in 1966 marked a pivotal moment in the city's architectural history. The extensive damage provided an opportunity for the Soviet government to implement long-sought modernization

plans (Raab, 2014, p. 277). The reconstruction effort was supported by resources from all Soviet republics, leading to a large-scale mobilization of architects, engineers, and construction workers (Meuser 2016, p. 86). The post-earthquake urban plan of Tashkent envisioned a series of architectural ensembles aligned along two primary axes, combining spatial, functional, and symbolic considerations.

At their intersection, the plan designated a governmental core, while cultural, educational, and recreational zones extended east and west (Vanke and Puretskii, 1967, p. 14). In this framework, modernist buildings were designed as prominent nodes within the city's fabric and green network, serving as important urban landmarks [FIGURE 01]. The ground floors were specifically designed to create visual and programmatic continuity with the surrounding context, using distinctive solutions to anchor the structures to the ground, such as plinths, suspended volumes, and galleries.

In the western part of the city, the system formed by the Peoples' Friendship Palace and the State Circus, designed by Tashgiprogor Workshop № 1 under Genrikh Aleksandrovich (1962-76), is a striking example. Positioned at opposite ends of Furkat Street, the principal north-south axis of Tashkent, these two buildings face one another, marking the boundaries of the city center and maintaining a direct visual relationship. The squares in front of them reflect the socialist ideal of public spaces as a place for collective gathering, while also serving to connect the buildings to their surroundings. To enhance their prominence and visibility, both structures are elevated on podiums, reinforcing their significance within the urban landscape.

Other key structures, such as the State Museum of History and the Panoramic Cinema—located in the middle core of the city—further illustrate how architecture was integrated into the urban fabric. The museum's cubic symmetry and stepped approach underline its cultural prominence and reflect the broader zoning logic of the city's administrative core, bringing together the state power, physical order, and hierarchy. Similarly, the Cinema was designed to mediate between large-scale public use and formal expression: its position—set back from Navoi Street and surrounded by open spaces—was strategically conceived to regulate crowd flows, particularly due to its proximity to the Pakhtakor Stadium by Mithkat Bulatov (1954-56), while enhancing both its recreational function and its visibility as a landmark. The design, thus, balanced functional circulation needs with a sculptural volumetric composition. With other modernist buildings, these structures reflect a coherent planning strategy that merged climate adaptation, mobility, and monumental architecture—central to the city's post-disaster transformation.



01 Map highlighting the most notable examples of Tashkent Modernism and their locations. © Michela Barazzetti and Laura Codilupi, 2022.

Although architecture and urbanism in Tashkent remained largely under local control during the first decade of Soviet rule (Chukhovich et al., 2025, p.62), the following decades witnessed a gradual shift toward Moscow's centralized approach. Most architects working in Central Asia at the time had been trained in Moscow or Leningrad rather than within the region itself. They were entrusted with the task of promoting the socialist way of life (Meuser, 2016, p. 166). The design and construction of public buildings were primarily overseen by state-affiliated architects based in Tashkent's planning institutes, such as Uzgospromekt (UzNIIPgradostroitel'stva), TashZNIIEP, Tashgiprogor, and Tashgenplan (TashNIIPgenplan). From the 1960s to the 1980s, these institutions played a fundamental role in shaping the city's architectural landscape, blending Soviet methodologies with localized approaches (Chukhovich et al., 2025, p.99).

The circulation of modernist ideas into the USSR, despite the Iron Curtain, also significantly influenced Tashkent's architectural identity. Technical journals, such as *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (Steiner, 2012, p. 7), exposed Soviet architects to global trends, fostering an exchange that highlighted the interconnectedness of architectural practices across political and geographical boundaries. In Tashkent, these ideas were not simply replicated but rather reinterpreted, striking a balance between innovation and tradition. In this regard, the architectural trajectory of Tashkent from the 1960s to the 1990s mirrors broader shifts in Soviet architectural policy. Khrushchev's 1954 construction reforms emphasized modernist

minimalism, standardized construction, and the use of materials like concrete, metal, and glass (Novikov and Belogolovskii, 2010, pp. 9-11). Early modernist structures in Tashkent reflect this functionalist approach, adhering strictly to the principles of Soviet and international modernist architecture.

By the late 1960s, a more symbolic and stylistic approach emerged, reflecting Soviet efforts to develop an architecture that was "national in form, socialist in content" (Chukhovich, 2012, p. 215). Moscow-based institutions increasingly produced modern designs featuring orientalist imagery and emphasized perceived "Eastern" elements (Chukhovich, 2012, pp. 218-219). Tashkent architects later followed, creating the architectural diversity that enriches the city's urban fabric, while illustrating the interplay between socialist ideals and local traditions. Beyond surface aesthetics, architects sought to reinterpret traditional residential forms within modernist frameworks, integrating cultural identity into functional designs. This duality is evident in the way Tashkent's modernist architecture incorporated influences from Europe, Russia, and the United States, such as prefabrication, curtain walls, and advanced building facilities, while simultaneously drawing on regional traditions. Central Asian elements, such as courtyards, loggias, and *pan-dzharas* (traditional patterned grills), were adapted to suit the region's social and climatic needs, while geometric patterns, colorful ceramic tiles, and Islamic-inspired decorative motifs added cultural depth.



02 The Central Exhibition Hall of the Academy of Arts (1972-74), featuring decorated prefabricated panels in the façade and an arcade with lancet arches evoking traditional forms. © Authors, 2022.

THE GLOBAL-LOCAL NEXUS IN TASHKENT'S MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE

A prime example of the fusion between global and local influences is the Central Exhibition Hall of the Academy of Art (lead architect Rafael' Khairutdinov, 1972-74), which reinterprets traditional architectural motifs and climate-responsive solutions while embracing modern construction techniques. The pleated façades, made from decorated prefabricated panels, blend modern technology with local decorative traditions [FIGURE 02]. These panels feature repetitive stucco patterns on a light-blue mosaic backdrop, creating a modernist twist on the regional ornamentation. The stylized cotton boll symbolizes both Islamic tradition, evoking paradise gardens, and Uzbekistan's Soviet-era identity, representing the nation's agricultural strength and the socialist division of labor (Chukhovich et al., 2025, p. 606). Moreover, the ground-floor arcade, with lancet arches recalling traditional forms, is reimagined with outward-tilted apexes and gaps replacing keystones, adding a playful reinterpretation of tradition. Behind the arches, blue ceramic tiles with geometric patterns evoke the Islamic heritage, further highlighting the blend of the past and the present. The interior is centered around a full-height atrium, illuminated by skylights that provide zenithal light. The lanterns, shaped like lancet arches with semi-circular horizontal projections, not only illuminated the hall but also facilitated ventilation through the stack effect (also known as the *shipang technique*), a characteristic of traditional Central Asian architecture.

Given the region's continental climate, experimentation extended to mitigation solutions, primarily aimed at shielding buildings from solar exposure and overheating. A key feature of Tashkent's Modernism is the *pandzhara*. Reinterpreted with modern materials and design, this feature is prominently used in numerous buildings, such as the State Museum of History [FIGURE 03],

where Moscow architects adopted this element to create a distinctly national architecture. In this case, *pandzhara* screens were also notable for their innovative technology. According to the museum's architect, it was the first time in construction practice that sunshades were made with high precision from precast reinforced concrete elements (Rozanov et al., 1970). The façade system was complemented by cutting-edge technical systems, including an air-conditioning system integrated with a radiant ceiling for heating and cooling, and a water-filled roof designed to reduce solar heat gain. The museum marked the beginning of a new architectural aesthetic in Tashkent, one that fused Soviet Modernism with Uzbek cultural identity. If the pure design concept of the museum, a glass cube floating above ground, straightforwardly referred to Modernism, the geometrical pattern of the *pandzharas* linked it to the Eastern world.

Pandzharas are also used in other major buildings, including the Hotel Uzbekistan by TashZNIIEP, (lead architect Il'ia Merport, 1963-74), the State Circus, and the Peoples' Friendship Palace by a team lead by Evgenii Rozanov (1971-81). In the palace, the lattice screens are paired with an interpreted version of Islamic *muqarnas*, a three-dimensional honeycomb-like decorative element, hanging from the top of the façades [FIGURE 04]. The interior is equally imbued with local references, with decorative elements inspired by local traditions, albeit scaled up to match the building's grandeur, as the palace was intended to be the largest and most sumptuous congress and concert hall in Tashkent and the entire region. For example, the auditorium ceiling features plaster elements modeled after the traditional Uzbek *karnay* trumpet. The Moscow architects who designed the building stated: "We sought to create our own aesthetic series when developing the plasticity of façades and interiors, which would make it possible to recognize traditional techniques through complex



03 Modern reinterpretation of the *pandzhara* on the façade of the State Museum of History (1968-70). © Authors, 2022.



04 The façade of the Peoples' Friendship Palace (1971-81), featuring a modern reinterpretation of the *pandzhara* and the *muqarnas*, traditional architectural characteristics of Central Asia. © Authors, 2022.

associations rather than direct repetition" (Sukhanova & Krichevsky, 1981, p. 24). Despite traditional influences, the extensive use of prefabricated concrete and glazing clearly refers to modernist logic, successfully blending modular modernity with Islamic-inspired decoration.

The integration of global Modernism with local heritage is also evident in minimally ornamented buildings, such as the Zhemchug Residential Building by TashZNIIEP with the leadership of Ofeliia Aidinova (1972-85). Designed as a "vertical *mahalla*" (traditional neighborhood), this

innovative housing complex sought to merge modernist housing solutions with the traditional Uzbek communal lifestyle. It reinterprets the spatial organization of the traditional *mahalla* through suspended triple-height courtyards [FIGURE 05], promoting community interaction and continuity of cultural practices in a modern setting. Each apartment also includes a summer room, reinterpreting the traditional *iwan*, a vaulted space open on one side typical of Islamic and Persian architecture, that historically separated public and private areas in Uzbek homes (Adle et al., 2005, p.



05 Suspended triple-height courtyards in the Zhemchug Residential Building (1972-85), recalling the spatial organization of the traditional *mahalla*. © Authors, 2022.



06 Buffet Hall of the Peoples' Friendship Palace (1971-81) with ceramic art by Aleksandr Kedrin. © Authors, 2022.

815). Aidinova's experimental approach extended to the construction, where she employed sliding formworks to create a monolithic structure, rather than using prefabricated elements (Meuser, 2016, pp. 235-236). Alongside the concept of the vertical *mahalla*, which anchors the building in traditional practices, the raw concrete and clean lines of the design clearly reflect the language of modernist architecture.

Tashkent's modernist buildings also reflect the intersection of global architectural trends and local cultural narratives through the integration of monumental art. In the post-war decades, public buildings in Tashkent were conceived not only as functional spaces but as ideological stages, designed to showcase large-scale artworks that blended Soviet symbolism with Uzbek visual and material traditions. This artistic synthesis reached a pivotal point in the 1960s, when monumental art began incorporating regional motifs, indigenous materials, and artisanal techniques rooted in the applied arts (Chukhovich et al., 2025, pp. 605-606). This integration reflected an ideological aim: to promote a unified socialist identity while celebrating the cultural diversity of the republics. Tashkent's modern architecture thus became both a medium for political discourse and a vessel for cultural continuity. Under Khrushchev, monumental art evolved from Stalinist rigidity toward more thematic and abstract forms, emphasizing ideals such as peace, labor, and unity. Though propagandistic in nature, much of this art also engaged with local heritage and individual artistic expression (Chukhovich et al., 2025).

A prime example of this fusion is the Peoples' Friendship Palace, where the banquet and buffet halls highlight local craftsmanship with Aleksandr Kedrin's ceramic panels, *Gulinaf* and *Gulichi* [FIGURE 06], which symbolize spring and autumn, respectively. Rendered in terracotta and emerald hues, these panels represent Uzbekistan's agricultural abundance and natural beauty while emphasizing its contribution to Soviet prosperity. Moreover, the Presidium Hall of the palace features an iconic tapestry by Bakhodir Jalalov that blends Soviet internationalism with Uzbek traditions. At its center, a depiction of the "happy cell of society"—a family in an idyllic setting—is surrounded by classical symbols, such as the Greek goddess Venus, alongside representations of Soviet advancements like astronauts, books, and stars. This tapestry embodies the ideological message of collective achievement, uniting regional symbolism with Soviet aspirations for progress and education. The use of local materials and motifs, coupled with the involvement of artists from other Soviet republics, underscores the palace's dual role: celebrating local heritage while symbolizing the unity of all Soviet republics.

PRESERVING A CONTROVERSIAL HERITAGE

Over time, Tashkent's post-earthquake urban plan and its modernist architecture have undergone significant changes. However, the main axes and the broader structural layout established in the second half of the twentieth century remain clearly legible today. While development pressures have led to the demolition or substantial alteration of several modernist buildings, many others have been preserved and continue to serve as prominent landmarks along the city's principal thoroughfares, standing as enduring symbols of Tashkent's pivotal role in the 20th century. They embody the aspirations and contradictions of a society navigating the challenges of modernization, globalization, and cultural preservation.

Nonetheless, this heritage reflects the broader struggles of modernist heritage worldwide, often overlooked due to its temporal proximity. In Tashkent, these challenges are compounded by two critical factors. The first is related to Uzbekistan's quest for a post-Soviet national identity following independence in 1991. In line with the global discourse on "difficult, dissonant, or contested heritage" (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996; Macdonald, 2009) in ideologically tied heritage places, many former Soviet republics have had to confront the Soviet legacy—particularly modernist architecture—which carries complex ideological undertones. Unlike countries that pursued de-Sovietization policies to remove Soviet symbols¹, Uzbekistan has taken a more moderate approach, preserving much of this heritage as part of the city's identity. The second factor influencing Tashkent's modernist heritage is the rapid urban development that has characterized Uzbekistan in recent years. While this growth has brought increased resources that could potentially support conservation, it has also accelerated poorly controlled interventions, often carried out without a full understanding of the significance of these buildings. As a result, several modernist structures, if not demolished, have been transformed to meet contemporary functional needs and architectural tastes, losing their original character.

Efforts to counteract these trends have emerged over time, beginning with broader initiatives to address the challenges faced by Soviet modernist heritage². Pioneering work by initiatives such as *Alerte Héritage*³ and scholars like Jens Jordan (2022) played a critical role in raising awareness about the threats to modernist architecture in Uzbekistan. These efforts laid the groundwork for more focused projects, such as the *Tashkent Modernism XX/XXI* research. Initiated by the Uzbekistan Art and Culture Development Foundation in 2021, this project marked a turning point in acknowledging and preserving Tashkent's Soviet modernist legacy. The outcomes have been numerous, accompanied by significant efforts in dissemination

and promotion aimed at raising the visibility of this heritage both nationally and internationally.⁴

On a national level, the registration of several modernist buildings in the State Cadastre of Cultural Heritage Sites⁵ has subjected them to Uzbekistan's legal framework for heritage protection. Central to this framework is Law № 269-II of August 30, 2001, *On the Protection and Use of Cultural Heritage Sites*, which regulates the identification, registration, and preservation of heritage sites. The law defines key protective measures, such as the establishment of protection zones, the implementation of scientific research, and the development of monitoring programs. These actions are coordinated by the *Madaniy Meros Agentligi* (Cultural Heritage Agency), which, through its Scientific Expert Council and Cultural Heritage Fund, provides both scientific guidance and financial resources to support conservation initiatives. The Urban Planning Code (adopted on May 23, 2021) further reinforces this system by mandating that master plans incorporate provisions for the protection of cultural heritage sites. This principle is reflected in Tashkent's current General Master Plan (approved on December 25, 2024), which designates areas containing modernist architectural assets as subject to conservation policies and regulations.

Internationally, a significant milestone in the recognition of Tashkent's modernist architecture was reached in 2024, when sixteen key buildings were included in the UNESCO Tentative List (UNESCO, 2024). This nomination highlights the architectural, urban, and social values of Soviet Modernism in Tashkent, framing it within the global narrative of 20th-century heritage. Following this inclusion, a formal Nomination Dossier has been prepared to support the case for full World Heritage status, outlining its outstanding universal value. This development marks a critical shift in how Uzbekistan positions its Soviet-era heritage on the international stage and underscores the growing institutional commitment to safeguarding Tashkent's modernist legacy.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has illustrated that Tashkent's modernist architecture, through its dialogue with local traditions, resulted in a distinctive regional adaptation of international Modernism, shaped by cultural and environmental specificities. These buildings played a central role in the city's socialist modernization, symbolizing both political aspirations and broader social transformations within Tashkent's evolving urban landscape. The city's unique modernist language diverged from the global homogenization of the movement, establishing an architectural legacy that now serves as a critical reference in contemporary preservation discourse. Through ambitious urban planning and

architectural experimentation, Tashkent embodied a vision of modernity that sought to define the identity of the Soviet East. Today, that same urban fabric is being reinterpreted and revalued, positioning Tashkent once again as a “shop window”, this time as a pioneer in the preservation of 20th-century heritage, not only in Central Asia, but across the former Soviet republics.

The preservation of this architectural legacy is of critical importance, not merely for its aesthetic or historical value, but for its capacity to articulate the continuity of identity in the face of political, ideological, and societal change. It acknowledges the shifting political and cultural landscapes while recognizing the historical narrative embedded in these structures. These buildings, once conceived to shape the modern identity of the “capital of Central Asia,” are now being protected as part of Uzbekistan’s national heritage. Their inclusion in national conservation frameworks and international initiatives such as the UNESCO Tentative List reflects a significant cultural shift: modernist architecture is no longer viewed solely as a legacy of the Soviet era, but as a meaningful and enduring component of the country’s present and future identity.

Despite the positive turn of events, significant challenges remain. Adapting this architectural heritage to meet contemporary needs without compromising its integrity is a costly and technically demanding task. Additionally, changing societal attitudes toward these structures often place them at odds with development priorities. The legacy of Tashkent’s modernist architecture, much like modernist heritage globally, requires careful documentation and proactive preservation strategies to address the ongoing threat of destruction and loss. By fostering a broader appreciation for this heritage and striking a balance between preservation and urban development, Tashkent can offer valuable lessons for other cities navigating similar issues, ensuring that modernist architecture is not just a relic of the past, but a meaningful part of the future.

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ENDNOTES

- Several former Soviet republics implemented laws to remove Soviet symbols linked to communist ideologies. Georgia's Freedom Charter (2011) mandated the removal of Soviet-era symbols and monuments, while Latvia enacted a similar ban in June 2022 (Law OP 2022/120.2). Similar measures were considered in Lithuania, Estonia, and Romania.
- To mention a few, Soviet Modernism 1955-1985 (Novikov & Belogolovskii, 2010), and СССР. Cosmic Communist Constructions Photographed (Chaubin, 2011) provide a visual overview of modernist buildings across the former Soviet Republics. The Soviet Modernism 1955-1991 (2012) exhibition held at the Architekturzentrum Wien was also essential in raising awareness and resulted in the first online inventory of Soviet modernist architecture.
- International observatory founded by Boris Chukhovich and Svetlana Gorshenina to raise awareness about endangered modernist heritage in Uzbekistan (<https://archalert.net/>).
- Among others, the exhibitions Tashkent Modernism. Index (Milano 17-23.04.2023; Tashkent 20.10-05.11.2023) and A Matter of Radiance (Venice 10.05-23.11.2025), the conference Where in the World is Tashkent (Tashkent 18-19.10.2023), and the books Tashkent. A Modernist Capital (Balas et al., 2024) and Tashkent Modernism XX/XXI (Chukhovich et al., 2025).
- A first batch of modernist buildings was added to the State Cadastre through Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan no. 846 of October 4, 2019. Further buildings, together with 154 modernist mosaics, were added through Resolutions No. 227 of April 22, 2024 and No. 154 of March 25, 2024.

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