The sources used for this research are lacunary and sometimes contradict each other. In the course of the radical political changes of the 1930's, they were often destroyed or dispersed, which makes them rare and difficult to access. This essay is an attempt at a reconstruction of facts using *inter alia* the unpublished bibliography of Philip Tolziner.

Molotov Sotsgorod

By Oscar Buson
Translated by Tatiana Gulyaeva

To those who believed in a better world, who applied their talent to its realisation and who paid their lives for it.

November 2008

THE sky is low above Motovilikha. Making our way along a muddy street, in the timid light of this part of the Urals we see emerging before us a silhouette of carbonated concrete, an iron structure rusting in the cold, whose plaster panels between pilasters suggest a construction site of dubious standards. It is difficult to believe that eighty years before this old workers' club designed by constructivist architect P. Golosov (Gladyshev, 2008) provided the early Soviet society with up to three hundred thousand meals a day (Semyannikov, 2002). An emblem of the new socialist urbanisation, not only was the workers' canteen meant to rescue the woman from her kitchen slavery, it was also supposed to be a place capable of generating the new social structure by becoming a venue for festivals and shows in the evenings [figure 1]. Several meters away we find a curvy-shaped building with sharply defined edges. Its faded crimson colour and white horizontal bands prompt its public building status. This is an infirmary at 11 Lebedev Street, built at the end of the 1920s [figure 2].

Then, with our feet still in the mud, we pass in front of a white house with purple lines, 15 Ziolkovsky Street [figure 3], or the agricultural college at 11 Zemlyachka Street [figure 4], the House of the Teachers [figure 5] and the technical college in Ural Street [figure 6] till we arrive at Lebedev Street, where blocks of flats welt in the mud like bars of concrete [figure 7]. Some of them are embellished by friezes and acanthus leaves [figures 8, 9].

We were not aware yet that we were in the heart of Molotov, a new revolutionary town whose construction started in the mid-1920's. What seemed to us on that November day like a ruined part of a forgotten city, was actually a manifest of the socialist urbanism, built in order to bring people out of the mud. Motovilikha, a workers' community next to Perm, was more suitable for the new Soviet society than the old merchant town of Perm. Its geographic situation was ideal. Between it and the Kama River, a tributary of the Volga, stretched the Motovilikha mechanical plant. The town and the plant were cut through by railway and by a strip of greenery. In his book *Sotsgorod*[1], Nikolai Milyutin writes that Motovilikha is the most thriving town of Russia, an ideal place where the Soviet society could germinate. In 1938, Hannes Meyer also called Perm an ideal region, as "it has, as is seldom the case, all the elements for the development of planned economy of socialist type, due to the availability of natural resources, both heavy and light industry complexes,

Figure 1. Cantinde Club.
Before 1932, **P. Golossov**

Figure 2. Clinic.
Before 1932

Figure 3. Administration building.
Before 1932

Figure 4. Agricultural School.
Before 1932, **Hannes Meyer** team

Figure 5. Teacher's house.
After 1932, **Hannes Meyer**

Figure 6. Technical School. After 1932.
H. Meyer & A. Urban or **P. Golossov**

energy resources, an excellent river transportation network, a good railway network, an old cultural centre and well-cultivated countryside" (Maglio, 2002).

However, it is not only their common interest for Perm and its region that unites Meyer with Milyutin, it is the concept of a socialist town: the *Sotsgorod*.

Sotsgorod

IT is believed that the author of the *Sotsgorod* concept is the sociologist Leonid M. Sabsovich. In the late 1920s, Sabsovich wrote about complete collectivisation of all forms of social life in a compact town comprised of standardized residential *combinats* (Kruft, 1985).

The principles of *Sotsgorod* had been germinating since the first years after the October Revolution. Between 1922 and 1923, simultaneously with the competition for the Palace of Labor, the first competition for socialist housing was launched in Moscow. According to the brief, the contestants had to plan flats for families with children and for single people. The contest brief required that the principles of a socialist town should be put into practice in two blocks in Moscow: one along Serpukhovskaya street, and the other in Simonov district. The blocks flats were supposed to incorporate a workers' club, a kindergarten, a domestic services centre, a bathhouse and a laundry room. The volumetric relations between the public functions and the housing lay in the basis for the development of communal life, which at that period still took place amid the existing merchant town. This question is fundamental for the concept of the collective city.

Among the submitted projects it is interesting to mention those by Andrei Belogrud [figure 10] and Konstantin Melnikov [figure 11], who were awarded with the second prize for the Serpukhovskaya street block. Both projects suggest a hybrid topology of town houses arranged transversely in lines, with flats for single people on the ground floor and larger flats on higher floors and in the loft. Housing units can be accessed through individual entrances separated from the street by a private garden. Both projects propose arranging the communal services in a single building. Melnikov also suggests connecting the individual town houses with the public services by roofed passageways and porticos, in order to create spaces for people to meet in the course of their daily routines, engendered by the rhythms of the life of the emerging socialist society and its new architecture[2].

Melnikov's project, just like that of Belogrud, proposes simple architectural forms and is devoid of ornaments. The spaces created by volumes are tense and form a hierarchy, thus giving the first answer to the question about the role of the individual in the communist society. These ideas are notably manifested in the standardised design of the lodgings and the relations between the residential part and the communal services.

The winners of the competition were the projects of Leonid Vesnin [figure 12] and Sergei Chernyshev. The typologies they proposed do not differ fundamentally from the ones used before the Revolution, the only difference being the inclusion of the pre-requisite communal services (Brumfield & Blair, 1993). The project by L. Vesnin has residential buildings arranged around the main regular-shaped semi-public space, with the public building inside it. The facade of the flats blocks is serial, but this design does not propose any standardization. The layout the of the flats offers a remarkable level of comfort but does not suggest any communal usage of the residential block. The density in this project is higher than the two previously mentioned ones.

Eventually, none of these projects were realized in Moscow, but in 1928 Chernyshev's design was

Figure 7. Dwellings, built from 1928 onwards. Drawings by **S. Tschernyschew,**1922-1923

Figure 8. Dwelling, cleaned façade

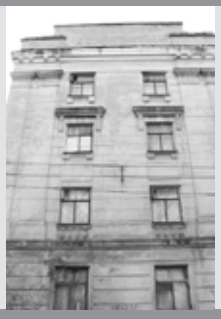

Figure 9. Dwelling, decorated façade

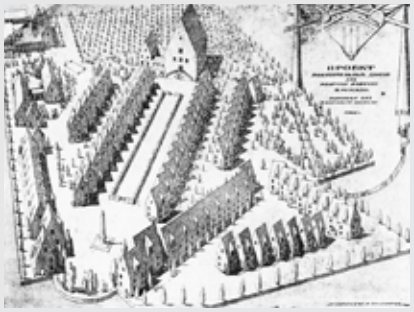

Figure 10. Collective dwelling project. 1922-1923, **A. Belogrud**

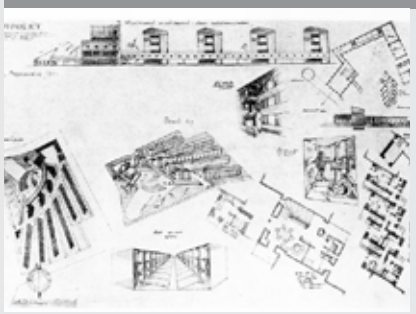

Figure 11. Collective dwelling project. 1922-1923, **K. Melnikov**

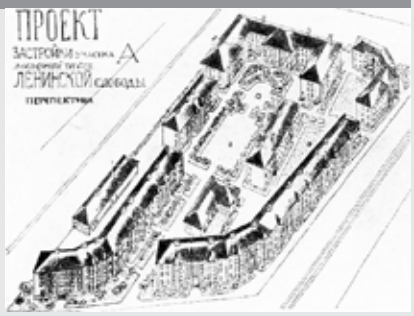

Figure 12. Collective dwelling project. 1922-1923, **L. Vesnin**

implemented in the construction of the new centre of Motovilikha[3]. On that November day we were still unaware of it, yet we found ourselves in the place where the first *Sotsgorod* has been built.

Molotov

BEGINNING with the 1930's, Motovilikha becomes more important than Perm. In 1931 Motovilikha will be renamed Molotov, and from the 1940-s, the town Perm-Molotov is officially called only Molotov. So, we were in the centre of Molotov, whose inhabitants eighty years before had been listening to jazz and European music (Semyannikov, 2002).

Molotov consists of twenty blocks of flats, having the same footprint: 50-meters-long and 11-meters-wide. Thirteen of those are made of brick and have three floors, another seven are made of concrete and have four floors. These seven buildings are remarkable for their construction and layout. They are arranged around semi-public open courtyards. The flats are spacious, each of them is equipped with a water heater, has running water and sanitary system. The builders attached special attention to cost reduction and to "social adaptation" by constructing functional buildings without decorative elements (Techeun, 1980). However, two houses have neo-classical decorative elements and modification of the distribution system justifying volumetric alterations of their facades. Those latter remind of the architectural language of the project by L. Vesnin submitted for the 1922–1923 contest. So it is possible that the first version by Chernyshev included neo-classical decorative elements, which were later removed for the sake of economy.

Complete lack of ornaments also characterizes the diploma projects executed by VHUTEMAS students after 1926. Projects created by professor Landovsky's students represent the architectural and urban design research of the *Sotsgorod combinat*. For example, the project by M. Turkus proposes residential blocks consisting of just two types of elements [figure 13]. The different possibilities of arrangement permitted variety in composition, layout, height and volumes (Chan-Magovedow, 1983). Standardization was a major characteristic of the *Sotsgorod*. Later N. Milyutin will criticize this 'unreasonable and useless monumentality' for 'barbarism' and 'squandering of materials' (Milyutin, 1930). Therefore, the presence of ornaments on just two standardized housing blocks in Molotov represented this stage of transition and the search for an architectural language to suit the Soviet society.

Combinat

THE incorporation of communal programs into housing typologies that followed lead to the development of a housing *combinat*, the primary cell of the *Sotsgorod*. One of the first prototypes of the *combinat* was developed in 1927 by I. Golosov [figure 14]. The project includes ten lines of housing slabs arranged around communal services and connected by passageways.

Each *combinat* included a variety of communal services, like a canteen, a club, a library or a daynursery, while the services of a greater scale, like a stadium or sports facilities, were shared by several *combinats*.

The origin of the public buildings in Molotov cannot be attributed to Chernyshev.

Besides the participation of Russian architects, we must mention Hannes Meyer's brigade[4]. *During the period of industrialization of the Soviet Union special importance was attached to the education of highly-qualified staff from workers to engineers. In order to set up the schools necessary for this purpose, a special institution was founded: the Giprovtus. (...) All team members were involved, with Hannes Meyer as the chief architect. According to Meyer's orders, standardization and type design practice were to be applied as much as possible, from the elements of design and construction to the buildings in his ensemble, and only the simplest and the most consistent materials and building techniques were to be used. The Brigade worked on the standardization of technical institutions and developed project types along with individual solutions. (...) One of the most important individual projects was the Higher Technical School of the city of Perm, which was created by Hannes Meyer and Antonin Urban (Tolziner, 1989).*

Figure 13. Combinat project. 1926, **M. Turkus**

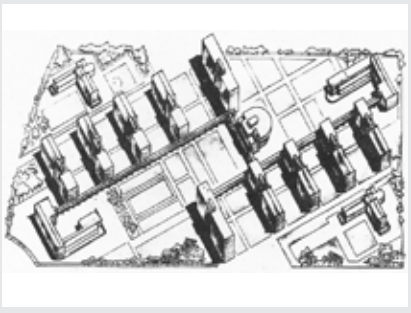

Figure 14. Combinat project. 1927, **I. Golossov**

Figure 15. Sotsgorod na Gorkach. 1932, **H. Meyer**

Figure 16. Sotsgorod na Gorkach. Molotov detail, 1932, **H. Meyer**

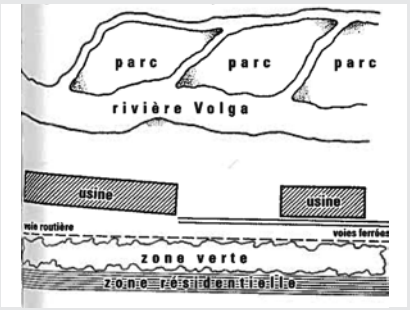

Figure 17. Magnitogorsk plan development, linear city. 1930, **N. Milioutine**

The House of Teachers situated in front of the workers' club by P. Golossov is also accredited to Hannes Meyer (Kiselev, 2008). If, in our mixed panoply of sometimes contradictory accounts, we take into consideration the fact that the Technical School [figure 4] also housed the headquarters and flats for NKVD officers who guarded the Motovilikha plant and other local industries and institutions (Semyannikov, 2002), we could locate the Technical School in Zemlyachka street. Indeed, this building of concrete constructed before 1932 has a very similar design to the drawings which we found in the archives of Philip Tolziner. The standardization of constructive elements and the industrial language of the facade lead us to the conclusion that the design of this building could belong to Meyer's team, and the team might have never become aware of its construction (Tolziner, 1989).

Sotsgorod na Gorkach

THERE is, however, an indisputable evidence that the project for the Molotov master plan was created by Meyer, and it was called *Sotsgorod* na Gorkakh (translated as « a socialist town on hills").

Sotsgorod na Gorkach has never been realised, but it is an important witness helping in the understanding of Molotov. Situated between the village of Motovilikha and H. Meyer's project, Molotov is the anchor between reality and imagination.

By superimposing Meyer's plan on the existing layout, we can recognize the buildings that were built before 1932. It is possible to establish the construction dates of the agricultural college, the infirmary, the workers' club and all the blocks of flats (fig 16).

By proposing a plan for the whole *Sotsgorod*, Meyer goes beyond the limits of the *combinat* suggested by projects of Ladovsky's students. The residential blocks of the *Sotsgorod na Gorkach* stretch from Molotov along the plateau between Motovilikha and Perm. Meyer develops a flexible urban plan of a linear city that can be adapted to climatic restrictions, to the topography, the location of the plant and the availability of natural resources (Jung, 1989). Meyer's *Bandstadt* is in fact nothing else than the realisation of N. Milyutin 's linear city, which is described in *Sotsgorod*, the manifesto of Soviet avant-guard urbanism.

Sotsgorod na Gorkakh develops itself in a linear layout, its main axis being the prolongation of Ural street, which separates Molotov from Motovilikha Plant. Most of the programmatic bands situated between Molotov and the Kama river are the ones proposed by Milyutin : 1. The industry; 2. The railway; 3. The green belt; 4. Residential houses and public facilities; 5. Green spaces and sports facilities; 6. Agricultural fields (Kruft, 1985) [figure 17]. Between the *combinats* there are public facilities of a greater scale: sports facilities, technical colleges or hospitals. Therefore, we can read the concentration of communal buildings of Molotov as a transition zone between the present and the future of Molotov's urban development. This programmatic alternation between housing *combinats* and public facilities is reproduced along the main axis.

An axonometric drawing coming from Meyer's studio provides the detailed structure of standard *combinats*.

The lines of blocks of flats are rearranged around green courtyards, which are sometimes closed by perpendicular lines. This creates more 'private' courtyards that provide community facilities, like playgrounds and sports grounds, for residents of that particular block. Public buildings situated inside the courtyards are lower than the surrounding buildings. Meyer's axonometric projection also shows that both public and residential buildings are made to a standardized design.

The *combinats* in Molotov are organized in the same way. Standard blocks of flats form semi-public open spaces including lower height public services buildings. The fact that the entrances are situated in the courtyards suggests a hierarchy in the use of spaces graduating from private to public. We can also reconstruct the gleam of the Soviet collectivism, the rhythm of which was created by the places the people visited daily: the individual cell, the communal programs within the *combinat* (crèche, laundry room, public bath house), workers' canteen, the place of work (intellectual or industrial) and then again the canteen (but also the workers' club or sports grounds), finally returning to the individual cell.

Utopia?

THIS organization of life induced by the urban composition of the *Sotsgorod* is now changed, but it can still be traced. While the Motovilikha Plant continues working and the concrete blocks are still inhabited, the public infrastructure is crumbling, and this corps of dilapidated concrete does not inspire hopes for a better society any more.

The contemporary Russia is now regaining its past values, its cities beginning to cherish their pre-Revolution history. Old churches are being rehabilitated, new ones are being constructed, and the houses of the nobility are being restored. However, there is a unique past which seems to be destined to fall into oblivion, a history or a utopia of an egalitarian society that came to be realised, of which Molotov is an emblem. Molotov is an open book of contemporary history of the first attempts at creating the *Sotsgorod*, where classical forms and avant-guard lines come together. It is a rusty machine of the communal life at the dawn of socialism, but it is also a *combinat* integrating the principles of the functionalist city of the Bauhaus, whose master plan is the manifest of Soviet urbanism.

The stones have been laid. It remains only to hope that the local authorities will realize that Molotov represents a treasure from the point of view of history, culture and the identity of a Russia that was once capable of creating a utopia.

Notes

1. *Sotsgorod, The Problem and the Construction of Socialist Cities* was published in 1930 by the State Publishing House in Moscow and Leningrad. The word Sotsgorod translates from Russian as socialist city.
2. This principle used by Melnikov will become one of the fundamental principles of constructivist architecture, which was integrated in the concept of Sotsgorod named defined in 1928 by M. Guinsburg «social condensor».
3. The first houses of this block were constructed in 1926 as a prolongation of Motovilikha district, at the doors of the neighboring factory of the same name. The first brick houses were constructed in the following year (Semyannikov, 2002). In 1928 the town council decided to build a new workers' block with all the services that its inhabitants would need (Kiselev, 2008).
4. The team was managed by Hannes Meyer and consisted of young architects from Bauhaus: R. Mensch, K. Pueschel, T. Weiner, A. Urban, B. Schefler, K. Meumann and Ph. Tolziner.

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