

# The Struggle for Symbolic Space: The Choice of the Patron-Spirit of the City of Kazan

Sergey Sergeev<sup>1,\*</sup> and Zulfia Sergeeva<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Kazan Federal University, Department of Political Sciences, Russia

<sup>2</sup>Kazan National Research Technological University, Department for Public Administration and Sociology, Russia

**Abstract:** In the article, the concept of "genius of a place" is defined as a historical or mythological character of particular importance for the locality, possible applicants for the role of "genius of a place" in Kazan are considered, the political and social mechanisms that determine the nomination of one or another applicant are identified. The authors suggest that the "genius of the place" of Kazan is not a certain static, formed, and integral image. The population of Kazan is heterogeneous, and the various groups of its constituents — the administrative and managerial elite and the intelligentsia, conservatives and liberals, Russians and Tatars — have their idea of what the "genius of the place" of Kazan should look like. Researchers come to the conclusion that the "genius of the place" is an embodied group sociocultural ideal, and the struggle and conflicts taking place in a symbolic form partly prevent the transformation of existing intergroup contradictions into real ethnosocial and ethnopolitical conflicts.

**Keywords:** Genius loci, "genius of the place", symbolic space, local identity.

## INTRODUCTION

According to Roman mythology, not only every person, but also every place, building, institution had its genius or patron spirit. Such a protective spirit was called genius loci, or the genius of the place, and had an anthropomorphic appearance: usually, genius loci was depicted as a young man holding a cornucopia, shield, and / or a snake. The snake is a reminder of the chthonic origin of the genius of the place.

However, the concept of "genius of the place" went beyond mythological, religious, or literary representations, acquiring historical and sociocultural significance. P. Weil in the book of essays "The genius of the place" (and in the eponymous cycle of television programs) linked various cities as a social, historical, cultural phenomenon with a certain creative personality (Weil, 2007). So, the genius of Dublin, according to P. Weil, is J. Joyce, the genius of Toledo is El Greco, the genius of Florence is N. Machiavelli, and the genius of Kyoto is Yu. Misima. The choice of P. Weil is exclusively subjective, so in some cases he made geniuses of the place man or woman who only visited this city or even never visited that city, but who described it in his works.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

If we consider the concept of "genius of the place" not as a literary metaphor, but as a scientific concept,

we can talk about at least two approaches of it understanding. Firstly, it is a real historical person or mythological character, which is an integral and important part of the cultural identity of a given place and determines, to one degree or another, its unique cultural identity. In this case, the genius of the place is completely a phenomenon that belong to the sphere of social consciousness.

Secondly, in the modern philosophy of architecture, the genius of a place or the spirit of a place is a special spiritual ambiance that is inherent in a particular place and makes it unique. This concept was returned to European culture, first by D. H. Lawrence, and later taken up and developed by L. Durell, and especially Ch. Norberg-Schulz. Ch. Norberg-Schulze (1926 – 2000) is a Norwegian architectural theorist who was significantly influenced of the phenomenology of E. Husserl and the phenomenological existentialism of M. Heidegger. The method of phenomenological analysis was developed by him in his work "The genius of the place: towards the phenomenology of architecture", published in 1980 (Norberg-Schulz, 1980).

According to Ch. Norberg-Schulz, modern society is characterized by "a person's loss of a sense of unity with nature and the man-made objects that make up his environment." This is enhanced by modern architecture, the structures of which exist as if in a "emptiness", "are not tied to the locality and do not correspond to the appearance of the city." This contributes to the spread of a sense of the meaninglessness of life and generates alienation. Overcoming alienation is achieved "with the help of

\*Address correspondence to this author at the Kazan Federal University, Department of Political Sciences, Russia; Tel/Fax: +7 (843) 2337704; E-mail: SASergeev@kpfu.ru

buildings that absorb the qualities of the place and bring them closer to a person". An architectural structure should be in harmony and proportion - both with themselves and with the environment. Thus, the components of the spirit of the place are the landscape, architectural structures with their inherent functions, and human, that should be harmoniously combined.

The two understandings of the "genius of a place" - as a historical or mythological character for the given locality, an integral part of its cultural identity and the special spiritual ambiance inherent in this place — complement each other (although the second is broader and may include the first).

In this article, we will consider possible applicants for the role of the "genius of the place" of Kazan (based on the first definition of the "genius of the place") and try to explain what political and social mechanisms determine the nomination of this or that candidate.

The study is based on a socio-phenomenological approach (A. Schutz), which made it possible to identify social and political mechanisms that determine the nomination of one or another applicant for the role of the "genius of the place" of the city of Kazan. The methodological basis of the work is also Bourdieu's structuralist constructivism. This theory assumes that the "genius of the place" is constructed in the socio-cultural space, being an expression of the ideals of different social groups.

The chronological framework of the study includes the period from the Kazan Khanate to the present.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Along with the physical space in which there are buildings, squares, streets, etc., as well as monuments, there is also a social space. Simplifying somewhat, we can say that social space is the interaction of various social groups and individuals fighting for the appropriation of various goods.

The use of space considered prestigious is one of the forms of exercising of power, and the ability to influence someone's spatial location has always been an important means of manipulating individuals or groups. Therefore, it is important for an agent or group of agents to catch a particular place and then legitimize the possession of it. This legitimization is provided by the media in their hands, the education system, etc.

Groups that occupy a dominant position in the social space also occupy it in the field of the production

of meanings, or the production of symbolic products (Bourdieu, 2020). The construction of statues, the name (and renaming) of streets and squares (as well as entire cities) are powerful tools in this symbolic struggle. This was also well understood by the Bolsheviks, who, shortly after their coming to power, developed a plan of "monumental propaganda". Therefore, the question of the "genius of the place", the symbolic patron of a given locality, becomes only part of the question of the symbolic legitimation of the power of various social or ethnic groups.

Who can claim to be the "genius of Kazan"?

First of all, it is necessary to name the mythical dragon Zilant and the Queen Soyembika. The earliest images of the Zilant probably belong to the period of the Kazan Khanate, but the stable reproduction of this image refers to a later period: in 1781, by an imperial decree Zilant was placed on the coat of arms of the Kazan province (although the image of Zilant is also found in the tsar's titular 1672, and on the seal of Ivan the Terrible). As for Queen Soyembika who lived in the middle of the XVI century, her name turned out to be firmly connected with the tower erected in the Kazan Kremlin, most likely in the late XVII - early XVIII centuries (possibly on an older foundation). In particular, S. Sanachin based on an analysis of cartographic and written sources, determines the time of construction of the tower in 1694 - 1718 (Sanachin, 2002: 37-47). However, the name "Soyembika tower" ("Sumbekin tower") appears only in 1832 in the essay "Kazan" published in the Kazan magazine "Zavolzhsky Muravey" ("Zavolzhsky ant"). Gradually it becomes common.

It is noteworthy that both Zilant and Soyembika seem to be archetypal images. According to C. G. Jung, archetypes are universal inborn mental structures that make up the content of the collective unconscious and are the main content of religions, mythologies, legends, and fairy tales. Archetypes, being the structure of the collective unconscious, are manifested themselves in all peoples and all epochs (but to various degrees) and are perceived consciously (not as a result of learning). C.G. Jung emphasized that the archetype is ambivalent, having both positive and negative aspects.

Although serpent is not one of the most frequently mentioned archetypes (these include, in particular, Shadow, Persona, Anima and Animus, Child, Virgo, Great Mother, Trickster), C. G. Jung in "Tavistock

lectures" mentions the dragon among the first three examples of archetypal images (he mentions that this image is always associated with the image of the hero, as well as the cave or crypt in which the snake inhabits (Jung, 2002: 55). However, the snake is not only frightening and carrying danger is an animal, it is a symbol of healing and a treasure keeper (remember, by the way, that the genius of the place was originally represented as a snake) (Jung, 2002: 167-168). The victory over Zilant is connected with the foundation of the city of Kazan. But the city is another image symbolizing integrity individual: "a city with four gates symbolizes the idea of totality; it is an individual who has four gates to the world, four psychological functions and, therefore, dwelling in the self" (Jung, 2002:167).

As for Soyembika, her image, as it is in folk legends, in our opinion, has a similarity with the anima archetype, the embodiment of a female element in a man (K. Kerényi and C.G. Jung also bring this archetype closer to the image of Kore or "The Eternal Virgin") (Jung 1997: 178-201). As you know, the legend says about the desire Ivan the Terrible to marry Soyembika (from the point of view of common sense, it is appropriate, we believe, in the event that she was a Virgo and not the widow of two khans and the tsarevich's mother). Soyembika invited Ivan the Terrible to build a tower in seven days and then threw herself from this tower. It is clear that this legend has almost nothing in common with historical reality, but the more pronounced is the archetypal character of the image of the Kazan Queen.

It is interesting that, despite the political and administrative dominance of the Russian part of the population in Kazan from the middle of the XVI century, the first guardian spirits of Kazan were of Tatar origin.

The emergence of the new "geniuses of the place" (we are thinking that a million-plus city with a long history may have several of them), their coexistence and rivalry with each other reveals a clear connection with the change of historical eras.

Only in the XIX century representatives of the Russian intelligentsia began to claim the role of "genius of the place". The first of them was the poet G.R. Derzhavin (1723 - 1816). The monument to him was erected in Kazan in 1846 (but in 1932 it was broken and put into scrap metal). Another "genius of the place" of Kazan should be considered the founder of non-Euclidean geometry, rector of Kazan University N.I.

Lobachevsky (1792 - 1856), whose bust was erected in 1895.

The relatively short Soviet period (1917-1991) is divided into at least three stages, each of which puts forward new applicants for the role of Kazan "genius of the place" of. During the Stalinist period, Maxim Gorky was promoted to this role: in 1940 the Gorky Museum was founded in Kazan, and in 1949 a monument to Maxim Gorky was unveiled.

During the "thaw" period monuments to V. Lenin (1954) and A. Pushkin (1956) are erected in Kazan.

It is noteworthy that the monument to Lenin on Freedom Square, which still stands today, was erected in 1954 to replace the old monument to Lenin, which was moved to Freedom Square in 1951 from May 1 Square in front of the Kazan Kremlin to make way for a monument to Stalin. Before the monument to Lenin on May 1 Square, there was a monument to Liberated Labor, and even earlier - a monument to Alexander II (erected in 1895 and demolished in 1918).

But, in our opinion, neither Gorky, nor Pushkin, nor Lenin can be considered as a "geniuses of the place" of Kazan, although they were all in our city, and M. Gorky and V. Lenin even lived here for some time. And not only because the Soviet tradition tried to firmly link Nizhny Novgorod, renamed Gorky, with M. Gorky, and Leningrad and Ulyanovsk with Lenin. From the 1920s to the 1980s, Lenin like Gorky appear not as local "geniuses of the place", but as "geniuses" of the entire USSR, just as the genius of the ruling emperor in the Roman Empire became a general imperial cult, worship of which was the duty of all subjects of the empire. And in dozens and hundreds of Soviet cities there were monuments to Lenin, Lenin streets, Lenin museums, Gorky streets, parks of culture and recreation, which were also given the name of Gorky, etc. Therefore, neither Gorky nor Lenin can be considered as the specific a "geniuses of the place" of Kazan.

But it was during the "thaw" that the conscious search for a new "genius of the place" of Kazan began. He had to satisfy the following unwritten conditions: to represent primarily local, republican history and thereby strengthen local identity and at the same time be a representative of "progressive forces". These conditions were met by the figure of the national Tatar poet G. Tuqay. The monument to him was erected in Kazan in 1958. Probably, the choice of the figure of G. Tuqay's was influenced: by other motives: the popularity

of poetry as a literary genre throughout the "Khrushchev decade" of 1954 - 1964, as well as the need to maintain ethnic balance in the cultural sphere.

But G. Tuqai was still considered by the ideologists of the ruling party not entirely as their "insider" (although his proximity to the advanced democratic movements was strongly emphasized by biographers and commentators). They needed a Tatar, a communist, a staunch supporter of Soviet power, a figure who using the famous formula of the Soviet culture would be national in form and socialist in content. And Musa Jalil, a Tatar poet, Hero of the Soviet Union, executed by the Nazis in Moabit prison in 1944, was nominated for the role of another "genius of the place" already in the 1960s. The monument to M. Jalil, erected in 1966, still stands on Square May 1, where previously were monuments to I. Stalin, V Lenin, and Alexander II. Also, in 1985, in the center of Kazan a giant monument was erected to M. Vakhitov, the chairman of the Muslim Socialist Committee, who was shot by the Whites in 1918. Earlier, in the 1970s, one of the central districts of Kazan was named after M. Vakhitov. By the way, in the late 2000s. the Kazan mayor's office proposed to move the monument to M. Vakhitov to the square of the same name. The communists opposed this, but the plans were postponed not because of them, but because of the 2008-2009 crisis.

The proclamation of the sovereignty of Tatarstan in 1990, the collapse of the USSR, the formation of an independent Russian Federation, with whose leadership the Tatarstan leaders had, to put it mildly, uneasy relations, led to the search for new "geniuses of the place" (Sergeev 2015; Sergeeva 2016). In 1996, a 40-meter stele was erected in front of the Kazan National Cultural Center (formerly a branch of the V. Lenin Central Museum), crowned with a rotating sculpture of a female Horriat bird, symbolizing freedom. Probably, the Horriat image does not even go back to Tatar, and to the common Turkic mythology. In the same year, the construction of the Kul-Sharif mosque began in the Kazan Kremlin, named after the sayyid Kul-Sharif, who headed the defense of Kazan from the troops of Ivan the Terrible in 1552. This mosque was opened by the millennium of Kazan in 2005.

## SUMMARY

It should be noted that over the past 15 years, attempts have been repeatedly made to find the "Russian genius of the place" of Kazan, but there is no

figure who could unconditionally take this place (Sergeev, Kuznetsova, 2018). As the applicants for this role should be noted F.I. Chaliapin, G.R. Derzhavin and Vasily Aksyonov (1932 - 2009). Although there is neither a monument to V. Aksyonov in Kazan, nor a street named after him, since 2007 the annual international literary and music festival Aksyonov-fest has been held in Kazan, in 2009 the house in which he spent his childhood was recreated (a literary house-museum of V. Aksyonov).

Speaking about the "geniuses of the place" who have been promoted to this role in the last two decades, it should be noted that they all belong to either pre-Soviet (Khorriyat, winged leopard, Kul Sharif, G. Derzhavin) or non-Soviet culture (F. Chaliapin, V. Aksyonov). Besides, at least some of the Kazan "geniuses of the place" show a clear connection with what is called "target audience" in marketing, i.e. they are the preference of a certain sociocultural community: for example, V. Aksyonov is primarily the idol of the "sixties" (Sergeeva 2018a; Sergeeva 2018b).

In the postmodern condition that we are experiencing, the heroic sublimity is replaced by non-pathos, irony, the desire to embrace everything and everyone - by fragmentation, and the elevation above the world around us - by the desire for organic inclusion in the culture of everyday life (Harvey 2000: 44; Hassan 1985: 123-124). The authors of monuments to animals and inanimate objects are likely guided by this global trend: such are the monuments to the Kazan cat, telephone, water carrier, drake, and wallet installed in Kazan. Of course, they diversify the urban landscape, but do not claim and are unlikely to be able to claim the role of "genius of the place."

## CONCLUSION

The "genius of the place" of Kazan is not a certain static, formed an integral image. The population of Kazan is heterogeneous, and the various constituent groups — the administrative and managerial elite and the intelligentsia, conservatives and liberals, Russians and Tatars — have their own idea of what the "genius of the place" of Kazan should look like. "The genius of the place" is, in essence, the embodied group sociocultural ideal, and clashes and conflicts of groups over this ideal are inevitable. And it is possible that the struggle and conflicts taking place in a symbolic form, in the form of figurative and semantic "capture of the landscape" partly prevent the transformation of existing intergroup contradictions into real ethnosocial and ethnopolitical conflicts.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University

## REFERENCES

- Bourdieu, P. (2020) *Habitus and Field: General Sociology*, Volume 2 Lectures at the Collège de France 1982-1983. Cambr.: Polity Pr., 446 p.
- Harvey D. (2000). *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxf.: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 388 p.
- Hassan, I. (1985). The culture of postmodernism. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 2(3), 119-131.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276485002003010>
- Jung C. G. (1997). *Dusha i mif: shest' arhetipov* [Soul and myth: six archetypes]. M.: ZAO "Perfection"; Kiev: Port-Royal, 384 p.
- Jung, C. G. (2002). *Tevistokskie lekcii* [The Tavistock lectures]. M.: AST, 252 p.
- Norberg-Schulz, Ch. (1980). *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. N. Y.: Rizzoli, 213 p.
- Sanachin, S. P. (2002). *Ikonografiya i plany Kazanskogo Kremlya o vozraste Syuyumbekinoi bashni* [Iconography and plans of the Kazan Kremlin on the age of the Söyembikä tower]. Kazan, 9, 37-47.
- Sergeev S.A. (2015) Osnovnye vekhi sociokul'turnoj evolyucii Tatarstana: ot suvereniteta k Universiade i Innopolisu (1990–2015) [The main milestones of the socio-cultural evolution of Tatarstan: from sovereignty to the Universiade and Innopolis (1990–2015)]. *Vestnik Omskogo universiteta. Seriya «Ekonomika»* [Bulletin of the Omsk University. Series "Economics"], 2015, 4, 89 - 93.
- Sergeev S.A., Kuznetsova A.V. (2018) Revolutionary Nationalism in Contemporary Russia. In: *Russia Before and After Crimea: Nationalism and Identity*. Ed. by P. Kolstø, H. Blakkisrud. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 119-141.  
<https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9781474433853.003.0006>
- Sergeeva Z. Kh. (2016) Konflikty za kul'turno-simvolicheskoe prostranstvo i postkolonial'noe myshlenie: analiz kejsa [Conflicts over cultural-symbolic space and postcolonial thinking: case analysis]. *Upravlenie ustojchivym razvitiem* [Management of sustainable development], 4 (05), 56-64.
- Sergeeva Z. Kh. (2018a) Action research: «Obraz goroda Kazani» po materialam analiza muzykal'nogo klipa «Nulevoj kilometr» gruppy «Murakami» [Action research: "The image of the city of Kazan" based on the analysis of the music video "Zero kilometer" by the group "Murakami"]. *Upravlenie ustojchivym razvitiem* [Management of sustainable development], 2 (15), 69-83.
- Sergeeva Z. Kh. (2018b) Obraz Kazani v vospriyatii studentov (po materialam sociologicheskogo issledovaniya) [The image of Kazan in the perception of students (based on sociological research)]. *Upravlenie ustojchivym razvitiem* [Management of sustainable development], 6 (19), 55-69.
- Weil, P. (2007). *Genij mesta* [The genius of the place]. M.: CoLibri, 488 p.

Received on 27-08-2020

Accepted on 08-09-2020

Published on 06-11-2020

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6000/1929-4409.2020.09.103>

© 2020 Sergeev and Sergeeva; Licensee Lifescience Global.

This is an open access article licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>) which permits unrestricted, non-commercial use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the work is properly cited.