

READING THE FACADES. ARCHITECTURE OF KALININGRAD CITY

Paulina Siegień

University of Gdansk, E-mail: paulina.siegien@gmail.com

Acknowledgements

This paper was presented at the Sixth international conference on Baltic and Nordic Studies in Romania, *Historical memory, the politics of memory and cultural identity: Romania, Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea Region in comparison*, organized by the Romanian Association for Baltic and Nordic Studies, Faculty of History and Political Sciences of Ovidius University of Constanța and International Summer School of The University of Oslo, Norway, May 22-23, 2015. Supported by a grant from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, The EEA Fund for Bilateral Relations, contract no. 910/20.03.2015.

Abstract:

The article presents the analysis of the city space of Kaliningrad, the capital city of the Russian exclave Kaliningrad Oblast. I use the methodology proposed by Ewa Rewers – hermeneutics of a trace, and Karl Schlögel – new optics to analyse architectural image of Kaliningrad. The historical and architectural layers of the city coexist and have impact on the identity of its inhabitants.

Rezumat:

Articolul întreprinde o analiză a spațiului urban al Kaliningrad-ului, orașul capitală al exclavei rusești Kaliningrad. În redactarea sa, folosesc metodologia propusă de Ewa Rewers – hermeneutica unui vestigiu, și Karl Schlögel – izvor al unei optici noi în vederea analizării imaginii arhitecturale a Kaliningrad-ului. Straturile istorice și arhitecturale ale orașului coexistă și au un impact asupra identității locuitorilor.

Keywords: Kaliningrad, anthropology of space, spatial turn, geocultural studies, Königsberg

Introduction. What is Kaliningrad Oblast? A ‘Cold war relic’, ‘double periphery’ or ‘Russia’s window to the west’?

The Kaliningrad Oblast is a federal subject of Russian Federation but it exists as an exclave. It is situated on the Baltic coast and is bordered by Poland and Lithuania. Until 1945 the territory of Kaliningrad Oblast was a part of Germany historically known as Eastern Prussia. After the Soviet Red Army defeated Germany in the Second World War, the territory was occupied by the Soviet Union. As a result of the Potsdam Agreement, the former Eastern Prussia was divided between Poland, Lithuania and Russia (the last two were parts of USSR). The main part of this territory, with the province’s capital Königsberg (soon renamed into Kaliningrad in honor of a high rank soviet commissioner Mikhail Kalinin) formed the Kaliningrad Oblast and became a subject within the Russian SFSR. Before the war, Eastern Prussia was inhabited by a population consisting mostly of Germans. Many of them died during the war, some flew westwards before the Red Army invasion, others who stayed were gradually expelled until 1950. Simultaneously people from the Soviet Union were settled in the new soviet region¹.

Currently, Kaliningrad Oblast has a population of about 1 million people, consisting mostly of Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. Russians are the major ethnic group². Soon after the war a decision by the soviet government was made to create a new military unit. The main priority for soviet authorities was to form the base of the Baltic Navy. Till now Russian Baltic Navy had its headquarters in Baltiysk (former Pillau). This is why the common answer to the question ‘how did your family came to Kaliningrad Oblast’ begins frequently with ‘my father is/was a military man’. This is also why the region gained the status of closed area with limited access both from abroad and other parts of Soviet Union. Although after the fall of Soviet Union Kaliningrad Oblast was to a certain degree demilitarized³, it is still an important Russian military base of strategic meaning. In 2013 Russia finally confirmed informal news, that it had placed Iskander missiles in the region⁴.

At the turn of the century, when Poland and Lithuania joined NATO

¹ Their memories were collected and published Костяшов, Ю.В. *Восточная Пруссия глазами советских переселенцев: Первые годы Калининградской области в воспоминаниях и документах* (Kaliningrad: Издательство Калининградского государственного университета, 2003).

² http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_etn_10.php?reg=25a

³ Matthieu Chillaud, Frank Tetart, „The Demilitarization of Kaliningrad: A ‘Sisyphean Task’?” *Baltic Security and Defence Review* 9 (2007).

⁴ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/16/us-russia-missiles-idUSBRE9BF0W020131216>

and were about to join the European Union and subsequently the Schengen Zone, the status of Kaliningrad Oblast became an urgent issue in Russia-EU relations. EU regulations require strong control over borders and an introduction of visas for non-EU citizens. Kaliningrad Oblast – often called ‘a Cold War relic’⁵ had all reasons to be afraid that it would become a ‘double periphery’⁶, i.e. a region not only separated from main Russian territory, but also a land isolated from its European neighbors. In 2012 a local border traffic agreement was signed by Poland and Russia. It allows the inhabitants of Kaliningrad Oblast and the inhabitants of Polish border regions to visit each other without visa. In order to build trans-border social networks, special measures were undertaken to cooperate with the Russian exclave⁷.

Inhabitants of Kaliningrad Oblast are believed to be more progressed, westernized and liberal than other Russians⁸. In fact, there is no sufficient research on Kaliningrad Russians’ identity. In my research, I will try to approach the question of Kaliningrad inhabitant’s identity. I focus on one special aspect – the attitude towards the architectural traces of pre-war Königsberg.

Theoretical framework or reading the facades

The question of space and place, and its connections to memory, identity and politics has already been researched for some time, and they became the focus of interest of many disciplines: cultural anthropology⁹ (anthropology of space, especially anthropology of city space), history¹⁰ (collective memory situated in space, space as a scene for historical events), philology¹¹ (geopoetics – space and place in literary text), political science¹²

⁵ Chillaud and Tetart.

⁶ http://journals.kantiana.ru/eng/baltic_region/502/1258/

⁷ Many projects were and are being conducted by Polish, Russian and Lithuanian subjects in the EU Programme for Trans-Border Cooperation (<http://www.lt-pl-ru.eu/>)

⁸ <http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/articles-and-commentary/1610-kant-vandals-and-identity>;
<http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/articles-and-commentary/1552-russia-s-kaliningrad-phenomenon-a-case-for-a-europeanised-identity>

⁹ Lawrence-Zúñiga and Setha M. Low, eds., *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

¹⁰ Karl Schlögel, *W przestrzeni czas czytamy: O historii cywilizacji i geopolityce* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2009).

¹¹ Elżbieta Rybicka, *Geopoetyka: Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich* (Kraków: Universitas, 2014).

¹² Rudolf Jaworski, and Peter Stachel, eds, *Die Besatzung des öffentlichen Raumes: Politische Plätze, Denkmäler und Straßennamen in europäischen Vergleich* (Berlin: Frank&Time Verlag für wissenschaftliche Literatur, 2007).

(the acquisition of space and place in political systems), geography¹³ (geocultural studies). There is also a concept of spatial turn in humanities and social studies¹⁴, which means that turning to the space and place was an important moment of development of humanities and social science. Spatial studies may be also seen as an interdisciplinary platform for many disciplines since it is hard to study space being limited to one theoretical and conceptual framework.

In the research I was inspired by the works of Karl Schlögel, professor at European University Viadrina. His work *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit: Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik* (*In space we read the time: on the history of civilization and geopolitics*) is an important contribution to the question of space and its meaning for history, memory and identity. In *Im Raume...* Schlögel proposed using the eyes as a new methodology to be used particularly in historical studies but one that can be easily adapted to any other discipline. In Schlögel's opinion a scientific research should not be conducted only in a library and cabinet. The researcher *should be ready to see*:

*"Some stages of historical study could offer a training of senses, especially seeing – with cities and landscapes as documents. (...) Then everything would start to be seen in different colours and begins, in some way, to talk to us: sidewalks, landscapes, reliefs, city plans, houses"*¹⁵.

Also, in another work, Schlögel studies the space and identity in Central in Eastern Europe. The Königsberg-Kaliningrad has been often represented in Schlögel's work.

In Poland the spatial studies are being successfully developed by many researchers of different scientific fields. In my research I have been inspired by the works of Polish professor Ewa Rewers. In her lecture *Przestrzeń kulturowa, czyli fasada, patchwork i bricolage?* (*Cultural space, i.e. facade, patchwork and bricolage?*) she develops the idea of reading facades. Architectural facades are representation of a metaculture. If the metaculture is set on national values then facades will be mirroring national culture. However, as Rewers right away states, already in modern times cities tend to lose the national facade. In Europe, this changed in the first half of a 20th century, when nationalist

¹³ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Przestrzeń i miejsce* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1987).

¹⁴ Rybicka.

¹⁵ Schlögel, 13.

ideology impacted on the city space¹⁶. The most radical example is of course the monumental architectural works built in Nazi-Germany. Soon afterwards, in the post-modern era with its characteristic features such as globalization, migration and spreading media networks, national facades abandoned cities once again¹⁷. Even though Rewers does not mention it, the Soviet ideology is also to be conceived as a metaculture that creates city facades and impacts this way on identity-building process¹⁸. For the soviet ideology, the space was of a great meaning. We can remember the great projects of the Stalin era, which are to see not only in Moscow, but also in many eastern and central European cities like Warsaw, Berlin, Minks, Kiev, Tallin. In these cities a great socialist realism architectural projects and new soviet city planning were meant as an acquisition of public space by Soviet authorities and Soviet ideology.

Reading the facades shows how the current identity policy is being shaped and what (meta)culture is the one that impacts the city space. Since there are many facades, built in different historical epochs, it is important to mention the concept of a city space as palimpsest. In this concept the city space is seen as a cultural text, gathering traces and information of its past and present¹⁹. In historical perspective this information and traces create layers that reflect different epochs. In case of Kaliningrad I call these layers an *architexture* of the city. The term *architexture* is a mixture of architecture and texture. It has been already stated that the contemporary architectural look of any space, consists of layers, formed in different historical and cultural circumstances. These layers create a texture of a city that represents the historical and social processes, i.e. nation-building process, identity-building process, acquisition or reacquisition of space by different political powers and systems.

For this reason, Kaliningrad Oblast is a very interesting place for all kinds of spatial studies. In this research I would like to show how the different architectural layers co-exist in Kaliningrad, creating a very special *architexture*.

***Architexture* in Kaliningrad Oblast**

As I already mentioned, the Kaliningrad oblast has been created from a

¹⁶ E. Rewers. „Przestrzeń kulturowa, czyli fasada, patchwork i bricolage?” in *Miasto-Twórczość: Wykłady Krakowskie* (Kraków: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych im. J. Matejki Wydział Architektury Wnętrz, 2010).

¹⁷ The concept of postmodern city is developed by Ewa Rewres in *Post-polis. Wstęp do filozofii ponowoczesnego miasta*. Kraków: Universitas, 2005.

¹⁸ On impact of ideologies on city space see Jaworski and Stachel.

¹⁹ Ewa Rewers, *Post-Polis: Wstęp do filozofii ponowoczesnego miasta* (Kraków: Universitas, 2005), 21-42

divided land of historical Easter Prussia. The region capital, Königsberg, has been renamed into Kaliningrad in 1946, after Michail Kalinin, the high rank Soviet commissar. The name-changing process is one of the most visible politics of identity which can be seen in the public space. The process of changing towns and villages names in Kaliningrad Oblast was very rapid. The Soviet historical policy of regional authorities was to erase its German origins. The towns' and villages' names were changed into Russian-sounding, related with the fresh soviet history of the region – mostly with local heroes of World War II. Königsberg became Kaliningrad, Tilsit – Sovetsk, Tapiau – Gvardeysk, Insterburg – Cherniakhovsk, Heiligenbeil – Mamonovo, just to give some examples.

Before the World War II the city of Königsberg had all the characteristic features of a Baltic-German city. The history of the Königsberg begins with the Teutonic Order and the city was also a member of Hanseatic League. This characteristic features were, first of all, the construction of buildings out of red brick, and the churches and neo-romantic elements in architecture that were common in pre-war Germany, and also the modernism of the 20's and the 30's. Not many of these buildings have been preserved until now, but there are still some left. This is the first, pre-war, originally Prussian layer, that creates the *architexture* of Kaliningrad.

After the war, the main task of the soviet urban planners and architects in the new city of Kaliningrad was to transform it in such a way that it did not preserve many of the features of its predecessor. Königsberg was largely destroyed during the war and never reconstructed. Today it is common to hear from Kaliningraders that the city was destroyed by Allied air strikes, especially by the British Air Force. One would not hear a word about the Red Army plundering the city, or the soviet period that created a new and completely contrary to the pre-war times architectural image of the city.

The fact that Königsberg has not been reconstructed like Gdańsk was a political or rather ideological decision. Instead, the center of the city was built with Soviet type blocks of flats. This raw architecture still dominates Kaliningrad's city space. These buildings, the same all over the post-Soviet space, are the second *architextural* layer of Kaliningrad.



The House of Soviet and block of flats on the Moskovskiy Prospect

Photo by Paulina Siegień

One of the most significant events in the history of the city, and maybe the whole region, was the blowing up of the ruins of the Royal Castle. The Royal Castle, which survived the war, was blown up in 1967²⁰, at Brezhnev's command, because it was "a symbol of German militarism and fascism". Following blowing up of the Castle, the decision was made to build on the same site a new Soviet symbol. The House of Soviets, a new residence of local administration was finally built only in the 80s, and until it was completed, the Soviet Union had collapsed. It also turned out there were some construction errors and the building cannot be used. The deserted House of Soviets, standing in the one of the central points of the city, became an informal symbol of the city.

²⁰ <http://rotary.de/wissenschaft/des-koenigs-vergessene-residenz-a-859.html>



The Cathedral on the Knipau Island

Photo by Paulina Siegień

The House of Soviet is neighboring other buildings of a high symbolic value for the Prussian past, buildings that have been preserved even though as ruins. One of them is the Cathedral, which was reconstructed after the Soviet Union collapsed mostly with German funds. The Cathedral is located on the Knipau Island, together with the grave of its most famous inhabitant – philosopher Immanuel Kant, and in the last years it is a must-see touristic attraction, where every visitor of the city is taken by his hosts. It is an interesting (not quite) coincidence, that two so different buildings, both of a symbolic value are situated near to one another, representing the two extremely different periods in city's history. The Cathedral is rather an exception because the condition of most of the pre-war buildings in

Kaliningrad is deplorable. They would not be presented to tourists, a visitor being in need to find them on his/her own. This is the case with the Amber Manufacture (Königsberger Bernstein Manufaktur) building just a few steps away from the main city street Leninskiy Prospekt.



Königsberger Bernstein Manufaktur
Photo by Wojciech Siegień

After the Soviet Union collapsed and the Kaliningrad region opened up in a mental and ideological way, the interest for the pre-war Prussian past resurfaced. The culmination was the year 2005 with the 750 jubilee of the city. The president of Russia, Vladimir Putin, and the chancellor of Germany, Gerhard Schroeder, were the most prominent guests of this event. In this very moment the idea of a German past as a part of regional identity was introduced. The city administration and the local businessmen understood that the past is also a product that can be sold, for example, to the tourists.

This is already the period of the third, New Russian, layer. The most typical features of it are the new houses made of glass and steel, quite common in the other parts of Russia as well. But, in Kaliningrad, a very specific phenomenon appeared. Since the first layer of the city architecture was almost entirely destroyed, a new idea emerged. The idea was a specific reconstruction of historical architecture. A great example is the fishers' village, built a few steps away from the old cathedral. All the buildings are new, built in 2006-2007. In fact, the fisher's village can't even be called a "reconstruction", since the buildings are not similar to the pre-wars one. It is a new Russian idea of what it had looked like. The most confusing moment is the lighthouse, built on a river bank, far away from the sea coast. Of course, there was no lighthouse in this place before the war. I call this phenomenon a simulacrum of the Prussian past. The term simulacrum is taken from Jean Baudrillard and it means an image with no reference to the reality. The fishers' village was designed by Kaliningrad city planners. The idea of "reconstruction" of historical city center has been circulating among city officials, intellectuals and media for a couple of years. Yet, it got an official form called "The City's Heart" (Сердце города)²¹. New contests for architectural projects are introduced from time to time. All of the projects winning the competitions simulate some reference to the pre-war period, presenting neither modern, nor historical design²². Aside from official plans, simulacra of the Prussian past emerge also as private initiatives. These are most of all commercial and leisure complexes like castle Nesselbeck (замок Нессельбек) in village Orlovka, called until 1945 Nesselbeck, but there was no castle there. Other examples are the Residence of the Kings (Резиденция королей) or the shopping mall Europe (Европа) near the central city square.

²¹ Official webpage of the project www.tuwangste.ru

²² Meaningful is the fact that new projects were commented with phrases: „Like Gdansk!” or “Gdansk again”(https://www.newkaliningrad.ru/realty/publications/6368236-opyat_gdansk_otkrylas_vystavka_proektov_novoy_rybnoy_derevni.html). This shows what are ambitions and direction the Kaliningrad city officials have taken.



The fishers' village at the Pregel bank in Kaliningrad
Photo by Paulina Siegień

The simulacra of Prussian past can be called representations of nostalgic memory, using the concept of A. Appadurai that can be also found in Rewers' work²³. Nostalgic memory is contrary to the critical memory that projects the space consciously facing the challenges of present time and the needs of contemporary inhabitants. Nostalgic memory tries to reconstruct, sometimes in a naïve way, the historical image of city space. However the fact that the Russian inhabitants of the Kaliningrad are looking for architectural form in the German past is noteworthy.

Conclusion

The region of Kaliningrad oblast, former Eastern Prussia, has been a playground of different cultures, political and ideological systems. In the last few years the German past has become a part of the region's identity and collective memory. By looking at the *architexture* of Kaliningrad we can recognize a peculiar form of introducing the Prussian past into collective

²³ Ewa Rewers, „Spór o przestrzeń kulturową: pamięć nostalgiczna czy pamięć krytyczna?” in *Miasto-Twórczość: Wykłady krakowskie* (Kraków: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych im. J. Matejki Wydział Architektury Wnętrz w Krakowie, 2010), 75-89.

memory. The shape of some of the new architectural traits of Kaliningrad shows that the attachment to the pre-war past is only superficial. The best expression of it are the architectural simulacra of Prussian past, i.e. brand new buildings, pretending to be something old, but in fact being only a trashy, rubbish fake, with no reference to the real history. The simulacra of Prussian past represent a peculiar form of nostalgic memory since at the same time the original pre-war architecture is being neglected and not used, despite its high historical or tourist value.

Probably the situation will not change in favor of old Prussian monuments and buildings, since the new Russian identity politics for the region perceives the German past as a danger. During the First World Russian People's council, that took place in Kaliningrad in March 2015, the patriarch of Russian orthodox church, Kirill, announced that identifying with the German past is a great temptation in the region of Kaliningrad, but the culture is created not by stones or ruins, but by the people, and now, the inhabitants of the regions are Russians. The German heritage, as the patriarch Kirill says, should not be devastated, but should not be exhibited. In its place, a new Russian space with its characteristic features, such as the Orthodox cathedral in the central square of Kaliningrad, should be created. The Orthodox cathedral in the central square of Kaliningrad is the second biggest Orthodox church in Russia and named the same as the first biggest one – the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow.

References

- Brodersen, Per. *Die Stadt im Westen. Wie Königsberg Kalningrad wurde.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht Verlag, 2008
- Chillaud, Matthieu and Tetart, Frank "The Demilitarization of Kaliningrad: A 'Sisyphean Task'?" *Baltic Security and Defence Review*, Vol. 9, 2007.
- Jaworski, Rudolf and Stachel, Peter eds. *Die Besatzung des öffentlichen Raumes: Politische Plätze, Denkmäler und Straßennamen im europäischen Vergleich.* Berlin: Frank&Time Verlag für wissenschaftliche Literatur, 2007.
- Kossert, Andreas. *Prusy Wschodnie: Historia i mit.* Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2009
- Lawrence-Zúñiga and Low, Setha M., eds., *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.
- Rewers, Ewa. *Post-polis: Wstęp do filozofii ponowoczesnego miasta.* Kraków: Universitas, 2005.
- Rewers, Ewa. *Miasto-Twórczość: Wykłady krakowskie.* Krakow: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych im. J. Matejki Wydział Architektury Wnętrz w Krakowie, 2010.
- Rybicka, Elżbieta. *Geopoetyka: Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich.* Kraków: Universitas, 2014.
- Schlögel, Karl. *W przestrzeni czas czytamy: O historii cywilizacji i geopolityce.* Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2009.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Przestrzeń i miejsce.* Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1987
- Misiunas, Romuald J. "Rootles Russia: Kaliningrad – Status and Identity", *Diplomacy and Statecraft* Vol. 15, 2004.
- Łukasz Wenerski, Piotr Kaźmierkiewicz. *Krajobraz pogranicza. Perspektywy i doświadczenia funkcjonowania małego ruchu granicznego z obwodem kaliningradzkim,* Instytut Spraw Publicznych, Warszawa 2013.
- Костяшов, Ю.В. *Восточная Пруссия глазами советских переселенцев: Первые годы Калининградской области в воспоминаниях и документах.* Kaliningrad Издательство Калининградского государственного университета, 2003.
- Заппер, М. and Вайксель, Ф. *Будущее Калининграда. От конфликтов к сотрудничеству.* Moscow: Osteuropa, 2003.

Internet Resources

http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_etn_10.php?reg=25a

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/16/us-russia-missiles-idUSBRE9BF0W020131216>

http://journals.kantiana.ru/eng/baltic_region/502/1258/

<http://www.lt-pl-ru.eu/>

<http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/articles-and-commentary/1610-kant-vandals-and-identity>

<http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/articles-and-commentary/1552-russia-s-kaliningrad-phenomenon-a-case-for-a-europeanised-identity>

<http://rotary.de/wissenschaft/des-koenigs-vergessene-residenz-a-859.html>

https://www.newkaliningrad.ru/realty/publications/6368236-opyat_gdansk_otkrylas_vystavka_proektov_novoy_rybnoy_derevni.html

www.tuwangste.ru