

History extended essay

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History Extended Essay 20th Century Stalinist Architecture How did the creation of Stalin's 'Seven Sisters' transform Moscow into a contemporary city while simultaneously presenting Soviet Communism to the world 1947-1957? On the Cover (Figure 1) – Kotelnicheskaya Embankment residential complex dominates over the Kremlin Cathedrals in Moscow's skyline. 1.

Abstract Stalin's Seven Sister buildings (Vysocki) irreversibly transformed the vast skyline of Moscow, and ultimately aided Stalin in his pursuit of a contemporary European city after World War II.

Although these massive architectural masterpieces hold a legacy that resonates magnificence throughout the architectural aspects of Stalin's era, the Seven Sisters hold a controversial history behind them, considering the fact that the housing needs of the proletariat were disregarded after 1945 up until Khrushchev's epoch. I have thus decided to investigate the means in which Stalin's Seven Sister buildings transformed Moscow into a modern city whilst displaying Soviet communism to the world.

Therefore, the subsequent question that comprehensively investigates the social, political and economic impacts of the Seven Sisters is: How did the creation of Stalin's 'Seven Sisters' transform Moscow into a contemporary city while simultaneously presenting Soviet Communism to the world from 1947-1957? This paper will investigate all the different aspects surrounding the creation of the Vysocki, and analyze the subsequent impacts on Soviet culture.

This will be achieved by analyzing various primary and secondary sources regarding the Seven Sisters, along with a comprehensive interpretation of a lecture given in the Moscow Shchusev Architectural Museum that I attended <https://assignbuster.com/history-extended-essay/>

on October 10th, 2012. Although the progression of Moscow into a contemporary European city is characterized by numerous different aspects, including the Moscow metro system and other forms of Stalinist architecture, the Seven Sisters ultimately defined Moscow with an architectural legacy that remains evident to present day.

Therefore, Stalin's Vysotki played a significant role in the creation of Moscow into a contemporary city, and presented Soviet Communism in Russia with architectural grandeur and magnificence. Abstract Word Count: 271 2.

Introduction How did the creation of Stalin's 'Seven Sisters' transform Moscow into a contemporary city while simultaneously presenting Soviet Communism to the world from 1947 to 1957? In order to conceptualize the political, economic and social status of the Soviet Union after World War II, it is essential to evaluate the impact of the war on the USSR in multiple aspects.

In 1945, while the Red Army controlled all of Eastern Europe and occupied such cities as Riga, Vilnius, Tallinn, Sofia, Budapest, Prague, Vienna and Warsaw, much of Russia's European cities lay destroyed from 4 years of war. The Soviet population suffered an estimated 25 million deaths during the course of the war; a statistic that significantly exceeds the number of deaths of any other country in the world during the war. Similar to the decimation of its population, the Soviet Union's economy was substantially depleted after the war.

Approximately one fourth of Russia's capital resources were destroyed, subsequently causing a dramatic decrease in the Soviet Union's industrial and agricultural output, contrary to the output goals set forth by the Five Year

Plans. On the other hand, the political status of the Soviet government had relatively positive prospects, as the Soviet Union was virtually the only power in Continental Europe to emerge from the war with the same political regime it had at the start of the war.

Stalin remained in power throughout the course of the war, and essentially continued his oppressive rule after 1945, sending national minorities and even Soviet prisoners of war suspected of supporting fascism to mass exile. Despite the economic depression of the Soviet Union after World War II, Joseph Stalin thought the USSR needed a strategy to glorify its capital, Moscow, to celebrate the great victory and send a message to its former allies who were rapidly becoming its geopolitical rivals - the US and Western European Allies.

Stalin's architectural ideology at this point was not to resolve the crushing housing crisis and rebuild the devastated nation, but to spend a major portion of government funding on the building of what would become Moscow's Seven Sister buildings, or Vysotki (literally translated as "high-rise buildings"). The original planning for the Seven Sisters was based on Boris Iofan's prize-winning plan for the Palace of Soviets building, a grand political edifice that was meant to exceed the Empire State Building in overall height.

Essentially, the creation of the Vysotki would allow Stalin to leave his own personal imprint on the city's skyline, and to rival many other world powers at the time - such as Great Britain and the United States, which had their own prized architectural landmarks recognized the world over. While the Palace of Soviets was never built, its construction repeatedly delayed by the onset of the war and diversion of steel to the munitions and weapons

factories, the process did leave an indelible imprint on the city, as the monumental Cathedral of Christ the Savior was torn down to make room for the Palace. . Background Information Figure 2 - Ministry of Foreign Affairs Figure 2 - Ministry of Foreign Affairs The erection of the Vysotki started in 1947, two years after the end of World War II. The prospective plans for the creation of the Seven Sisters included three ministries, three hotels and one multi-purpose governmental building. In terms of location, the general plan for the placement of the buildings was to arrange the Seven Sisters in a circle, surrounding the center of Moscow.

This plan was done to aesthetically balance the skyline of Moscow, as most of the buildings in the city at the time were at most six or seven stories in height. Strategically placing these huge, innovative structures evenly throughout the city would give Moscow a new aura to it after the war, and would essentially transform Moscow into a modern European city. The first of the Seven Sisters to be finished was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building (see Figure 2), which was built from 1947 to 1954. The main architects behind this building were V. G. Gelfreih and A. B.

Minkus, and the creation of this building ultimately set the benchmark for the next six Vysotki, as it stood out in the city with both magnificence and its grand scale. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs building had certain stylistic features that influenced the plans for the other six Vysotki, such as obelisks in the main entrance, the Soviet hammer and sickle on the sides of the building, and the massive spire on top of the central tower. The specific use of the hammer and sickle symbol on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building

suggests the Soviet Union's strength, as it projected the power of the Soviet diplomacy world over.

The building reached a total of 172 meters, including 27 stories, making it the tallest building in Moscow at the time. The second of the ministries, after the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is the Red Gates (Krasniye Vorota) administrative building. Designed by Alexei Dushkin, this administrative building is 133 meters tall, containing 24 usable floors. The method in which this Vysotka was built is particularly innovative, as Dushkin proposed erecting the building initially tilted to one side, so that the weak soil of Moscow would not have a negative impact on the structural stability of the building.

More than 200 holes were drilled and filled with ice under the foundation of the building, to maintain the soil's strength while the building was being constructed. As this Vysotka concluded construction, the ice was deliberately melted and the tilted building shifted into an upright state, in which it currently stands. The purpose of this building was to house the Ministry of Railways, with whose officials Alexei Dushkin himself cooperated during the design and construction. Dushkin is known mostly for his work on the Moscow Metro stations; however, the Ministry of Railways holds a well-respected place in his architectural legacy.

Although the initial plans for the Seven Sisters included three ministry buildings, only two were built, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Railways. The third ministry building was replaced by the Moscow State (Lomonosov) University building, upon Stalin's demand. Drafted by Boris Iofan and inaugurated in 1953, the Lomonosov University building is 236

meters tall, with 36 floors. The sheer magnitude of this building dominated the Moscow skyline in its early years and is visible from many points of the city to this day. It still holds the title of being the world's largest educational building.

In this respect, Stalin partially achieved one of his objectives: the recognition of Moscow as a contemporary European city on a global scale. 4. Influences of Stalinist Architecture In order to analyze the effect of the Seven Sisters on the transition of Moscow to a contemporary European city, it is essential to establish Stalinist Architecture as a short-lived architectural style that experienced a definite starting point and definite end. This aspect of Stalinist architecture is specifically unique, as other styles of architecture are typically dispersed throughout long periods of history, without defined start and end dates.

Therefore, the defined beginning of Stalinist architecture, sometimes referred to as Stalinist Gothic or Socialist Classicism, originated in 1933, with Boris Iofan's design for the massive Palace of Soviets building. Throughout a defined 20 year time period, Socialist Classicism reigned dominant in the Soviet Union as the preferred style of architecture. However, in 1955, two years after Stalin's death, Nikita Khrushchev issued a decree "On Excesses in Architecture" that deemed Stalinist architecture extinct and began the start of a new architectural age in Moscow and the rest of the Soviet Union.

Khrushchev's preferred style of architecture, compared to Stalin's love for architectural magnificence and grandiose Roman Empire inspired design, was significantly more conservative, as Khrushchev and his administration focused on a pragmatic solution to the lack of housing for the masses in the

Soviet Union. The architecture in Moscow after 1955 was therefore relatively simplistic and practical, and was ultimately defined by the khrushchyovka, 5 story, identical, pre-fabricated apartment buildings meant to house a significant amount of families in relatively tight quarters.

Named after Khrushchev himself, the key element of these buildings was the rapid production of their concrete panels in manufacturing plants and rapid assembly on site. The intent of these buildings was to resolve the housing shortage rapidly, as their life span was projected as 40 years – an architectural and construction strategy whose impact is now being acutely felt in modern Russia, as these buildings are now crumbling and require replacement.

Figure 3 – Boris Iofan’s winning design for the never-built Palace of Soviets – Recreated in 3D Max as a modern rendering of what the building would look like if it were constructed²⁰. Figure 3 – Boris Iofan’s winning design for the never-built Palace of Soviets – Recreated in 3D Max as a modern rendering of what the building would look like if it were constructed²⁰. Shifting to the influences on Socialist Classicism as an architectural style, it is essential to consider the effect of Ancient Greek and Roman style on Soviet Architects from 1933 to 1955.

As Boris Iofan’s winning design for the Palace of Soviets building essentially defined the boundaries of Stalinist architecture, Iofan’s individual influences must be taken into consideration (see Figure 3). After visiting New York, Chicago, Rome and Berlin, Iofan remarked in an issue of the Soviet newspaper Pravda that “ wherever I [Iofan] might travel, whatever I might see, I approached everything from a particular point of view: what of all this has to be ‘ taken home’ to the Soviet Union”.

Therefore, Iofan's ideology essentially reflects upon Stalinist architecture with influences from American, Italian (subsequently Roman), and German architecture. Although Stalin marveled at the Seven Sisters and Iofan's Palace of Soviets plan, he ultimately contradicted himself and disregarded Iofan's work as being too "cosmopolitan" (Western-influenced) and lacking stylistic features individual to the Soviet Union.

5. Relevance of Stalinist Architecture

In order to assess the relevance of Stalinist architecture between 1945-1957, it is important to put the events of the Cold War into context. First of all, tension between the United States and the Soviet Union continuously rose from 1945 to 1957, starting with the disagreements between the USA and the USSR at the Yalta conference in February 1945 and the Potsdam conference in July 1945. For instance, at the Yalta conference, Roosevelt and Churchill did not accept Stalin's proposal to annex Eastern Poland.

Furthermore, at the Potsdam conference, Stalin promised free elections past the Oder-Neisse line. However, free elections were never held and the Soviet government eventually persecuted Polish nationalists. In terms of economic reconstruction, the Soviet Union had joined the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1944. However, when the Soviet Union applied for a \$6 billion loan from the United States, America immediately imposed conditions on the loan.

These conditions included the opening of eastern European markets to American products, which in effect reflected the "dollar diplomacy" strategy of the United States - using its economic power and intact industry to reach its geopolitical goals on the devastated European continent. Stalin's reaction

to the forced conditions on the six billion dollar loan was undoubtedly negative. However, the Soviet Union was in great need of funding after its economy was significantly depleted after the war.

However, Stalin had controversial aims as to what would be done with all government funding regarding the reconstruction of Russia after World War II. With millions of people deceased and hundreds of thousands of homes destroyed, it is argued by many historians that the building of Khrushchyovka, small and simplistic residential buildings built to maximize housing space and housing multiple families in communal apartments, would more rapidly reconstruct Russia after the war.

However, Stalin focused more on the creation of the Vysotki rather than Khrushchyovka, thus using a substantially larger portion of the government's money on expensive, grand buildings, yet not spending enough on building pragmatic housing solutions that would have helped a much larger share of Soviet population. For example, the entire city of Stalingrad took approximately 2 billion Russian rubles to completely reconstruct after the war, however in comparison, the Moscow State Lomonosov University building took about 2.6 billion Russian rubles alone, approximating 415 million British pounds in contemporary monetary terms.

Stalin's method of spending billions of rubles on the building of the Seven Sisters was immensely controversial. Nonetheless, while he remained in power very few people dared to oppose any of his decisions or his architectural ideology. In other words, up until March 1953, when Joseph Stalin died, Stalin's cult of personality ultimately undermined any attempt to consider spending less governmental funds on the creation of the Vysotki.

Public opinion after Stalin's death was split, as one side favored the Seven Sisters, claiming that the new high-rise buildings essentially beautified the capital of Soviet Russia.

Many others agreed with the new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev that Stalin's spending spree on a few grand buildings did not benefit the Soviet Union and ultimately did more damage than good. One simple reason to criticize the Seven Sister project is that two of the grand buildings were built as hotels – Leningradskaya and Ukraine – catering to foreign tourists. However, the Cold War tensions slowed any tourism from the West to a trickle and the two hotels stood largely vacant, while millions of Russians struggled without adequate housing, their homes destroyed in the war. 6.

Incorporation of the Seven Sisters into the City of Moscow In the architectural realm of the Soviet Union, the main project was to rebuild Moscow in an innovative and idealistically planned manner. This massive project to rebuild Moscow was placed in the hands of the Communist Party's Central Committee, and in June 1931, a resolution was generated that essentially provided the guidelines of how each city was going to be rebuilt. The Union of Soviet Architects subsequently utilized these plans to determine the amounts of funding to be spent on the rebuilding of each Soviet city.

Although the plans to reconstruct the city of Leningrad were considered the most prominent, the majority of funding was given to Moscow, as it was the nation's capital. Therefore, the city of Moscow was to be deemed as the ideal “ socialist city”, a utopia that reflected the ideology of Socialism and conveyed the positive link between architectural grandeur and Soviet achievements in all other realms of life –education, government, science,

industry and the arts. However this model of a “ socialist city” contained numerous ironies, due to the General Plan for Moscow’s components.

The plan envisioned a relatively non-industrial landscape, as factories and other industrial plants were to be banned in central Moscow and mass housing (Kommunalka) significantly reduced. These plans, in effect, resembled the typical contemporary city of a capitalist society, such as the United States. Considering the incorporation of the Seven Sisters into Moscow in aesthetic terms, the general plans for rebuilding Moscow called for the Vysotki to be the predominant elements of the city’s skyline.

Relating back to the initial plans of the prospective Seven Sisters, the design consisted of the seven high-rise buildings to be aligned in a circular formation. Although this was mainly done in order to balance the skyline of Moscow, thus avoiding the clutter of skyscrapers in a condensed area, Stalin proposed that this circular formation would psychologically and visually coronate the capital city of Russia. The Seven Sisters, would therefore “ crown” Moscow, representing architectural jewels, much like the composition of a literal crown.

This idea of crowning Moscow suggests multiple things, including Stalin’s vision for Soviet pride in the victory in World War II and nationalistic ideology, as well as the suggestion that Moscow with its Seven Sisters is superior and more grandiose in contrast with other contemporary European cities. Figure 4 - Moscow State University (Lomonosov University) 7. Moscow’s Progression into a Contemporary European City Figure 5 - Moscow Metro, Kievskaya Station Figure 5 - Moscow Metro, Kievskaya Station

With consideration to Moscow's gradual progression into a contemporary European city, the Seven Sisters and numerous other architectural projects all contributed to the innovative re-imagining and rebuilding of Stalin's showpiece city. Perhaps one of the most glorious aspects of Muscovite architecture in a way that affects the city's enormous 15 million population to this day is the Moscow city metro system (see Figure 5). Initially opened for use in 1935, the Moscow Metro was the first underground railway system in the Soviet Union.

Although not only pragmatic in its use, moving close to 4 million people a day in 2012, the metro system in Moscow is famous for its stations' architectural and artistic magnificence, complete with bronze chandeliers, marble floors and mosaic and sculptural art works unimaginable in the drab, utilitarian metro systems of New York or London. Furthermore, adding to the practicalities of the new Moscow, the urban planning of the city ultimately helped define Moscow as a modern European city. More specifically, it was the Moscow Master Plan of 1935 that ultimately outlined the way Moscow was to be reconstructed.

Stalin instigated a numerable amount of changes to the urban planning of Moscow, which in turn supported his funding of expensive "ensemble" projects, thus favoring luxury over the needs of millions of middle and lower class workers in the city. For instance, city blocks were to be increased from 2 hectares up to 15 hectares, and the population density was limited to 400 people per 1 hectare. Additionally, all new buildings were required to be at least 6 stories high, while first-rate streets (embankments) had to be 10 or 14 stories high.

These new rules effectively banned the production of inexpensive and mass constructed housing units, as well as single-familyhouses. 8. Conclusion

Figure 6 – Triumph Palace Figure 6 – Triumph Palace When evaluating the city of Moscow from an aesthetic point of view, it is the Seven Sisters that generally stand out most prominently among the vast skyline of Moscow. The Vysotki did not only leave a strong visual impact on the city, they also left both an architectural and social legacy that has proven to influence modern architecture throughout the world.

There are numerous positive and negative impacts caused by the building of the Seven Sisters, which ultimately define the legacy of the massive Stalinist high-rises. First of all, Stalin’s Vysotki delivered a newfound architectural magnificence into the capital city of Moscow. With influences from Ancient Greek and Roman architecture, the Seven Sisters gave the city a luxuriously grand aura. The stylistic features of the Seven Sister buildings have been repeated several times in modern architecture globally, thus proving to be an influential legacy left by the Vysotki.

For instance, the Triumph Palace in Moscow, built in 2004, takes the architectural magnificence of the Vysotki and converts the features into a modern representation of a Seven Sister building (see Figure 6). This massive apartment building purposefully resembles a Seven Sister building, and is sometimes referred to as the “Eighth” Sister. However, relative to the issues challenging the nation at the time of the construction of Stalin’s Seven Sisters, the Vysotki left unanswered the more pragmatic and humanistic problems, as the housing crisis after World War II was not resolved.

As mentioned previously, the total funding of the Lomonosov State University building exceeded the total funding for the reconstruction of the entire city of Stalingrad. Of course Stalingrad did not have nearly as many plans for grand buildings as Moscow, however the lack of housing in Stalingrad was resolved much more effectively than in Moscow, in light of a relatively lower need for funding in comparison with the capital city. In terms of Stalin's architectural preferences, Moscow was to be reconstructed as the ideal socialist city, with all unattractive mass housing units moved to the outskirts of the city.

Although these buildings eventually solved the issue of the lack of housing, the dull nature of the Khrushchyovka was criticized by many, claiming that the buildings constructed under Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev were aesthetically unpleasant. The method of constructing these mass housing units was parodied by the Soviet popular film "Irony of Fate", which was produced in 1975, approximately 20 years after the initial implementation of these buildings.

When determining the relevance of Stalin's Seven Sister buildings, the question must be asked: How did the creation of Stalin's 'Seven Sisters' transform Moscow into a contemporary city while simultaneously presenting Soviet Communism to the world from 1947-1957? Although the gradual transformation of Moscow into a modern European city is characterized by various different aspects, such as the urban planning and architecture of Moscow, the conclusion can be made that the Seven Sisters played a significant role in Moscow's progression.

To a large extent, the Vysocki helped define the city of Moscow with an architectural legacy, and also gave Moscow the distinguished individuality that Stalin pushed for. In some aspects, Stalin's Seven Sisters ultimately gave Moscow what the Khrushchyovka could not, architectural gems that are world-renowned to this present day. Sources: 1. Texts 1. Andreev, EM, et al. , Naselenie Sovetskogo Soiuza, 1922-1991. Moscow, Nauka, 1993. 2. Amir Weiner, Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution, Princeton: Princeton University Press (2001). 3. Kustova, Anna. Moscow's Seven Sisters. " Lecture, Shchusev State Museum of Architecture, Moscow, Russia, October 10th 2012. 4. Kiernan, Maria. Moscow: A Guide to Soviet and Post-Soviet Architecture, Ellipsis, London, 1998, p. 126. 5. Mark Harrison. " The Soviet Union after 1945: Economic Recovery and Political Repression. " Department of Economics, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, UK. April 2012. Page 2. 6. Kathleen Berton. " Moscow: An Architectural History. " New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1977. 7. Russian: ??????, ? (Barzar, L.), "? . ? . ?????? (M. A. Minkus)", ? oscow, 1982. . William Craft Brumfield. " Landmarks of Russian Architecture: A Photographic Survey. " Singapore: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 1997. 9. Katerina Clark. " Moscow, The Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941. " Cambridge, Massachusetts: HarvardUniversity Press, 2011. 10. Russian: "???????????????? ????? 70 ???", World Architecture Magazine, no. 14, 2005, ??? 30-52 (Moscow Metro, 70 Years, pages 30-52) 11. Melvyn P. Leffler, " Adherence to Agreements: Yalta and the Experiences of the Early Cold War", International Security, Vol. 11, No. (Summer, 1986), pp. 88-123 12. Berthon, Simon; Potts, Joanna (2007), Warlords: An Extraordinary Re-creation <https://assignbuster.com/history-extended-essay/>

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