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## The Simbirka River as the Protagonist in the Reconstruction Project of the Historic City Center of Ulyanovsk in Russia

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### ➡ ABSTRACT

The reconstruction project of Ulyanovsk city center was formed in accordance with the basis of the historical landscape, architectural environment and deep urban analysis. The Simbirka River with its banks as the protagonist in the reconstruction project, according to the main idea could become a new landscape and recreational core for ecologically sustainable development of the newly built residential and public micro groups of city center site.

However, the river is enclosed in the reinforced-concrete pipe with a diameter of the 1.5 meters from the 1950-s and until today the ravine of the Simbirka represents a huge area of debris and waste. The Simbirka floodplain is filling and intensively building up with high-rise buildings and faceless parking. At the same time the historical district is gradually demolishing and destroying, taking away with it the spirit of the old city of Simbirsk.

### Introduction

Architecture, urban and regional planning, and landscape design more and more closely linking to the solution to one of the main tasks - the creation of an environment in the urban conditions such favorable and healthy as it exists in «suburban» area. Burning issue at the present stage of the urban development is a problem of the city center. Both in small and large cities an intensive construction of public and residential buildings goes due to the high cost of land in the centers.

There where squares were located, today we can see the high-rise buildings; there where flower beds were, now car parkings are organized there. Small rivers, once refreshing urban space, enclosed in underground sewer tunnels.

Together with the correction of such oppressor picture of the historic city center it is possible to solve one of the major issues of modern urban planning: how to avoid an ecological crisis in the urban environment?

After all, there is nothing more expensive than the health of people that depends on the climate, water, planting and gardening. Rehabilitation and reconstruction of the abandoned landscape spaces bordering the water bodies in the historic city center, allow to create an environment that does not slow down the intensity of construction, but on the contrary, it gives to the building a special attraction and value.

### *The Simbirka River and some dates*

The city Simbirsk is situated in western Russia, it's a port on the Volga River, and in 1924 it was renamed in Ulyanovsk. In olden times Lake Marishka was situated on the northern outskirts of the city in the area of Losevaya Street (now Federatsii Street). The Simbirka flowed from the southern side of the lake, passed through the city and flowed into the Sviyaga River (Fig. 1). The lake wasn't big, but was enough deep and affluent, because it was filled with pure springs. At the beginning of the XIX century the city authorities annually allocate large sums to clean up the surrounding ravines and the river. Purification was so effective that the water from the Simbirka used the whole city, including for drinking. However, then the springs are clogged, the lake became shallow, was covered with duckweed, the river became shallow too. In the middle of the XIX century the Simbirka already represented a huge ravine, at the bottom of which a little fetid stream flowed. The gully began to serve a huge reservoir of dumping manure almost from the whole city and to be a carrier of various epidemic diseases. Since 1875, significant amounts were spent to strengthen the banks of the ravine, to the filling of manure dumped into it. In 1879, the edges and the bottom of the ravine were planted with fast-growing trees and planted with grass. Just all these measures were given few results - the ravine continually lengthened and widened. During the First World War, the Great October Revolution and the Civil War, the city government did not engage in the landscaping of the Simbirka ravine.



Fig. 1 - Historic map of Simbirsk, 1787

22 December 1922 investigations began in the Simbirka riverbed - a survey of springs and wells, drilling boreholes to determine the level and direction of groundwater. At the beginning of 1923 the information appeared in the local newspapers about the relocation of residents away from the ravine and about creating a free zone along the edges for the passage and improvement works. Strengthening of the ravine was started. A new bridge was built on the ruins of the dam on Engels Street in 1924. Later in 1925, the steep banks of the ravine were covered with ground in several places. The flows of water were cleared, the dams were strengthened. However, later it was decided to abandon the dams enclosed the Simbirka River in reinforced concrete pipes with a diameter of 1.5 meters. In parallel with these works in the 50-s the dams on Karl Marks Street and in the central market area were reinforced, the new dam was filled up at the intersection of Street of 12th September and Krymov Street. In the city center the ravine became almost invisible. The stadium «Trud» was conveniently located in it next to the factory «Contactor». On the other side of the street an area for the visiting circus tent was made. All these works were completed in 1960.

Nevertheless, the story of Simbirka did not end there. The river constantly reminded itself, even included in a table: three new landslides were registered in 1987. In the 2002 the rest ravines of the Simbirka were huge areas of debris and waste that polluted the environment and were a source of epidemiological contagion. It was required the reconstruction of the river. In June 2003 the graduation project was presented by M. Komarova in Ulyanovsk State Technical University.

### *The basic urban planning project ideas*

The project of reconstruction of the Simbirka River and the creation a pedestrian area in its flood plain is formed according to the basis of the historical landscape and architectural environment of the Ulyanovsk city center (Fig. 2). The first pedestrian area connects streets of Karl Marks, Goncharov and the promenade of the Volga River. The second pedestrian area connects the «Dam», the Lenin Preserve, Shevchenko Street and the promenade of the Sviyaga River. A uniform pedestrian system is created in the central part of the city from the three river promenades, residential and public micro-groups. The projected object borders on the industrial plants «Utes» and «Contactor». There are also objects of trade: Central Department Store, the «Consumer Services Office», two large retails –«Amaranth» and «City», and office centers.

The Simbirka River with its banks could become a new landscape and recreational core for ecologically sustainable development of the newly built residential and public micro groups of city center site. Urban planning analysis of all pedestrian and transport network of streets in the historic center of the city was also conducted at the course of the project. There were identified intersections, the most dangerous to pedestrians and most loaded to transport. In their place it is possible to create vertical pedestrian-transport interchanges, organizing the

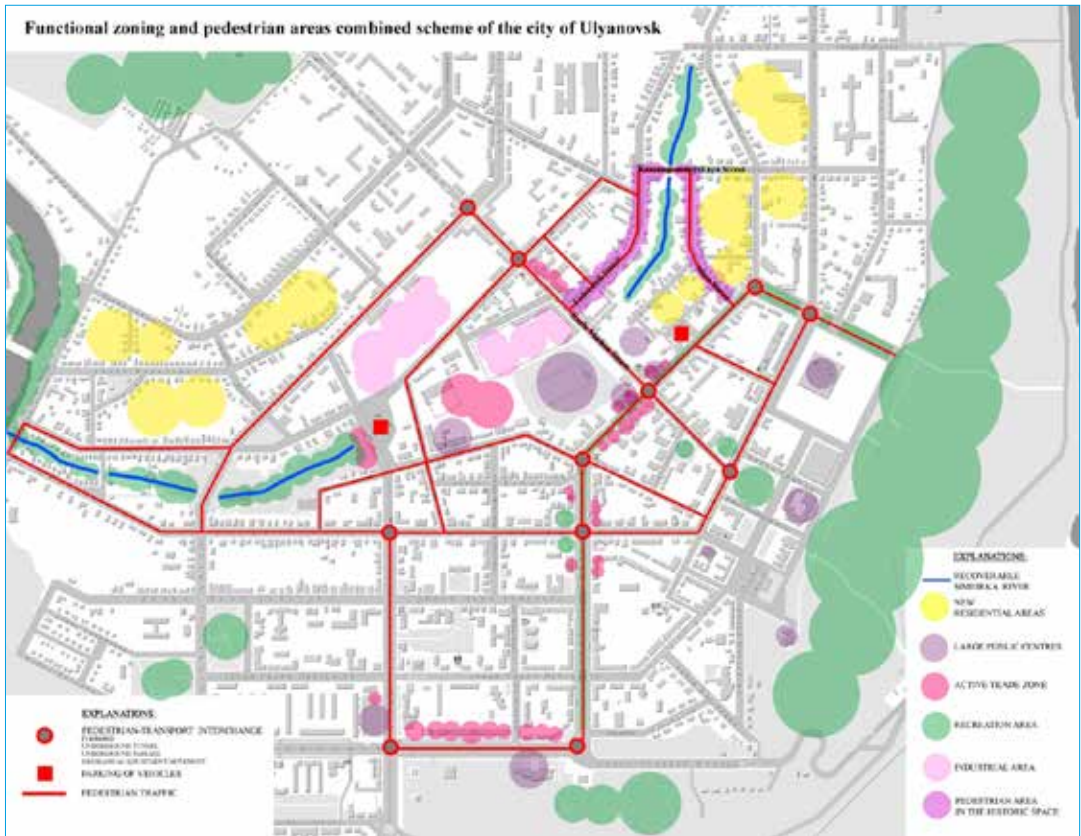


Fig. 2 - Functional zoning and pedestrian areas combined scheme of the city center of Ulyanovsk, graduation project by M. Komarova, 2003

traffic flow in several ways, depending on the road adjacent to the buildings, properties of soil, groundwater level, etc. The solution to these problems of urban development and engineering allows creating in the historic city center the uniform landscape-park network of pedestrian streets with water recreation facilities, to improve the ecological environment, to attract tourists and new investments.

### *Characteristics of the landscape and the pedestrian areas*

Implementation of the idea can take place in stages. The first phase - the actual main core, it is located between streets of Federatsii and Mira. Its total land area is equal to 5.9 hectares. The area of paths and grounds is identical to 1.5 hectares; the area of the body of water equivalents of 0.7 hectares; the planting area is about 3.67 hectares and the area of small architectural forms is equal to 0.03 hectares. The recoverable part of the river is the main composition axis; the recreational space is formed around it. The project proposes to restore the river movement on its existing channel with minimal adjustment and to improve the embankments depending on

the size of their slop. The length of the section of the river is 625m, and the length of the walking path along the streets of Federatsii and Mira is equal to 1km.

The movement of vehicles is one-way here, complicated with uncomfortable twists. Car drivers rarely selected moving along this way, while for pedestrians it would be the shortest distance from the shopping area to the cultural city's center. All of the buildings on these streets have their historical significance. The project proposes to adapt them to new functions, to reconstruct the inputs, but also to save their historic appearance, restore the principal fronts and the elevation facing yards. It is proposed to place museums and antique shops, cafes and bars, artists' and music studios, theaters and shops for the citizens and the visitors of the city. Territory improvement is performed in historical style. Lights, benches, advertising signs, fountains, shop windows, sculptures and other architectural forms are of scope to man and are observed a pedestrian at short range. It is provided coating as tiling, cobblestone and other natural materials, depending on the functional zoning of the pedestrian area.

The functional zoning of the recreation area is carried out in the direction from south to north from the Karl Marks Street. Sports area is located in the southeastern part of the garden; it is designed for outdoor activities of citizens. Children's sector is located in the southwestern part. The central part of the garden is the most ultimate from the main traffic and industrial plants; there is a zone of quiet rest. Cultural and entertainment sector is located in the northern part projected territory. It is planned to green the coastal area with fast-growing trees and shrubs, to create favorable conditions for sports and leisure. The complete solution to the pedestrian area allows to create favorable, healthy and comfortable urban environment in the historic center of Ulyanovsk, to improve the environment through the clean waterway and the creation of landscape ensemble.

### *The present-day situation of the historical landscape. Conclusion*

Since the time of Peter I laws in the field of architecture and construction were strictly observed in the Russian Empire. During the Soviet period the urban development the general plan of the city also had a major role.

One can only be surprised with the modern urban planning in the historic city center between streets Federatsii and Mira. There are high-rise and low-rise houses adjacent to each other without forming either the planning or three-dimensional composition. In the buffer zone of cultural heritage multistorey concrete parking is building, completely destroying the historic urban landscape. Thus, 6-storey parking lots with a semicircular wall was built along Krasnogvardeyskaya Street in the riverbed of the Simbirka; before the round-shaped fountain in the neoclassical style was proposed on that place (Fig. 3). During the construction of the second parking lot, just down the river, the basements of nearby buildings were filled with water. In 2014, one of the businessmen decided to build near the lake Marishka multi-storey hotel with a business center. It was allocated 5 million rubles for the cleaning of 200 meters



Fig. 3 - The situation of the Simbirka River is at the left, 2002; the graduation project by M. Komarova is at the center, 2003; the parking lot is at the right, 2015

of the river Simbirka from the lake Marishka and downstream. The project has been made; the reconstruction of the river bed with concrete constructions was started. But the works were not completed, and were stopped by unknown reasons. At the same time, the construction of the reinforced concrete parking lot in the buffer zone of cultural heritage continues, causing irreparable damage to the existing and long ago abandoned urban landscape.

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