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IMAGE OF CHISINAU AND ITS EVOLUTION IN TOURISTIC ALBUMS AND GUIDES (1964–2008)

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Rezumat

Imaginea Chișinăului și evoluția sa în albume și ghiduri turistice (1964–2008)

Imaginea orașului prezintă o parte importantă a studiilor urbane, deoarece conceptul de oraș se află la baza identității urbane și este legat, de asemenea, de capitalul său simbolic și de atractivitatea pentru rezidenți. Anterior am studiat identitatea urbană a chișinăuienilor, inclusiv imaginea orașului pe care ea se bazează, remarcând inconsecvența acestora. Deoarece imaginile sunt proiecte cognitive și emoționale ale timpului în care au fost formate, în concordanță cu constructul social existent, este important să urmărim dinamica dezvoltării și conținutul imaginilor Chișinăului, care se formează în calitate de imagine din albume de călătorie și ghiduri turistice atât din perioada sovietică, cât și din anii de independență a Republicii Moldova. În acest scop au fost selectate câteva surse din fiecare dintre cele două perioade menționate și întreprinsă compararea lor în conformitate cu cele două categorii evidențiate. Rezultatele analizei au confirmat concordanța imaginilor din albume cu principalele tendințe ideologice ale momentului creării. Este urmărită evoluția conceptului de oraș „nou”, creată în perioada sovietică și înflorită în anii '80. După obținerea independenței, în imaginea orașului poate fi observată ideea căutării identității, revizuirea istoriei, orașul european, renașterea culturii tradiționale ca una dintre componentele-cheie ale identității naționale, care determină, printre altele, și identitatea orașului. Este relevantă continuarea investigațiilor folosind surse suplimentare din ultimii 5–10 ani.

Cuvinte-cheie: Chișinău, imaginea orașului, marca orașului, album de călătorie, evoluția imaginii, perioada sovietică, perioada post-sovietică.

Резюме

Образ Кишинева и его эволюция в туристических альбомах и гидах (1964–2008)

Образ города является важной частью городских исследований, поскольку представления о нем лежат в основе городской идентичности, а также связаны с его символическим капиталом и привлекательностью для жителей. Ранее нами была изучена городская идентичность жителей Кишинева, включая образы города, на которых она основывается, и отмечена их несогласованность. Поскольку образы представляют собой когнитивные и эмоциональные слепки времени их формирования, согласующиеся с существующим социальным конструктом, важно проследить динамику развития и содержательное наполнение образов Кишинева, которые формируются в качестве имиджевых в туристических альбомах и гидах как в советский период, так в

года независимости Республики Молдова. С этой целью было отобрано несколько источников каждого из двух периодов и проведено их сопоставление по выделенным категориям. Результаты анализа подтвердили соответствие образов из альбомов главным идейным трендам времени их создания. Прослеживается эволюция создания концепта «нового» города в советский период и расцвета этой идеи в 80-е гг. После получения независимости в образе города становятся заметны идеи поиска идентичности, пересмотра истории, европейского города, возрождения традиционной культуры в качестве одного из ключевых компонентов национальной идентичности, определяющей в том числе облик города. Представляется актуальным продолжить исследование с привлечением дополнительных источников последних 5–10 лет.

Ключевые слова: Кишинев, образ города, бренд города, туристический альбом, эволюция образа, советский период, постсоветский период.

Summary

Image of Chisinau and its evolution in touristic albums and guides (1964–2008)

The city image presents an important part of urban research, because representations about the city basically underlie urban identities and are connected with its symbolic capital and attractiveness for the residents. Our earlier research of urban identity in Chisinau included images of the city it was based on and showed their inconsistency. Considering that images represent cognitive and emotional matrixes of the historic period of their formation, congruent with the existing social construct, it is important to trace dynamics of formation and contents of the Chisinau images, which are being formed as the public/brand ones in the touristic albums and guides of the Soviet period, as well as in the years of independence of the Republic of Moldova. For this purpose, we selected several sources from the both periods and carried out their comparison according to the identified categories. The results of the analysis proved the existing correlation between the city image from the albums and the main notional trends of the time of their creation. We can trace evolution of creation of the “new” city concept in the Soviet period and flourishing of this idea in 1980s. During the independence period the city image reflects some obvious ideas of identity search, revision of history, a European city, revival of traditional culture as one of the key components of national identity, which will define the appearance of the city as well. It is challenging to continue the research on additional sources from the last 5–10 years.

Key words: Chisinau, city image, city brand, touristic album, image evolution, Soviet period, post-Soviet period.

The question of existing images of Chisinau or representations about it among different groups of residents raised during the past years of urban identity research (Ivanova 2020a, 2020b). Urban identity as a place identity is an emotional type of bond between people and places, formed through attachments to them. Spaces become places through everyday uses and narratives, experiences or interventions, which provide them meaning (Introducing... 2016: 24). The interviewed research participants, speaking about their views and emotions about the city, generated their own images of Chisinau as a part of their personal experience of local space and place. Remarkable was the variety of those images, spreading from the pragmatic and constricted ones to the well-defined comprehensive images. There was an obvious correlation between one's urban image and urban identity, depending on his/her urban life experience, personal story, cultural and social identity. Images are highly complicated phenomena, a combination of individual and social features, which trace history, ideas, policies, social strata etc. Scientific sources in general provide no explicit definition of the city image, in most cases referring to its aspects and different research positions. Thus, the city image may be regarded in a substantive aspect (as a number of sub-images), a processual aspect (its construction and re-interpretation by Mass-media, urban authorities, residents, tourists etc.), and a narrative one (discursive symbolic recycling of those objective conditions, which are present or connected with the city) (Vezner 2014: 223). A variety of individual images may denote a lack of an integrated collective image or a city brand.

Local urban research during the past decades was mostly focused on the history of the city, generating numerous books and papers with reconstruction of its architectural and cultural past (for example, Eșanu 1998, Ciocanu 2017), although there were some papers about Chisinau image in fiction (for example, Grati 2017) and touristic offers (Axenti 2018). Keeping in mind social and sometimes even constructivist part of the city image it seems consistent to analyze images of the city reflected (or constructed) in photographic albums and city guides, which represent some kind of ideal presentations. Typically, such touristic or gift editions correspond to the brand of a city. In Moldova, until 1991 they were ideological in their nature, being landmarks not so much of the city as of the Republic as a whole, its resources and potential. Therefore, it is highly interesting to compare Chisinau images from the editions issued before and after 1991, including the recent period.

With this scope we selected several sources from each period and compared them according to the iden-

tified categories and their content, what allowed us to trace "evolution" of Chisinau image. Expected was the change of ideological paradigm – from the communist one to the so called "decolonization", that is revision of the past in search of other identities except for the Soviet one. This can be observed by both contents of the albums and their number. During the Soviet period Chisinau was demonstrated as the object of intensive development: building and construction work, industry, education, science etc. A vast number of albums, touristic guides and sets of postcards were issued. After 1991 the focus shifted towards history and architectural monuments, "old Chisinau", therefore nowadays in libraries and bookstores there are quite few albums with photographs of the city and a relatively big amount of monographic studies. Economic factor plays here an important role as well, for the free market relations replaced governmental request for such product, as it was in the past.

6 albums constituted the object of research: from 1964 (Кишинев 1964), 1972 (Кишинев 1972), 1982 (Кишинев 1982), 1998 (Chișinăul vechi și nou 1998), 2005 (Chișinăul și chișinăuienii 2005) and 2008 (Chișinăul vechi și nou 2008), selected in terms of the publication date and volume (number of photographs and pages). The photographs were divided into the following categories: architecture, monuments, parks (nature), culture, panoramic views, people and city life, resources (industry, education, science etc.). These categories were rather relative, for the main object could be attributed to several of them. For example, the building of nowadays Art Museum is an architectural and cultural object at the same time. A city in general is hard to divide into parts, for all of its elements blend together to render it a unique identity. Thus, analyzing the albums we refer to the proportions between the categories, accompanying text and general idea of the albums.

Photographers through their lens capture not just what they see, but what they consider important and characteristic for the object in view, thus becoming unconscious reflection of the their epoch. Therefore, the city images from the albums provide some features of the time they were issued, even if under strict governmental control, and their analysis can demonstrate evolution of the city image in the corresponding time period.

1964. "Communist new ground". This album can be attributed to the ideological ones aside from the images of Lenin or pioneers. Key notes of the accompanying text define Chisinau as backwoods of Russian empire, ruined afterwards during the Second world war, but reconstructed as a completely "new" city – industrial, economic and cultural center of the Soviet Republic. Images are focused not on architec-

tural potential, but on the development of the Republic, including its human capital. Thus, there are 13% of the images of buildings, 13% of people (workers), 22% relating to resources (industry, science and education) and 27% – to culture and sport. The last category is mostly presented by humans – professional musicians, artists, sportsmen, as well as by the ethnic “folk” culture. Thus, ideology here cancels the city’s past and draws an idealistic image of cultivating a new ground – process of creation of a completely new space.

1972. “Big renewal”. Issued in 4 languages, this album in general follows the idea, set above, developing and completing it with the changes, happened during those 8 years. The text accentuates, that the “real” history of the city starts in that period of renewal, but unlike the beforementioned edition it draws an image of a southern city, buried in verdure, with culture of its own (museums, restaurants, artisanry). Being a young city, an industrial and cultural center it “has its own identity... It is a pleasure to come into such a city” (Кишинев 1972: 33). These words are underpinned by a variety of images, depicting different aspects of city life. The category of industry is reduced, and the people in the images are mostly simple residents in their everyday life. More attention is paid to the architecture, especially to the newly built quarters and buildings. Culture is still an important category, pictures being very vivid (for example, people waiting outside for the theatre to open). This album sets a trend, which will be repeated and developed in the following editions, including the postcards sets and city guides.

1982. “Place for living”. A voluminous book with about 350 images, depicting architectural objects, different views of the streets, residential quarters, museums and cultural life, parks and nature in the city etc. Ideology is also present here – in monuments, celebrations and symbols. Nevertheless, the accent is put upon life of the city. Chisinau is presented as a very green city, almost each image contains flowerbeds, trees and vegetation during all the 4 seasons of the year. The accompanying texts (in 3 languages) describe distinct features of the city, its notorious personalities, architectural monuments, cultural life, festivals etc. Thus, this album reflects an already established construct – a city for living, where industry and other resources are set apart, giving place to everyday life of a Soviet citizen, which in Chisinau is demonstrated to be rich and comfortable.

1998. “In search of identity”. Named a “souvenir book” this volume with over 500 images is actually a photographic collection of reviewed history of the city. Even its title “Chisinau. The old and the new city” reflects the development of a new local tenden-

cy to rediscover un-Soviet history and identity. The “old” city is presented through an extensive historic introduction and a lot of accompanying texts with a large number of archival images, comprising 25% of the whole volume. The accent is put on architecture, mainly on the buildings from late 19-th and early 20-th century. The book also highlights many important personalities of the past – in the new names of the streets and squares, as part of the pre-Soviet history. Both covers contain photographs of the Cathedral of Christ’s Nativity – symbol of national revival and return to the Orthodoxy after 70 years of atheistic ideology, which will repeat throughout the album and in the following editions. The only events shown here are the crowds of people on the central square (declaration of independence) and foundation stone laying of the bell tower, which will be later reconstructed after its complete demolition in 1962. Parks, nature, culture and people are poorly represented (less than 5% of the images). The “new” city is reflected by a detailed listing of residential quarters and microdistricts, providing an informative overview of the city’s geography. Modern buildings are represented mainly as parts of panoramic views of different residential quarters, streets and squares. Rich in accompanying texts this album thus can be considered as one of the typical for post-Soviet area incorporations of the idea of decolonization.

2005. “European city”. Album issued apparently with support of the city mayor, who appears in many images. Dedication on the front page says “to the City day”, which was established on October 14 and according to the local tradition was linked with the main church of the city. One-page introduction in 3 languages represents Chisinau as a European city with wide boulevards, green streets, lots of parks, its special identity and accentuates its hospitality (“Gates of the city” building on the front page). Brief history draws to 19-th century and then to some recent reconstructions, first of all of the Bell tower. The content corresponds to the title “Chisinau and its residents: daily routine and celebrations”: images showing different kinds of residents – from the prominent ones to ordinary people – veterans, doctors, workers, teachers, children etc. It also contains different objects of infrastructure and industry. As to the part of celebrations – besides some images of the parks with people spending their free time there, it is focused on the City Day and reconstruction of the Cathedral and the Bell tower. As a whole the idea of the album seems to be diffused, but it follows the general trend, set after the declaration of independence of Moldova and described above. Besides, it mentions a new idea of Chisinau as a European city, that reflects a chosen Western vector of political orientation.

2008. “Back to the origins”. This album presents a much more vivid image of Chisinau in comparison with the one from 1998. Following the trend of combination of the past and the present and attribution to the European cities, it shows Chisinau as multifaceted. Besides images of the main architectural objects, the old and the modern ones, and panoramas of different city views it is focused on city life and culture – the most presented category (19% of images). Among the already classical images of concert halls and museums, the bigger part of the category is attributed to the traditional “folk” culture (mostly Moldovan) – music, dances, costumes, artisanry etc. Here we see the next trend of representation of Chisinau and the country as a whole: search of identity within the context of globalization led to actualization of traditional rural culture, viewed as the native origins of the nation. One can see the elements of this culture everywhere in the city of today, for it is highly popularized (murals, fashion, city and country symbols, music, festivals etc.).

As to the recent sources – they are more specific. City guides are combined with maps, and albums represent monographic research or separated aspects of the city image, for example “Chisinau: boulevards, streets, squares, parks: encyclopedic guide” (2017), “Cultural Chisinau” (2017), “Chisinau 1918. Guide Album of the city” (2018), “Unknown Chisinau” (2020) etc.

Thus, despite a limited number of sources, there could be traced a main tendency in the evolution of the Chisinau image – changes in paradigm during a relative short period of time. The temporal difference between 1982 and 1998 comprises 16 years, during which the physical image of Chisinau didn’t change much, whereas symbolically these albums represent 2 different cities. This ideological change explains coexistence of different urban identities in Chisinau, formed during different historical periods. In brief, the coherent construct of the Soviet time led to formation of a coherent urban identity, while dynamic processes of the last 30 years together with the arising problems of transition period formed a number of rather diffused identities.

Image of Chisinau reflects the time of its creation, being a vivid illustration of the “epoch” and sociocultural milieu. An object in a photograph reflects experience of the space by its author. How is the space of Chisinau experienced nowadays, in time of the most dynamic change – remains a question for investigation. In general research of Chisinau images proved to be an important step both for the purpose of creation/construction of a well-conceived modern city brand, and estimation of the city’s attractiveness for its residents as a resource for a stable development of the urban community and the country as a whole.

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