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Urban Planners Assessing Professional Autonomy during (and after) State Socialism

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The Soviet state aimed to turn urban planning into a primary venue where Communist ideas about both the past and the future could be manifested. Architects and planners had to translate these visions into materiality, and they sought to carve out a space for professional autonomy. After the collapse of the USSR, they had to adjust to the new configuration of stakeholders to maintain their standing. Based on interviews with experts who entered the profession in the 1970s and 1980s and remained there after the collapse of the USSR, the author demonstrates that architects and planners perceived their positions under socialism as more stable than under market conditions. They learned how the state bureaucracy worked and got "entrenched" in the networks of decision-makers. They did not need to navigate between different interests—just those represented by the party. They knew what technology and practices they could rely on, and the boundaries of their professional field were clearly defined. With this case study, the author relates to a broader conversation about the autonomy and dependence of professionals during social transformations.

1. Introduction

On November 16, 2021, architects gathered in Lviv for a peaceful protest against the adoption of the draft of Law No. 5655, On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine on Reforming the Sphere of Urban Development. The head of the Lviv Regional Union of Architects, Mykola Sheremeta, stated that this document was "an attempt to destroy the architect's role in society because it transfers disproportionate rights from society to the largest (oligarchic, monopoly) developers in the state."[1] According to publicly circulated comments from architects and planners, the draft law has two significant pro-

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[1] Gryn'ko Ol'ha, Arkitektory vyishly na protest. Shcho vony vymagaiut'?, https://zaxid.net/arhitektori_viyshli_na_protest_shho_voni_vimagayut_n1530388 [October 27, 2024].

blems: it does not provide a space for public participation and gives too much power to developers. The third and most crucial concern, which forced architects onto the streets of many Ukrainian cities in mid-November 2021, was a challenge to their professional autonomy.

The former chief architect of Lviv was critical of current architects' ability to act independently: "The architect shrank from a demiurge, as he was in the 1950s, into a servant of the money bags."[2] This quotation provides the frame for the "golden age" of planners—the imagined period of independence, when they could act according to their will and vision.

In this paper, I define professional autonomy as the ability to self-regulate one's own field of expertise. It is always negotiated and localized, and certain connections become more or less visible over time. For instance, the dependence on the state became less noticeable than the dependence on the private customer. Architects speak about the period of state socialism as a time when their field was better protected and they had more tools to secure their positions. Although the Soviet state utilized urban planning as an essential ideological tool, experts assert that they could navigate the system. Based on in-depth interviews with people who entered the profession during state socialism and developed their careers before and after the collapse of the USSR, I outline the factors that determine this perception of professional autonomy.

During the 1970s and 1980s, urban planners had learned to work with the state bureaucracy, and there was no need to coordinate their decisions with many stakeholders. Experts from other fields did not interfere with their professional practice, and they acquired a range of applied knowledge and skills that clearly defined their field of competence. Even when they remember the relations with the state, represented by central institutions, as hostile, they often concede that local authorities secured their autonomy. The loss of connection with the city councils is one of the key reasons behind the deterioration of their position. Their autonomy was supported by various types of relations—with employers, clients, users, and other professionals. With the collapse of the Soviet system, they had to rearrange this network.

The alliance between the planners and the Soviet state—represented by executive committees, ministries, local administrations, and enterprises—had taken decades to form. Architectural historian Christina Crawford mentions early Soviet architects' ability to be creative and innovative, granting them a degree of autonomy.[3] During the following years, they expanded the space for

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[2]   Urban planning professor, born in 1955, recorded December 31, 2020.
[3]   Cf. Christina E. Crawford, Spatial Revolution: Architecture and Planning in the Early Soviet Union, Ithaca 2022.

professional expression.[4] Urban planners were simultaneously engaged in forging the socialist city and pursuing personal interests, searching for loopholes and workarounds. Some of them accumulated both professional authority (the ability to enforce decisions beyond one's direct sphere of competence) and autonomy (the ability to protect their own field from outside interference). They were quite successful "connective professionals"[5] who managed to cultivate networks with decision-makers.

The collapse of the USSR forced urban planners to rethink their relations with the state as their principal employer and to develop a new system of connections in order to preserve privileges and positions. Promotional material published in Architectural Herald (Arkhitekturnyi visnyk in Ukrainian) in 2001 compared urban planners to "stalkers[6] in a relativistic environment, who are navigating their way toward an unclearly defined goal while only knowing the general direction of movement."[7] Just a decade before, the broad aim of urban planning in the Soviet Union had been rather clear. Theoretically, planners had to create an image and provide guidelines for constructing the socialist city. In practice, they had to adjust party decisions to specific urban situations drawing on limited resources. After the collapse of the USSR, there remained a zone replete not only with the previous regime's material debris but also with infrastructures, institutions, social practices, and cultural patterns. Urban planners had to reimagine their field—using the tools they had gained over the previous decades. They also had to negotiate their autonomy within inherited and newly emerging institutional landscapes.

2. Architects Speaking: Specifics of data and methods

Research on architectural milieux often focuses on formalized organizations, the most famous of which is CIAM, the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne.[8] In the United Kingdom and the United States, firms are used as criti-

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4   Cf. Heather D. DeHaan, Stalinist City Planning. Professionals, Performance, and Power, Toronto 2013.
5   Mirko Noordegraaf, Protective or connective professionalism? How connected professionals can (still) act as autonomous and authoritative experts, Journal of Professions & Organizations 7:2, 2020, 205-23.
6   The word comes from the Soviet movie "Stalker" (1979), loosely based on the novel by the Strugatsky brothers, "Roadside Picnic" (1972, published in English in 1977).
7   APM-2, Mistoprojekt, Arkhitekturnyi visnyk 1, 2001, 22.
8   Cf. Martin Kohlrausch, Brokers of Modernity. East Central Europe and the Rise of Modernist Architects, 1910-1950, Leuven 2019; Eric Mumford, Defining Urban Design: CIAM Architects and the Formation of a Discipline, 1937-69, New Haven 2009; Lukasz Stanek (ed.), Team 10 East: Revisionist Architecture in Real Existing Modernism, Warsaw 2014.

cal units around which researchers construct their narratives.[9] In my case study, I follow urban planning professionals with different institutional affiliations who were (and are) working on the level of the city as academics, practitioners, or administrators. My arguments unfold from publications in professional architectural monographs and journals from the 1970s to the 2000s, archival inquiries, memoirs, and conversations with 20 architects and urban planners. The interviews were intended as biographical and focused on education, professional careers, and the community of peers. I used a semi-structured guide so that the dialogue was quite flexible. Narrators could thus reconstruct their life trajectories according to their understanding of the importance of specific events and the development of the interview situation.

The narrators have diverse professional biographies: some of them worked in state planning institutions for decades; others were mainly involved in teaching, and some were independent designers. In this paper, I mainly focus on interviews with professionals who were both planners and administrators. They are mostly male—the sample reflects the field at a time when the chief architects of the city and the region were only men. The interviewees were born between 1930 and 1974, and the majority are from the first post-WWII decade; therefore, they started undergraduate education in the 1960s and got their first jobs in the 1970s. As of 1991, they were already established professionals, which means that they had experience in urban planning both under state socialism and after its demise. These interviews reflect a distance from the discussed events, as I recorded these conversations between 2018 and 2020 when specific ways of narrating the Soviet state and the post-socialist decades had already been established.

Distance in time and the current position of a speaker are important variables to consider when analyzing oral evidence. In that sense, the story about early post-Soviet recordings is indicative. In 1992, John V. Maciuika, a doctoral student in architectural history at the University of California Berkeley, conducted interviews with four Lithuanian architects as part of his research on Soviet housing construction and the Lazdynai project, which had won the Lenin prize in 1974. In the introduction to these oral histories published almost 30 years later, he mentions that Lithuanians expressed skepticism and believed that his storytellers engaged in "self-mythologization" when describing how they manipulated the Soviet system to introduce better quality housing. Maciuika distances himself from such an interpretation. For him, their stories

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[9]   Cf. Judith R Blau, Architects and Firms: A Sociological Perspective on Architectural Practice, London 1984; Laurie Cohen et. al., "Remember I'm the bloody architect!": Architects, organizations, and discourses of profession, Work, Employment and Society 19:4, 2005, 775-96.

are more significant than a myth; they "corroborate the specific and subtle circumstances in which Soviet Lithuanian architects had to [...] practice their profession".[10] He continues that "even forging sufficient budgetary maneuvering room to be architecturally creative in the heavy bureaucratic central planning context presented grave difficulties."[11]

By contrast, Marija Drėmaitė challenges the narratives produced by architects in independent Lithuania about their professional careers during the Soviet period, which they claim constituted "cultural resistance." Architecture and urban planning were tightly connected with the state apparatus and state infrastructures (including patronage practices, the establishment of centralized institutions, financing, and the construction industry). Drėmaitė remains suspicious of the possibility of being a dissident in such a state-dominated field.[12] My interview partners do not frame their professional practice as "resistance," nor are they nostalgic for their lost status and past experience.[13] Rather, they perceive their job as permitting a certain measure of autonomy allowed by the institutional environment in which they operated. This assessment became a background against which the current situation in the field is constantly evaluated. It is worth emphasizing that the narrative reality of the interviews reflects both the interviewees' past experiences and their current lives. At the same time, these narratives provide insight into the process by which people make meaning and relate to the world.

The interviews I have recorded in Lviv imply both the distance to state socialism and almost 30 years of experience working in independent Ukraine. This experience includes several significant developments. The economic crisis of the 1990s, which was an extremely challenging time in the lives and careers of a vast number of professionals,[14] marked a turning point. It was followed by the establishment of a new system of relations with private clients, the return

10   John V. Maciuika, A Personal Introduction in Two Journeys: From Lithuanian SSR 1980 to Lithuania 1992, in Maciuika and Marija Drėmaitė (eds.), Lithuanian Architects Assess the Soviet Era: The 1992 Oral History Tapes, Vilnius 2020, 30.

11   Ibid., 38.

12   Cf. Marija Drėmaitė, Cultural Resistance or Subversive Opportunism? On Lithuanian Architects' Memories, in Maciuika and Drėmaitė, Lithuanian Architects, 52–92.

13   Cf. Otto Boele, "Perestroika and the 1990s—Those Were the Best Years of My Life!" Nostalgia for the Post-Soviet Limbo, in: Otto Boele, Boris Noordenbos and Ksenia Robbe (eds.), Post-Soviet Nostalgia. Confronting the Empire's Legacies, New York 2019, 203–23; Marina Kiblitskaya, "Once We Were Kings". Male Experiences of Loss of Status at Work in Post-Communist Russia, in Sarah Ashwin (ed.), Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia, London and New York 2000, 69–78.

14   Cf. Maria A. Rogacheva, The Private World of Soviet Scientists from Stalin to Gorbachev, Cambridge 2017; Vladislav Zubok, Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia, Cambridge, Mass. 2009.

of the state as a controlling body, the growing role of developers, and the beginning of decentralization reform in 2014, with more decision-making powers being transferred to the local administrations. All this forms the context in which my narrators recount their professional biographies.

3. Relations with the Soviet state as principal client

Urban planners framed the attitude toward the Soviet state as a "love-hate" relationship. On the one hand, the nationalization of the land and the means of production opened up the possibility of large-scale planning interventions. The state was the primary employer and client; it represented the public good and suppressed individual needs for the sake of the collective. Urban planners did not engage in multiple negotiation processes. One of the authors of the Lviv general plan speaks about the tension between the interests of specific individuals and the common good: "750,000 residents [estimated Lviv population—N.O.], thousands of individuals and legal entities, and you can't please everyone."[15] On the other hand, planners acknowledged that the Soviet state limited and restricted their profession in many ways and that resources were constantly scarce.

In the case of Lviv, several urban planners were quite successful in lobbying for the interests of the local professional community. For instance, the chief architect of the Lviv region, Andrii Shuliar (1918–2010), held his position for almost three decades—between 1953 and 1980. Similarly, Yaroslav Novakivskyi (1920–82), the head of the urban planning workshop at the Dipromist State City Design Institute' local branch, managed to secure the direct financing of a new edition of the Lviv general plan through the State Construction Committee. Another example is Zynovii Pidlisnyi (1935–99), who was a director at the same institution.

The following case illustrates his relations with the central planning office in Kyiv in the late 1970s when the Lviv branch of Dipromist started to plan a mass housing district in the southern part of the city. A local team changed the typical construction of 84 series of prefabricated panel buildings slightly, and Pidlisnyi had to get this approved by the local State Construction Committee. Later, he described this meeting to his Lviv colleagues. A professor of urban planning recalls Pidlisnyi's story in his interview: "It is clear that these improvements [in series] were constructive, and they caused some price increase, and this was a deadly sin. And he [Pidlisnyi] told how [people] were shouting at him in high offices in Kyiv (his name was Zynovii): 'Zynovii, you will be imprisoned because you raise the cost of the construction.' Well, somehow, thank

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[15]   Urban planner, born in 1952, recorded December 20, 2018.

God, he was not imprisoned. Thank God he remained in Lviv with his projects."[16]

The other interviewee tells a similar story about this conversation. She recalls that the director of the State Construction Committee was very upset about these changes to the series, but that Pidlisnyi protected the project and it was implemented.[17] Later, Viacheslav Sekretariuk, the First Secretary of the Lviv City Committee of the Communist Party from 1980 to 1987, proudly mentioned that local builders were among the first in the Ukrainian SSR to switch to the construction of houses with improved planning.[18] This example illustrates how a powerful professional managed to secure the autonomy of architects and how this accomplishment became something to be utilized by the party authorities in the competition between cities.

The former chief architect of Lviv, who worked both under state socialism and after the collapse of the USSR, describes the situation of professionals who were navigating relations with the state. As an urban planner and a representative of local administration, he experienced pressure from local and central authorities concerning city development: "There were many assignments and many questions from the regional party committee and the city party. It was difficult because many enterprises of national significance operated, expanded here, located their sites, and we were categorically against [it] [...]. I had to prove it to the first secretary. He was under pressure there; I understood that. They are pressuring [him] from Kyiv, from Moscow, and I have to write out the justifications so that he has to remember them and report on high."[19]

This story shows the power dynamic between professionals and local authorities as well as the relations within the party hierarchy. It also illustrates that urban planners had to deal with the interests not only of the local party administration but also of the powerful industries that were located in the city yet managed by state ministries. The alliance with local officials gave them persuasive claims to represent the public good, competing with the ever-growing demands from the center.

4. Search for a new principal client after 1991

The first post-Soviet decade brought significant political and societal transformations in Ukraine. Mass privatization pushed the state to the periphery of de-

[16]   Urban planning professor, born in 1942, recorded February 26, 2019.
[17]   Cf. Urban planning professor, born in 1934, recorded February 9, 2019.
[18]   Cf. Viacheslav Sekretariuk, Gorod L'vov i ego problemy, Stroitel'stvo i arkhitektura 344:1, 1983, 2-3.
[19]   Cf. Urban planner, born in 1944, recorded December 2, 2020.

cision-making concerning urban development; the administration no longer had a monopoly on spatial interventions. An urban planner who was Lviv's chief architect during the early 1990s describes the situation as "the most difficult times in the economy and in the urban development of the city."[20] He links this to the bankruptcy of numerous industrial enterprises, opaque and aggressive privatization, and the emergence of the first oligarchs.

Due to the economic crisis, the programs of mass housing construction stopped, and numerous developments remained unfinished. Several infrastructure projects, such as new tram routes and metro lines, were postponed for decades or are still not implemented. It was also a crisis of common spaces: throughout the 1990s and much of the 2000s, municipal authorities could not consistently maintain communal facilities.[21] The turn from a planned to a market economy meant a radical redistribution of resources and a shift from the macro-scale of planning, where one key customer controlled planning at the city and regional level, to the micro-scale of a person who became the owner of a privatized housing complex or company.

All this led to the shrinking of the field of urban planning. While speaking about the 1990s, the former chief regional architect who used to work at the Lviv branch of the State Design Institute for Cities mentions that out of 60 people working in a planning office, only 15 remained.[22] State-funded planning institutions lacked resources: salaries were meager and often came late. Instead of money, architects sometimes received products or things. My interviewee describes a line of people in the corridor; two sacks of sugar, three bags of buckwheat, and some boots were offered as payment. He bitterly comments: "Such was the respect for architectural specialists in terms of material support."[23]

Kateryna Malaia recalls the story of one of the architects with whom she spoke in 2017. In 1993, despite his lack of previous experience with interior design, he started to remodel elite apartments. This work earned him much more money than his job at the institution at which he had worked during the Soviet period.[24] Resources shifted from state institutions to private customers. As a result, urban planners had to adjust to the new configuration and mobilize a dif-

[20]   Urban planner, born in 1944, recorded September 24, 2020.
[21]   Cf. Stephen J. Collier, Post-Soviet Social: Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics, Princeton 2011; Mateusz Laszczowski, Scraps, Neighbors, and Committees: Material Things, Place-Making, and the State in an Astana Apartment Block, City & Society 27:2, 2015, 136–59.
[22]   Urban planner, born in 1946, recorded December 21, 2018.
[23]   Ibid.
[24]   Cf. Kateryna Malaia, A Unit of Homemaking: The Prefabricated Panel and Domestic Architecture in the Late Soviet Union, Architectural Histories 8:1, 2020, 12.

ferent skill set. The period of the 1990s is remembered as a crisis, but also as a time when many things were possible as there was almost no controlling body.

After the collapse of the USSR, urban planners from the former state institutions "tried to preserve their influence in the area in which they had worked earlier"[25] and competed with numerous individual actors for limited resources. Gradually, the position of the investor was gaining more traction, especially in the field of architecture. A person with financial capital became the decisive voice in any project. In Soviet times, money had stemmed from one source, the state. After the USSR's collapse, the question of the origin of, and control over, money suddenly came to the fore. My interlocutors are still irritated when recounting how developers started to interfere with their professional practice: "The private customer pays with his own money. That suffices to make him the main person."[26] Whereas before, urban planners had learned to coexist in relations with a more or less abstract state in a mutually beneficial way, they now had to adjust to a new power dynamic. This tension resulted in the reduction of the role of professionals.

The biggest challenge to planners' autonomy—as it was framed in the majority of interviews—came from investors and developers. "An architect can show off as much as he wants, but if he doesn't have a good investor, he won't get anything done," says an architect who left the profession during the 1990s and returned in the 2000s.[27] Previously, urban planners had had to deal with the state (represented by specific individuals, but more or less tied to the socialist project) as the key investor. Knowing "the right people" and adopting "the right language" of justification enabled the implementation of particular projects. When discussing the narratives of leading Soviet Lithuanian architects, Marija Drėmaitė mentions the existence of "collegial ties to local Lithuanian government officials, which helped generate original solutions to material shortages and economic challenges."[28] The connections developed during, and inherited from, state socialism helped urban planners to secure a limited number of orders during the 1990s, but they were evaporating with time.

5. Relations with other fields and groups of interest

Urban planning under state socialism was a technocratic field. If we use the "becoming-doing-relating" triad to assess professions,[29] the "becoming" part of

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25   Urban planner, born in 1947, recorded November 20, 2018.
26   Urban planner, born 1948, recorded August 2, 2020.
27   Architect, born in 1960, recorded August 6, 2020.
28   Drėmaitė, Cultural Resistance or Subversive Opportunism?, 86.
29   Cf. Michel Anteby, Curtis K Chan, and Julia DiBenigno, Three Lenses on Occupations and

urban planning in the USSR was closely related to the field of construction. During the post-war decade in Soviet Lviv, architects studied at the Department of Engineering and Construction. Khrushchev's condemnation of Stalinist "excess" in architecture led to the field being unified and restructured—there was no architectural program at Lviv Polytechnic between 1956 and 1959. "'The builders will do it themselves'—it was a denial of the architectural profession," as one interviewee recalls his student years during the mentioned period.[30] Urban planning was restored as an architectural sub-specialization at the Polytechnic Institute in 1966, while a separate department of architecture was only organized in 1971.[31]

Although a department was eventually formed, its genealogy mattered: the program included a strong emphasis on technical training. My interlocutors praised the engineering part of the curriculum, as it helped them with design work and delineated the borders of what was possible. Education imposes the boundaries of a field on students; in the case of urban planning under state socialism, these boundaries were rather exclusive. At the same time, such boundaries secured professional autonomy against outside interference[32]—either from other professional fields or from the general public.

The need to redefine the established boundaries of urban planning began to manifest itself during the last decade of state socialism. The story of the Lviv underground tram is quite telling in this regard. The project was envisioned in the 1960s, mentioned in the Lviv general plan of 1966, and became a subject of detailed planning during the 1970s and 1980s. However, the very first shaft in the courtyard of the Potocki Palace, an architectural monument from the late nineteenth century, caused cracks in several nearby buildings.

The urban planners responsible for designing the underground stations recall the conversation about the termination of work in more detail than the planning of the project itself. They remember that discussions with the Lviv City Council went on for about a year. Some of the arguments were more technical in nature, such as focusing on strengthening the bases of the central buildings with concrete poles[33] or referring to the underground construction

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Professions in Organizations: Becoming, Doing, and Relating, The Academy of Management Annals 10:1, 2016, 183–244.

[30] Urban planning professor, born in 1942, recorded February 26, 2019.

[31] More about urban planning education in Lviv in Natalia Otrishchenko, Looking Forward, Looking Back: Ways of Re-Connecting Urban Planning Education in Lviv, Studia Historiae Scientiarum 21, 2022, 485–514.

[32] Cf. Anne Edwards, Building Common Knowledge at the Boundaries Between Professional Practices: Relational Agency and Relational Expertise in Systems of Distributed Expertise, International Journal of Educational Research 50:1, 2011, 33–39.

[33] Urban planner, born in 1947, recorded November 26, 2018.

experience of other cities, especially the London Tube.[34] The others were concerned with the financial side of the project. However, the heritage protection milieu and the wider public opposed the project as it could damage the city center (at that moment, the State Historical and Architectural Reserve). One urban planner recalls this discussion: "The people who participated in this movement said that 'it is something you do wrongly, you want to destroy Lviv (something like that—adding fuel to the fire), you do it intentionally, and you want to destroy Lviv' [...]. [T]he general plan predicted that the population would reach 900,000, up to a million, so understanding, predicting those trends, off-the-street transport was suggested so there would be no problems in the future. But, it is one thing when the specialists propose something, and quite another when public figures shout, 'Shame on you, specialists,' shaming those specialists."[35]

This story illustrates the clash between different professional communities and the wider public. From today's perspective, the urban planner draws on his expertise to make predictions in order to solve future problems of urban development, criticizing the amateurish and overly emotional position of public figures trapped in the "black or white"-mode of thinking. However, as Victoria Donovan puts it, since the 1960s, "members of the local community were empowered to express their criticism of local officials, particularly with reference to 'democratic' themes such as the preservation of cultural heritage. [...] In the perestroika era, when the limits on public debate were removed, this group realized its political potential, transforming into a platform for social criticism and organized dissent."[36] The autonomy of urban planners was challenged not only by local politicians who became involved in the debate about city development but also by other fields of expertise—such as heritage protection—that reframed the definition of the city and the notions underpinning planning.

For decades, the voices of professionals from the humanities and social sciences had been quite marginal in discussions about city development. They existed mainly in academia and later NGOs and did not have much influence on the actual practice of planning. However, by rearranging the boundaries of urban planning so as to make it more inclusive, these alternative experts gained more traction. Similarly, Hungarian sociologists entered the conversation about the welfare system during the late phase of state socialism: "By claiming the role of the 'expert,' they carved out influential positions for themselves as analysts and policymakers. Hence, although sociologists were clearly con-

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[34] Urban planner, born in 1952, recorded December 20, 2018.
[35] Urban planner, born in 1952, recorded December 20, 2018.
[36] Victoria Donovan, The "Old New Russian Town": Modernization and Architectural Preservation in Russia's Historic North West, 1961–1982, Slavonica 19:1, 2013, 32.

cerned about the fate of the impoverished, their reform maneuvers were also propelled by their own professional interests."[37] In a similar vein, urban planning started to be a contested interdisciplinary practice. Therefore, the city became an arena in which different professions competed for their share and were, therefore, not eager to cooperate. Debates about professional autonomy and crises of professional legitimacy are bound up with issues of inclusion and exclusion, objectivity, and outsourcing.[38] Even though their field of expertise has long been challenged from the outside, urban planners still rely on exclusion and objectivity when speaking about their professional autonomy.

After the collapse of the USSR, the state was no longer the main investor in the field of urban planning. At the same time, it did not yet establish a new system of norms and controlling institutions. The former chief district architect draws a comparison between the 1990s and the 2000s: "It was easier then, there was no such bureaucracy. Then it [city council] began to introduce approvals, an interdepartmental commission [...]. And then it was necessary to pass the sanitary and fire inspections separately."[39] This quotation addresses the planners' autonomy from at least two perspectives: that of the state and that of other professional fields. However, planners see the challenge mainly from the side of competing technical expertise rather than at the social science level, as it happened in the context of the US.[40] This implies clear professional boundaries: they speak about urban development as a field of engagement for people from an engineering background. In their view, the city remained the space of artificial objects, not of the people or of nature.

6. Broadening venues for public participation

The situation with the underground tram described earlier shows the tendencies that would become more widespread later as the state lost its monopoly on defining the public good, and multiple interest groups entered the conversation about the city's future. Residents joined this discussion with their visions of the individual or collective good, and the field itself was unprepared to accommodate their claims. Kristof Van Assche, Gert Verschraegen, and Joseph Salukvadze, when speaking about the context of post-Soviet Georgia, mention

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37 Lynne Haney, Inventing the Needy: Gender and the Politics of Welfare in Hungary, Berkeley 2002, 168.
38 Cf. Gil Eyal, The Crisis of Expertise, New York 2019.
39 Architect, born 1947, recorded November 26, 2020.
40 Cf. Lloyd Rodwin, Images and Paths of Change in Economics, Political Science, Philosophy, Literature, and City Planning, 1950-2000, in Rodwin and Bishwapriya Sanyal (eds.), The Profession of City Planning: Changes, Images and Challenges, 1950-2000, New Brunswick 2012, 19.

that planners themselves "would be unlikely candidates to organize participatory planning."[41] It reflects the legacy of centralist design and the technocratic imagination that urban development had to be coordinated from above by experts, and people did not have the space to express their visions (with the exception of letters to the authorities). Yet, through the media, protests, and public hearings, city dwellers started to exert more influence on urban affairs. If earlier planners embodied the state's interests (and the abstract public good), they are now forced to navigate between multiple stakeholders with various and often mutually exclusive interests.

Urban planners often perceive city inhabitants as less educated, solely focused on their individual concerns, and unable to grasp the broader perspective. The former chief architect of Lviv, who held the office in the mid-2000s, criticizes public participation as lacking proper moderation, a forum that anyone can join without specialist knowledge. The following quotation hints at multiple issues: a professional's contempt toward ordinary people's opinions, a fierce and emotionally loaded public debate, the formalized and instrumental role of the state in setting up priorities for urban development and creating lists of monuments for protection, the dependence on external legal expertise, which could be easily tempted by financial capital: "Architecture is such a public thing because it is a visual, [and everyone] has something to say about it. Because when there are some hydraulic tests, when there is no water and so on, people don't know, they shout that there is no water [...]. And here everyone has an opinion, especially on heritage, especially on architecture. And polarization appeared: this opinion is very much in favor of preservation and, accordingly, an ignorant opinion against it, 'What is there to preserve?' immediately appeared. There was a rule, they drew it: 'Is there a table?[42] If not—it is not a monument [...]. And here our humane, 'the most humane courts in the world,'[43] have joined in, where everything could be solved with money. And the architect was defenseless."[44]

The narrator describes urban planners navigating relations with the state and courts, which became essential players in the field, helping certain actors push through their interests. He briefly mentions the professionals who possess technical knowledge about infrastructures. He also covers the relations with lay audiences and the inability to engage in constructive dialogue with urban

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[41] Kristof Van Assche, Gert Verschraegen, and Joseph Salukvadze, Changing Frames: Citizen and Expert Participation in Georgian Planning, Planning Practice & Research 25:3, 2010, 377-395, 386.

[42] Table on the building indicates its listing as a monument to be protected.

[43] Quote from the Soviet comedy "Kidnapping, Caucasian Style" (1967), often used for mocking the court system.

[44] Urban planning professor, born in 1955, recorded December 31, 2020.

residents. The reasons behind this inability come from both sides: urban planners, who are not trained to listen to city inhabitants, and city dwellers, who do not trust planners' expertise.

On the side of planners, professional training as a whole lacked the skill of understanding different social experiences and engaging in a conversation with various competing parties. The discipline uses depersonalized language, even when constantly referring to the user. Planning documentation had to generalize based on "the number of city-forming personnel, i.e. workers,"[45] and use average numbers (square meters per person, number of beds in hospitals per 1000 persons, number of places in high schools per 1000 person, et cetera) to make a claim. Urban planners would also need a new vocabulary and moderation skills, which are not part of their educational curriculum. Alex Kriege describes the ideal planner: he or she, among other abilities, must be able to "analyze, visualize, and orchestrate relationships in space"[46] while understanding the role of people in place-making and place-maintenance and respecting the expertise of other professionals. Kriege concludes that "the best planners will once more be educators and advocates (though not preachers)."[47] Some of Lviv's urban planners had the experience of teachers, but their communication was of a hierarchical character—more like preaching. For instance, the former chief architect of Lviv describes a meeting with urban residents in the late 1980s, recorded by local media: "I begin to report [...] and say: 'Here, integration and differentiation of functions is planned, and according to that principle, we divided that, that, and that.' After the meeting ends, the camera operator says: 'Everything is correct, just do not use some of those words—integration, differentiation.' And I say: 'No, I speak as a representative of the institute, the public, who must clearly call everything by its name.' And then I explain what I meant. Let the people get used to such words so that they know. This is an educational process."[48]

He speaks about his role as an educator, but he did not engage in knowledge exchange. He was inclined to convey concepts from his field to the public, as opposed to responding to people's direct experiences. The same idea, but in relation to developers who need to be better educated, is expressed in multiple narratives. The following quotation by an architect is emblematic: "This enlightening role should be [a common practice] [...]. Overall, I would ban all peo-

45 Urban planner, born in 1944, recorded September 17, 2020.
46 Alex Kriege, The Planner as Urban Designer: Reforming Planning Education in the New Millennium, in Lloyd Rodwin and Bishwapriya Sanyal (eds.), The Profession of City Planning: Changes, Images and Challenges, 1950-2000, New Brunswick 2012, 208–09.
47 Ibid., 209.
48 Urban planner, born in 1944, recorded September 24, 2020.

ple without architectural education from owning construction companies [...] these people must be educated."[49] This resonates with observations made by Zsuzsanna Vargha about advertising experts in post-socialist Hungary, who also had the ambition to educate their clients and customers.[50]

On the side of urban residents, distrust could result from "planning cynicism"[51] among a population that had ample experience of a planned economy. One of the authors of the Lviv general plan stresses the link that people make between urban planners and functionaries: "When I speak at public hearings, they treat me like an official: 'But you, officials, are so-and-so!' But I say: 'I'm not an official, I'm a designer, you know? I studied. I was taught to hold a pencil in my hands and count, and all this business.'"[52] His answer delineates the boundaries of expertise and the need to separate urban professionals from decision-makers. He also describes why dialogue is impossible: "People are already winding themselves up when they come to public hearings—no arguments work because a person is already irritated, and if he is irritated, it is very difficult to prove anything to him."[53] Planners perceive the audience as aggressive and uneducated because direct citizen involvement would require a change in their self-image.[54]

This "dual inability" to enter dialogue blocks any opportunity for alliances that would benefit both sides. By engaging with a larger audience, urban planners could gain symbolic capital to compete with developers, and city dwellers could collaborate with planners to enhance the quality of urban life. If planners began to see themselves as mediators and engage with the local context they could secure a new foundation for their professional autonomy.

7. Possession of locally relevant knowledge

The urban planning field is site-specific—professionals had to acquire information on a given territory's geological, climatic, infrastructural, demographic, and economic features in order to summarize them in visual form. Such multifaceted knowledge contributed to their ethos as specialists with broad and locally embedded knowledge. They enjoyed a greater degree of freedom than artists in fields such as literature, painting, or cinema; architectural historian

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[49] Architect, born in 1960, recorded August 6, 2020.
[50] Cf. Zsuzsanna Vargha, Educate or serve: the paradox of 'professional service' and the image of the west in legitimacy battles of post-socialist advertising, Theory and Society 39:2, 2010, 203–43.
[51] Van Assche, Verschraegen and Salukvadze, Changing Frames, 383.
[52] Urban planner, born in 1952, recorded December 20, 2018.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Cf. Van Assche, Verschraegen and Salukvadze, Changing Frames, 384.

Marija Drėmaitė explains this by pointing to their positioning as technical rather than artistic experts.[55] The former chief architect of the Lviv region during the 1980s and 1990s calls such experts "people who know the territory and who own the territory."[56] This was an implicit knowledge gained through practice and, therefore, not always transferable. Planners' connectedness to the specific urban context, their possession of locally grounded knowledge, and practical design skills are important components of their perceived autonomy.

As an expert who had worked under state socialism in the 1980s, the former chief architect of the city provided information that local party representatives could use in their discussion with central institutions. During the interview, he paid a lot of attention to the quality of information he was delivering ("When I reported something to someone, I must be 100%, 120% convinced that it is true"[57]) because this constituted the foundation for mutual trust. Such information was derived not only from his theoretical knowledge and familiarity with planning documentation but also from his practical skills: "I walked around the entire territory. There is no hole in the city where I did not walk. It was a little easier for me when I came to the position [of the chief architect] because I had done a lot of work before as an urban planner. [...] I knew all the industrial enterprises, walked around them, looked at what was there."[58] This tacit knowledge was the basis of his professional confidence.

The changes in the urban planning field during the post-Soviet decade are connected to the decreasing role of tacit knowledge and the increasing role of performing expertise. The former chief architect of Lviv, who held the office in the mid-2000s, reflects on the tendency of local authorities to rely more on "some scientific-looking cartoons, presentations, an unlimited number of images, internet, Wikipedia."[59] He deplores this trend because it undermines the planner's role and significantly lowers the threshold for entering the profession. The narrator also criticizes the municipality's HR policy for underestimating the role of locally embedded knowledge of infrastructures: "For example, the water supply company or those related to gas, those people who know where which pipe goes—it was very wrong to fire everyone from their jobs and to recruit people who can hardly read a map. And they [fired specialists] knew by heart when they changed the pipes, valves, and dampers, knew that it could burst or that the heat pipes that have been laid there for 30 years are rotten

55 Marija Drėmaitė, Cultural Resistance or Subversive Opportunism?, 84.
56 Urban planner, born in 1946, recorded December 21, 2018.
57 Urban planner, born in 1944, recorded December 2, 2020.
58 Ibid.
59 Urban planning professor, born in 1955, recorded December 31, 2020.

[and] need to be repaired."[60]

The narrator stresses the importance of technical expertise, which, he believes, has become less prominent in the discussion about urban development. Returning to the value of locally grounded knowledge is seen as a way to restore the planning profession's autonomy.

The ability to access locally relevant knowledge works on different scales and relates to different topics. It is about connecting to a particular territory, knowing "where which pipe goes," but also about knowing the population profile and being able to foresee different outcomes of decisions. The main competition is along the lines of imagination: what is a city, and what knowledge is essential for its planning? A symbolic struggle will also take place over the language used by planners to describe the development of a city. Urban geographer Tom Staler unpacks popular buzzwords and concepts adopted by academics, business leaders, media, and policymakers (like "resilient cities," "place-making," or "neighborhood effects"). He worries that "[t]he autonomous scholar, conducting research for reasons arrived at in the course of their engagements with knowledge, politics, and society, is increasingly a challenging role to fulfill."[61] Therefore, local knowledge can challenge the global unifying language of urban development. It also means engaging with different communities—which urban planners need to do in order to regain their autonomy.

8. Conclusions

I finished my interviews with architects and urban planners almost a year before the draft of Law No. 5655 was discussed. This document, in addition to serious corruption risks, is the final step in the erosion of architects' and planners' professional autonomy, which, according to the interviews I have collected, has been underway for decades. In describing their professional biographies, urban planners return to the period of state socialism, when ideological pressure and lack of resources were combined with institutional settings that could protect their professional field. In their narratives, urban planners refer to different "states" when talking about various periods and scales. Relations with the state on the local level—namely, the city administration—were crucial because they secured professional autonomy. Numerous powerful experts—such as Andrii Shuliar, Yaroslav Novakivsky, and Zynovii Pidlisnyi—cultivated diverse networks and were tightly connected to party nomenclature. Thanks to their positions, the entire field was perceived as stable and protected from external in-

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[60]   Urban planning professor, born in 1955, recorded December 31, 2020.
[61]   Tom Slater, Shaking Up the City: Ignorance, Inequality, and the Urban Question, Berkeley 2021, 186.

terference. Therefore urban planners now miss the times when they were closely related to the local administration.

My analysis is limited to one city during a specific period, but I hope that some generalizations can be drawn from it that might be tested in other contexts. Urban planning under state socialism was inherently a hierarchical practice with little (if any) public participation and the need to adjust to shifts in ideological discourse. Professionals who internalized this approach were struggling to adapt to the new power configuration after the collapse of the USSR. In the 1990s, the state lost the status of a primary developer; due to privatization, individual customers began to engage with the urban fabric. The city space was no longer the object for design by a single actor; instead, it was shaped by different people and institutions. Urban planners have to relate to diverse stakeholders: organized civil society, business, professionals from the natural and social sciences, heritage protection groups, and so forth.

Transformation of the institutional landscape contributes to the feeling of diminished professional autonomy because planners do not have enough resources either to protect the boundaries of their profession or to redefine them in a more inclusive way. After the partnership with the state and the local administration no longer provided them with secure positions (especially when the state first lost the resources and later became entangled with the interests of commercial developers), they could have established relationships with organized civil society and professionals from other fields. However, their training and professional ethos do not equip them with a more flexible vocabulary or skills like communication with different audiences. My hypothesis is that urban planners can regain their professional autonomy not through the return to a top-down approach and cooperation with the most resourceful players in the field (be it a state or commercial developers) but by communicating with different audiences and addressing different interests. Planners can re-establish their relations with various urban communities, but this requires the revision of their idea of professional autonomy, not as embedded in vertical relations, but as dispersed horizontally.

As the urban planning field has become more interdisciplinary, planners have perceived it as a threat to their professional autonomy. They were used to operating in a technocratic system and marshaling their design skills but were not ready to adjust to new developments. As one of the urban planning professors mentioned, the biggest challenge to his practice came with the introduction of computer technologies.[62] At the same time, their tacit knowledge is an important source of confidence and contribution to the development of their field.

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[62] Urban planning professor, born in 1942, recorded February 26, 2019.

Finally, questions about the professional autonomy of urban planners led me to reflect on the definition of the public good. Urban development affects large numbers of people and will impact the lives of several generations. Still, to address the expectations and needs of all these people, venues for discussion are necessary. The Communist Party dominated the public sphere; hence it was much easier for planners to deal with one player who embodied the "public good" than to navigate between numerous stakeholders. In twenty-first-century Ukraine, planners are compelled to operate within a pluralistic society, and they will address multiple challenges of post-war recovery.

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