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Reconfiguring the Republic Dream: New Equitable Housing Types in Post-Socialist Tbilisi

Irena Wight
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Reconfiguring the Republic Dream: New Equitable Housing Types in Post-Socialist Tbilisi

Abstract
Post-socialist Tbilisi is a city with a rich yet rapidly disappearing built heritage. The city’s long and layered histories as well as its location at the crossroads between Asia and Europe have shaped its urban and architectural forms to reflect its multicultural and cosmopolitan character. Traditional building types demonstrate the confluence of cultures and the inhabitants’ open social ideals, as gradients of privacy blend between private, public, and semiprivate. The Art Nouveau courtyard house embodies these values as its internal composition reveals that the shift toward Art Nouveau accompanied a broader redesign of domestic space at this moment. Further, these buildings were constructed when Georgia was determining its own cultural and national identity during the last years of the Russian Empire and before the country’s short-lived independence (1918-1921). They, therefore, offer insights and models for an architectural identity in present-day independent Georgia. This thesis aims to demonstrate how a deep understanding of building history can aid in introducing contemporary design into post-socialist (and post-imperialist) cities with a rich, yet quickly deteriorating, historic urban fabric, preserving their built heritage and cultural identities, and adding fundamental social needs. It intends to challenge the linear trajectory of uncontrolled new development in Tbilisi by analyzing and reinterpreting the spatial composition of the Art Nouveau courtyard house to provide an architectural opportunity for self-determination by Tbilisi residents.

Keywords
Art Nouveau, Tbilisi, Post-Socialist City, Adaptive Reuse, Built Heritage

Disciplines
Historic Preservation and Conservation

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RECONFIGURING THE REPUBLIC DREAM: NEW EQUITABLE HOUSING TYPES IN POST-SOCIALIST TBILISI

Irena Persis Patricia Wight

A THESIS

in

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through every endeavor in my life and who have continuously encouraged me through my spells of self-doubt. To my dad, whose advice from over forty years as a professor has helped me overcome many challenges in my academic career. And to my mom, who fled communist Czechoslovakia alone at eighteen to build a new life in Canada without ever imagining the possibility of returning. Your resolute optimism about life and strength to keep carrying on are qualities I can only hope to have.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to the city of Tbilisi, its citizens, and cultural heritage professionals, whose resiliency and determination in refusing their city’s built heritage to succumb to demolition is truly admirable. I hope this work may aid in your fight for what Tbilisi and its citizens deserve: respect and appreciation for your wonderful built heritage and innovative approaches to restore it so as to improve the quality of life.
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1.0 Introduction

Public and private. Both are terms that we as inhabitants of built space, understand as fundamental to the ownership of our environments. Private defines what is controlled by us and public defines what is shared by residents and citizens (or rather owned by the local, state, or federal government, or organizations such as churches and concert halls, but accessible to us as occupants and tax payers of urban space). This mindset describes, in an oversimplified way, the western construct of land ownership. But in many countries around the world, there is a space that lingers between these two defined polarities. A space that, due to historical trends in urban arrangements is jointly owned by many and thus shared by many. This space often contains the most democratic uses of the built environment – improvised playgrounds, hanging laundry, and neighborly discussions. However, this space, for the same reason, can also be used in ways that contradict its inherent design of being accessible to the greater community, used as parking lots or divided into individual private garden plots. The space being described is that of the semi-private.

Instances of semi-private space, as illustrated above, are prevalent in the post-socialist capital of Tbilisi, Georgia, notably found in the rear courtyards of its Art Nouveau housing. This courtyard space is the result of a long tradition of semi-private space and its rearrangement within the Tbilisian domestic building types. It began in the medieval darbazi and baniani sakhli houses, evolving to the nineteenth-century balcony house, and culminating in the Art Nouveau rear courtyard house of the early 20th century. The further evolution of the traditional Tbilisian domestic type was brought to a halt in 1921 when the Soviet Union invaded the small country, which had been independent from Imperial Russia’s century-long occupation for just three years. At this time, Soviet Russia implemented its housing policies, which mainly focused on the creation of mass-
produced apartment blocks, called microrayons. Historic structures in Tbilisi’s center began a nearly seventy-year period of neglect and overuse. Tbilisi’s Art Nouveau buildings were particularly hard hit as the Soviet government considered them to be of “bourgeois” origin and thus not worthy of state money for repair work. Simultaneously, Soviet policies drastically increased the number of residents living within them.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, Georgia entered a period of political chaos and uncertainty. Almost overnight, residential occupancy rights were converted into ownership rights, confusing ownership status and consequently deterring Tbilisi’s citizens from reinvesting in their properties. This resulted in the further deterioration of the city’s historic structures. With the election of Mikheil Saakashvili’s “Rose Government” into parliament in the 2000s, an era of rapid and uncontrolled new private development took hold in Tbilisi. At this time, the government accepted building proposals that blatantly ignored Georgian laws, such as developing in environmentally and culturally protected zones, arguing that these practices promoted international “investment” within the country. These political policies, along with the ongoing disrepair of historic Tbilisi, brought about the careless demolition of many historic structures. The government favored eye-catching architectural tropes that visually signaled Tbilisi’s emergence on the world stage, albeit superficially. At the same time, Tbilisi residents experienced a housing crisis with much of the housing stock overburdened and dilapidated.

These often-illegal building practices and disregard for historic and environmental sites continue today, as does the urgent need for more good-quality and affordable housing for Tbilisi’s citizens. This thesis intends to challenge the linear trajectory of uncontrolled new development in Tbilisi by analyzing and reinterpreting the spatial composition of the early 20th century Art Nouveau courtyard house. It proposes a new
equitable housing prototype for post-socialist Tbilisi that dissects and reforms the historical, spatial, and formal layers of this traditional courtyard house. The proposal also preserves and creates new value for Tbilisi’s Art Nouveau houses. The adaptive reuse design speculates on the levels of interaction between the interventions and the traditional housing. It does so with a series of architectural tactics that can be implemented in various ways to preserve and provide new programming for the Art Nouveau housing. Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates that the new urban and architectural identity towards which Tbilisi eagerly strives will not be successfully achieved by purely transplanting Western post-modern architectural design practices and “statement pieces” into its urban environment as is now the common practice. Rather, Tbilisi’s architectural and urban identity lies within the preservation and evolution of its own traditional spatial arrangements and its ability to reconfigure them for the 21st century context.

Tbilisi’s Art Nouveau (‘Stil Modern’ in Georgian) was constructed at a time when Georgia was determining its own cultural and national identity in the early 1900s. In contrast to building in the Historicist style as was dictated by Imperial Russia, Georgian architects and craftsmen adopted the abstract natural motifs and future-driven sentimentality of the Art Nouveau from Eastern Europe (primarily from the Secessionist movement) and incorporated them into the spatial layout of the traditional domestic building type. These buildings, however, should not be studied as and reduced to a “style.” Rather, they are remarkable as their internal compositions reveal that the shift toward “Art Nouveau” or “Secessionist” facades accompanied a broader redesign of domestic space at this moment, articulating, as Nestan Tatarashvili states, a very specific Eurasian identity.¹

The proposed housing prototype physically interacts with the Art Nouveau courtyard house and uses the lessons learned from the spatial composition of the existing building to provide a new more equitable and socially- and environmentally-sustainable housing strategy that gives Tbilisi residents more agency over their historic building stock and their lives. The new housing intervention considers questions of living, particularly issues of overcrowding in Tbilisi’s historic buildings, and also creates economic strategies to restore and maintain the original Art Nouveau courtyard houses.

This thesis aims to demonstrate how a deep understanding of building history can aid in introducing contemporary design into post-socialist (and post-imperialist) cities with a rich, yet rapidly deteriorating, historic urban fabric and an increase in new private development, as a means to preserve its cultural heritage and identity. Western researchers and academics have only recently begun studying countries east of the former Iron Curtain as they were unable to access archival or political documents until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 and 1990. Much of the research regarding the post-socialist city, however, has focused on its political and economic transformations, while “studies investigating changes in urban form and structure have been quite rare.”

Although an increasing number of architectural and urban planning researchers, such as Kimberly Elman Zarecor, Vladimir Kulic, Juliana Maxim, and Sonia Hirt, have begun to focus on the Second World states there is much work to be done in terms of studying

5 “Second World” refers to the former communist-socialist states in the Soviet Union, Eastern Bloc, and Yugoslavia.
their urban forms as resources for their successful future. Further, the former Soviet Union and its Satellite States, as well as the former Yugoslavia, were comprised of many countries, each with its own regional and ethnic identity, climate, and building tradition. Individual countries and even cities must be researched independently to understand how the Soviet Union spatially transformed the urban environments in each cultural context.

Research on post-socialist Tbilisi has mostly revolved around architectural history, urban planning, and cultural heritage management. These studies, although many written in English, have been primarily composed by Georgian researchers or academics from Europe, mainly England. They have focused on the onslaught of demolition and pseudo-conservation activities within Tbilisi’s historic and cultural center. This has led locals to lament that more of Tbilisi has been ruined within the last thirty years than during the entire seventy years of communism. Architectural historians and cultural heritage advocates hope to see most of the historic building stock restored to its original condition with international standards and with original materials. This thesis proposes how existing buildings can be adapted to modern values and lifestyles as an alternative to the traditional conservation approach.

Currently lacking in Tbilisi are ideas about how new design can respectfully insert itself in the historic urban landscape, and what this could mean for Tbilisi’s new architectural and cultural identity. The “Tbilisi Architecture Biennial,” which was held

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6 Maia Mania and Nestan Tatarashvili are the two preeminent researchers involved in studying Tbilisi’s architectural history and Art Nouveau buildings; Joseph Salukvadze, Paul Manning, and Oriel Prizeman have focused their research on Tbilisi’s current urban structure and policies; ICOMOS Georgia along with Maia Mania, Nestan Tatarashvili and many other Georgian architectural academics are focusing intensely on preserving Tbilisi’s cultural heritage.

between October 26 and November 3, 2018 and explored the concept of informal architecture in the Soviet housing neighborhood of Gldani, was the first opportunity for designers and planners to openly discuss and react against the development assault on Tbilisi. This event was a huge success in furthering the architectural discourse about the city and positing what architecture in Tbilisi means today. This thesis seeks to continue and slightly reorient the discussion to what contemporary design within Tbilisi’s historic center means. Instead of attempting to retain every single historic structure or, at the opposite extreme, demolishing them all, can there be small architectural interventions that mediate between these two polarities? Can architectural interventions provide social housing and other economic programs to retain the local community within the city center, and can this new development in fact promote the preservation of the historic building stock?

To challenge current development practices in Tbilisi and promote adaptive reuse approaches for conserving historic housing and maintaining its affordability, this study poses four questions: How can housing and the semi-private courtyard in post-socialist Tbilisi function? How can a new equitable housing prototype, that reconfigures the intricate and layered histories of housing in Tbilisi, be inserted in the Art Nouveau courtyard house to ensure the future survival of this first wave of a modern Tbilisian architecture and its inhabitants? Can these buildings become a means for Tbilisi residents to develop programming strategies and urban networking that promote self-sustainability, self-organization, and self-determination, while rejecting authoritarianism in its socialist state and capitalist state forms? Can this new housing prototype become a catalyst for Tbilisi’s post-socialist architectural identity?

To answer these questions and chart the evolution of dwelling and development in Tbilisi, this thesis elaborates on four main topics. First, it situates the project within
the historical context of Tbilisi and the post-socialist city. Second, it frames the adaptive reuse project in terms of the history of domestic space in Tbilisi and argues that the Art Nouveau courtyard house is one of Tbilisi’s greatest architectural assets. It notes how Soviet urban and housing policies permeated the entire historic and contemporary city, including its infrastructure and historic housing by increasing its density. Third, this study examines the contemporary urban and preservation issues Tbilisi is facing, including government apathy toward the historic building stock, lack of adequate and affordable housing, new development challenges, environmental degradation, diminishing public space, and the growing Internally Displaced Persons population. Fourth, this study provides an architectural adaptive reuse framework to use for the Art Nouveau courtyard houses. This framework discusses how contemporary design in historic settings and historic preservation can aid in solving Tbilisi’s equitable housing challenges, diminishing public space, and lack of preservation and maintenance knowledge amongst its residents.

1.1 Tbilisi, the Capital of Georgia

Tbilisi is the capital city of the small, geographically and culturally rich country of Georgia (Figure 1). The city has a similarly mild climate to Rome and Barcelona, a challenging topography with hills rising on both sides of the Mtkvari (Kura) River, and a wealth of built heritage. Today the city encompasses 504km² and has a population of just over 1 million.8 Located just south of Russia and bordering the Black Sea, Georgia is one of the four countries forming the Caucasus Region (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the southern tip of Russia). This region is defined by the high Caucasus Mountains which have historically marked the border between Europe and Asia. For most of its history, Georgia’s

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territory has been divided into two parts marked by the Surami mountain range: Western Georgia (anciently known as Colchis, and later as Lazica, Abasgia, or Imeretia) and Eastern Georgia (known as Iberia to the classical world, and Kartli to the Georgians) (Figure 2). Today, Georgians call themselves kartveli and their country sakartvelo, “the place of the Georgians,” a term which was coined during Georgia’s first and brief unification in the 11th century.9

Tbilisi was founded in the 5th century C.E. on the banks of the Mtkvari River, and became the capital of the Eastern Georgian kingdom, Kartli (Iberia) in the 6th century (Figure 3). Due to Tbilisi’s location on the border of Asia and Europe and surrounding modern and ancient empires (Persian, Byzantine, Arabian, Mongolian, and Ottoman), it has historically been an important economic and geopolitical center. Consequently, Tbilisi has always been characterized by a multicultural and cosmopolitan character, with the city’s urban and architectural forms physically representing these varied cultural layers. However, also due to the country’s location, it has been the center of rivalries from the surrounding empires.10

Constant battles and wars between these kingdoms and the North Caucasian tribes took their economic toll on the 18th century Georgian Kartli-Kakheti kingdom, at which time its king, Irakli [Erekle], sought to ally his country with the Russian Empire, ruled by Catherine the Great. Russia abandoned its military protection of the small country twice during the late 1700s to focus its troops on the first and second Russo-Turkish wars. It was during the second war that Georgia, deserted and unable to defend itself, was invaded by the Iranian shah, Aga Mohammed Kahn, with his troops capturing and razing Tbilisi in 1795. The Georgian kingdom, in one last desperate attempt, sought military protection from Russia in 1797. However, Tsar Alexander I determined that

10 Salukvadze and Golubchikov, “City as a Geopolitics,” 39-41.
Russian interests lay in the region and consequently that the kingdom had to cede its independence and incorporate itself completely into the Russian Empire. In 1801, without consulting Georgian representatives in St. Petersburg, Tsar Alexander declared that the Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti had been abolished.11

The medieval urban form of Tbilisi, rebuilt after its Persian sacking, was composed of a “compact settlement with a medieval social organization and an irregular oriental-style layout”12 (Figures 4 & 5). With its annexation into the Russian Empire, Tbilisi became the administrative and cultural center of Transcaucasia, and thus experienced a rapid urban transformation into a ‘European-style’ city; a metropolitan center with grand boulevards and Classical architecture.13 The main axis of development changed from the Kura River to the newly developed avenues based on a regular gridded plan (Figure 6). The 19th century developments were socially more homogeneous than the medieval core, inhabited by Russian bureaucrats, wealthy Armenian entrepreneurs, and Georgian aristocracy. Western architects from Europe, as well as Georgian architects who had trained in Europe, came to Tbilisi to design buildings in its new neighborhoods, introducing styles such as Neo-Renaissance, Neo-Baroque, Italian Gothic, and the Art Nouveau. Other urban types foreign to pre-19th century Tbilisi such as administrative

12 Salukvadze and Golubchikov, “City as a Geopolitics,” 41.
13 The Georgians had always led a more rural way of life, in large part due to the kingdom’s practice of serfdom until the 1860s: by the end of the 18th century, 97.2% of Tbilisi’s 3,498 inhabitants were serfs. Consequently, the number of non-Georgians living in Tbilisi exceeded that of Georgian nationals in the early 19th century. In 1803, 2,700 Georgian nationals lived in Tbilisi comprising 22.6% of the population. For the Georgians, conducting urban forms of work such as trade was considered shameful and equivalent to being “Armenian.” Much of the trade in Tbilisi at this time was in fact controlled by the Armenian population and they formed most of the bourgeois social class, a cause of displeasure for many Georgians. The Russian population in Tbilisi was small but held much administrative power and controlled the politics of the country. Due to the city’s location on the crossroads of Europe and Asia, the population of Tbilisi in the 19th century was significantly diverse. Georgians, Armenians, Persians, Russians, and even French, Poles, Ukrainians, and Germans composed the city’s population. Nino Chanishvili, “Nineteenth-Century Architecture of Tbilisi as a Reflection of Cultural and Social History in the City,” FaRiG Rothschild Research Grant, 2007, http://farig.org/research, 2.
buildings, parks, palaces, squares connected by boulevards, botanic gardens, opera houses and theatres, museums, and schools, were all erected during this time (Figures 7 & 8).14

In the late 19th century, a movement against Russification began in Georgia. Academics and intellectuals sought to revive Georgian culture and national identity, which had been suppressed since Russia’s annexation of the country in 1801. “The Society for the Propogation of Literacy among Georgians,” which established Georgian schools and libraries, was founded in 1879. At the same time, the general population began actively participating in Georgian culture with the establishment of Georgian theatre performances, Georgian newspapers (“Iveria” and “Droeba”), and the study of Georgian history and literature in schools. Proponents for Georgian language and culture fought against the gradual loss of old traditions in Tbilisi. They idealized the past, especially the agrarian tradition of Georgia.15 An article in “Droeba,” the leading Georgian newspaper in the late 19th century, wrote:

The pupils who have grown up in Tbilisi are well educated. Just have a look at the pedestrians in a delightful manner. You will see the extraordinarily educated ladies, who look like Parisian coquettes. How come they happen to be here! Beginning from their hats and high heel fashionable shoes to the way they walk in the streets, is nothing but Parisian. They even talk in French as they believe speaking in their mother tongue is a shame and a sign of being far out.”16

This search for a national identity and means for self-determination made its way into the architecture of the city as well. Tbilisi’s Art Nouveau houses best exemplify these sentiments, as the architects and craftspeople merged the European style with traditional Tbilisian domestic construction and spatial arrangements. Georgian craftsmen experimented with the style both materially and stylistically, as manifest in the distinctive

14 Ibid. 13-14, 18.
15 Georgia is one of the oldest wine-making countries in the world. Even today, the agrarian tradition is very much apart of modern Georgian living. Chanishvili, “Nineteenth-Century Architecture of Tbilisi,” 3.
wooden rear balconied courtyards, the exterior staircases detailed with intricate ironwork, and instances of façade ornamentation that refer to Georgian mythology, that make the Art Nouveau houses uniquely Tbilisian (Figures 9 & 10).

After the collapse of the Russian Empire and February Revolution in 1917, Georgia’s 117-year occupation by Russia came to an end and it gained independence on May 26, 1918. The country declared itself as the Democratic Republic of Georgia (also known as the Georgian Menshevik Party). As Ronald Grigor Suny writes, “by 1917 Georgians not only had a sense of their own history and national character, but they had also developed their own national leadership intellectuals who enjoyed support among the peasants as well as among their original constituents, the workers.” Suny further clarifies that the country’s independence resulted from the simultaneous occurrence of political struggles in Russia and a military threat from Turkey, and was not a planned conjunction:

The conjuncture of events that led to independence was in no sense the controlled result of social democratic aspirations of planning. Despite the hopes of the small number of Georgian nationalists, independence was not the desired goal. Rather it was the physical and political separations from Bolshevik Russia created by the civil war and the immediate threat of a Turkish invasion that forced the Georgians, Azerbaijanis, and Armenians to break officially with Russia. The Georgians now had the full panoply of political power and the possibility of building a new sovereign state.

While Bolshevik Russia organized itself and re-established its hegemony in the region, Georgia was able to govern itself independently. However, the country received little organizational and political support from Western states apart from financial aid. This would put Georgia’s future independence in peril, especially as “Bolshevik Russia ultimately would not accept separation of the Caucasian republics.” As the year 1920

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 208.
closed, the Red Army began encircling Georgia, declaring Soviet republics in Azerbaijan and Armenia. On February 14, 1921, the government in Moscow ordered the invasion of Georgia, which took place the following day as the Eleventh Red Army crossed the border from Azerbaijan into Georgia. On February 25th, the social democratic Menshevik government left Tbilisi for Batumi where they mounted a last desperate defense but fled into exile three weeks later.20

The Soviet Union’s invasion of Georgia was immediately followed by the introduction of the Soviet planned economy, bringing about massive societal transformations that not every citizen understood they must follow. As Suny explains in a short anecdote, Tbilisi’s citizens soon learned that obeying these policies and laws was not an option:

After long silent hours, whistling could be heard in the distance, and the Bolshevik soldiers marched into the town center. An unknown commissar called upon the citizens to bring their surplus grain, soap, and other foodstuffs to Erivan Square for distribution; harsh penalties were promised for hoarders. The Mirzoevs’ landlord was to learn a few days later that the Bolsheviks were serious about their commandments. When a large sack of flour was discovered in his basement, he was led away, never to be seen again.21

Similar narratives about the disappearance of dissidents are common in all former Soviet states. Governing by terror was a major factor in securing Soviet control in these countries. Georgia would be a part of the Soviet Union for nearly seventy years until 1991. During these decades, Tbilisi’s urban form greatly expanded and altered with the introduction of Soviet urban and housing policies, which sought to densify residential buildings and neighborhoods, and establish large-scale infrastructure projects (Figure 11). By 1990, Tbilisi’s population had increased to six-times its pre-Soviet level and the land area had increased ten times.22 These policies increased the number of apartments

20 Ibid., 207.
21 Ibid. 209.
22 Salukvadze and Golubchikov, “City as a Geopolitics,” 40.
in the historic building stock and instigated the construction of planned *khrushchevkas* and *microrayons*\(^\text{23}\) on the periphery of the city. They also established widespread infrastructural transformations by building urban recreation areas, national institutions, highways, and underground metros.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, Georgia, like other European Second World countries, sought to become a “modernized” country based on neo-liberal principles. This transformation is still taking shape and impacts built heritage and urban processes within the country. The current urban issues arising in post-socialist Tbilisi will be discussed in Section 3 of this paper.

### 1.2 The Post-Socialist City

When discussing urban systems in post-socialist cities such as Tbilisi, it is imperative to consider the infrastructural and programmatic layering and development that took place over the decades of socialism. In her article, “What was so Socialist about the Socialist City? Second World Urbanity in Europe,” historian Kimberly Zarecor asks the most pressing question facing post-socialist cities: “What [is to be done] with the concept of the socialist city once socialism itself ends?” She further elaborates, “even after a city’s relationship to socialism is severed, and its institutions dismantled, the built environment endures.”\(^\text{24}\) Zarecor argues that the built environment of the socialist city developed in parallel with the welfare state and other capitalist urbanisms, originally inspired by the nineteenth-century industrial city models, but not replicating them.\(^\text{25}\) The spatial model of the socialist city’s urban form is best described by French and Hamilton (1979) as consisting of eight concentric zones: (1) the historic core with medieval and renaissance

\(^{23}\) Khrushchevkas are low-cost, mass-produced panelled apartment buildings (typically 5 stories) built during the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev. Microrayons are residential complexes of mass-produced housing built from the 1970s till the end of the Soviet Union. They are composed of high-rise towers ranging from seven to sixteen stories.

\(^{24}\) Zarecor, “What Was So Socialist about the Socialist City?,” 96.

\(^{25}\) Ibid. 97.
structures; (2) the inner pre-socialist capitalist neighborhoods; (3) an outer zone of early socialist transition characterized by modern construction encroaching on and replacing traditional pre-soviet villages; (4) a zone of 1950s socialist housing; (5) large-scale socialist neighborhoods and districts from the 1960s and 1970s; (6) vast greenbelts; (7) industrial zones; and (8) surrounding countryside and recreational areas (Figure 12).  

Tbilisi’s socialist urban form clearly followed this pattern though it was transformed by local geography. Due to the city’s location between two mountain ranges on either side of the Mtkvari River (a strategic move for medieval Tbilisi), the city was forced to expand linearly. Its post-socialist development is blurring these distinct borders and expanding them further out. However, the socialist city’s structural bones still very much dictate how modern Tbilisi functions and will continue to function well into the future. Zarecor writes, “the layers of embedded systems and spatial hierarchies in these cities, built and expanded during socialism, were so integral to their existences that they endured beyond the political and cultural life spans of the regimes.” Thus, in designing for the post-socialist city, it is essential to consider the lasting impacts the socialist city has on contemporary life and urban processes, and acknowledge how these systems continue to shape domestic, economic, social, and political patterns.

Figure 1: Map of Georgia. Source: Google Maps Adapted by Author

Figure 2: Ancient Map of Iberia and Colchis (Abasgia). Source: Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation
Figure 3: Map of Tbilisi, 1735. Source: Archives at the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation
Figure 4: Old Tbilisi. Source: Archives at the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation
Figure 5: Old Tbilisi. Source: Archives at the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation
Figure 6: Map of Tbilisi, 1913. Development of 19th Century City on a Gridded Plan. Source: Archives at the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation
Figure 7: 19th Century Development. Tamamshev’s Theatre-Caravanserai and the Museum of Fine Arts on Pushkini Street. Source: Archives at the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation

Figure 8: 19th Century Development. Asatiani Street. Source: Archives at the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation
Figure 9: Art Nouveau Facade at 16 General Mazniashvili Street, 1906, Apartment House

Figure 10: Art Nouveau Rear Courtyard at 38 Lado Asatiani Street, Early 20th Century, Apartment House
Figure 11: Soviet Ministry of Transport Building (1975). Source: Roberto Conte & Stefano Perego, ArchDaily

Figure 12: Map of Tbilisi’s Soviet & Post-Soviet Configuration. Source: Salukvadze and Golubchikov, *City as Geopolitics*
2.0 Domestic Space in Tbilisi

Domestic Tbilisian architecture demonstrates a distinctive typological and spatial evolution over several centuries. The late David Marshall Lang, a former professor of Caucasian studies at the University of London, wrote, “Georgian architecture, ancient and modern, shows remarkable adaptability.” This adaptability, whether it be spatial or material, is striking when studying Georgian domestic types over many centuries. As this research focuses on the architecture of Tbilisi, the following section discusses the evolution of dwelling types in Eastern Georgia.

2.1 The Evolution of Traditional Eastern Georgian Dwellings

Tbilisian dwellings have historically displayed a gradient between private, public, and semi-private space, eventually culminating in the Art Nouveau courtyard house. The subtle opening of Tbilisian domestic types towards the street demonstrates a greater openness to society as a whole. The semi-private space of the courtyard remains one of the most intriguing spaces in Tbilisi’s urban form. The next section will describe how semi-private space in Tbilisian domestic architecture evolved, beginning with the medieval darbazi houses and ending with the Art Nouveau courtyard house, and argue why the Art Nouveau is the starting point for designing an equitable post-socialist future.

29 Georgia has an astonishing diversity of domestic types due to its drastically varied geography. The valleys of the High Caucasus Mountains in the north boast the mystical and fortified Svaneti towers. The western region of the country borders the Black Sea and thus its traditional dwellings respond to its environment, mainly the heavy rainfall. The oda, a wooden rectangular house surrounded entirely by a covered balcony and punctured with large windows sits high off the ground on wooden or stone legs. This building type is considered to be “moveable property” and as such is easy to deconstruct, relocate, and reconstruct. The populations of the Ajari region by the Black Sea based their livelihoods on livestock – consequently, they moved three times throughout the year, from the lowlands to the highlands, and thus had three different houses. The Adjari region’s lazuri house uses both stone and wood as building materials. Nana Meparishvili, “Traditional Homes of Georgia: The Reason to Be Proud,” Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, February 24, 2015, https://folklife.si.edu/talkstory/2015/traditional-homes-of-georgia-the-reason-to-be-proud.
for Tbilisi.

2.1.1 The Medieval Darbazi House

The *darbazi* house is one of the oldest domestic types in eastern Georgia (Figures 13 & 14). This wooden dwelling, cut deep into the earth, is distinctive for its open hall floorplan, in which several generations lived together, and for its tapering roof structure that culminates in a central aperture acting as a chimney or light well. This “pyramidal corbelled cupola,” called *gvirgvini*, is constructed of “hewn logs and beams, the bottom layer being laid horizontally with ends overlapping to form a rectangle or octagon upon which successive layers of logs are then piled up”\(^\text{30}\) (Figure 15) Well-known in the classical world as a typical dwelling type for the kingdom of Colchis and Iberia, Vitruvius even included a description of the *darbazi* in his *Ten Books on Architecture*:

> Among the Colchians in Pontus, where there are forests in plenty, they lay down entire trees flat on the ground to the right and the left, leaving between them a space to suit the length of the trees, and then place above these another pair of trees, resting on the ends of the former and at right angles with them. These four trees enclose the space for the dwelling. Then upon these they place sticks of timber, one after the other on the four sides, crossing each other at the angles, and so, proceeding with their walls of trees laid perpendicularly above the lowest, they build up high towers. The interstices, which are left on account of the thickness of the building material, are stopped up with chips and mud. As for the roofs, by cutting away the ends of the crossbeams and making them converge gradually as they lay them across, they bring them up to the top from the four sides in the shape of a pyramid. They cover it with leaves and mud and thus construct the roofs of their towers in a rude form of the ‘tortoise’ style.\(^\text{31}\)

As the *darbazi* was partially subterranean and had its roof structure covered in earth, the roof also acted as a gathering space for the inhabitants and their visitors. Thus, the *darbazi* is one of the first domestic types in Eastern Georgia to suggest a spatial realm for semi-private life. Although the *darbazi* was prevalent throughout Georgian cities

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\(^{30}\) Lang, The Georgians, 119-123.

and towns for several centuries, this domestic type disappeared entirely during Tbilisi’s nineteenth century development – its historic and rural organization of space was no longer compatible with the modern city’s rapidly evolving requirements.32

2.1.2 The Medieval Baniani Sakhli House

Along with the darbazi, a second type of early Tbilisian dwelling, the baniani sakhli, also characterized the urban fabric of the city until the 1860s (Figures 16 & 17). This domestic type was composed of a flat roof with pressed earth, bani, which also acted as a terrace for gatherings.33 Dr. Friedrich Parrot, a Baltic-German explorer and professor of natural philosophy, vividly recounts the structural, material, spatial, environmental, and social elements of Tbilisi’s baniani sakhli in his memoir of his expedition to Mount Ararat (today in Eastern Turkey) in 1829:

There is one circumstance which, in my opinion, also contributes not a little to maintain a degree of coolness in the apartments of an Eastern house; that is, the peculiar roof, if we may be allowed to give this name to the uppermost floor or terrace of their houses. This is formed of a layer of earth and stiff clay, about two feet thick, quite even, but inclined by about two inches to one side, so that during a heavy shower of rain the water may not run off at all sides, but be directed through a couple of openings in the parapet, which rises about a foot above the level of the roof. This bed of earth acts hygrometrically upon the atmosphere, imbibing the damps by night, which are again evaporated in the heat of the day, and by a known law of physics, has a perceptible effect in cooling the air; whereas, under the usual European roof, which has been most unadvisedly introduced by foreigners into Tiflis, an actual reverberation of the heat takes place. These flat terraces are, moreover, usually overgrown with weeds; it is said to be particularly the Lepidium vesicarium which is there met with. This becomes scorched in summer, and then is set on fire to get rid of the dry stalks, so that the fire which soon seizes on this inflammable vegetable matter, will often present the startling and beautiful spectacle of a wide body of flame sweeping over the city in the night.

This terrace is also the place to which the Georgians of the ancient stock

33 Ibid.
resort, when the sun had set and the heat of the day has declined, to enjoy themselves with their family and friends in the cool air, taking a look into the streets of the town, admiring the magnificent snowy peaks of the Caucasus, or indulging themselves with tea or wine, and often passing the entire night on it in song and music; this is the place where many a one, exhausted by the heat of the day, and anxious to escape from the scarcely less intolerable heat of the night in the apartments below, tries to court the respite of a little refreshing repose under a tent; the place, too, where upon all occasions of solemn processions through the narrow streets, the Georgian fair, enveloped from head to foot in their thick and snowy veils, find a convenient stand, from which they may see and be seen.34

This detailed description demonstrates that semi-private spaces on the rooftops of Tbilisi’s vernacular dwellings not only acted as important areas for entertaining, resting, seeing, and being seen, but also functioned as significant environmental and climatic mitigation. These two traditional building types, however, began to disappear with the 1828 “Russian Emperor Nicholas I’s First Decree,” prohibiting the construction of flat-roofed houses near main streets and boulevards.35 Despite continuous attempts by Russian officials to eradicate Tbilisi’s traditional building forms and types, the citizens merely adapted their living spaces to play within the European guidelines, while creatively inserting their traditional dwelling and spatial practices. Thus, the activities that defined the versatile and dynamic programming of the baniani sakhli and darbazi rooftops evolved in the nineteenth century to the front and rear balconies that characterize much of Tbilisi’s Old City today.

2.1.3 The 19th Century Balcony House

The 19th century saw a dramatic increase in development within Tbilisi, largely due to the Russian presence. The city evolved from a semi-agrarian feudal town, where citizens owned plots of cultivated land, to one of the most important cities within the Russian Empire, acting as the political, administrative, and cultural center of

Transcaucasia. Mikhail Vorontsov (1844-1852), the first Viceroy of the Russian Tsar in the Caucasus, implemented major urban and architectural changes to the city. Although the Russians believed Tbilisi’s houses had too many Asiatic traits for the new European city and sought their demolition, they ultimately resolved that there were just too many and that it would be too costly to do so.36

Beginning in the 1830s, the city’s dwellings changed from the relatively inward-facing houses of the *darbazi* and *baniani sakhlī* to the outward-facing balcony houses (Figure 18).37 These dwellings form the majority of Tbilisi’s old city (Kala, Avlabari, and Sololaki districts) and are characterized by overhanging wooden balconies and walkways (bridges connecting houses), both semi-private areas of gathering that replaced the *bani* (Figure 19). Three-sided courtyards project out towards the street, causing the semi-private space of the courtyards and balconies to act as thresholds between the public street and private dwelling space (Figure 20). In warm weather, all forms of communal activities took place and to an extent still do on the balconies, including having tea, breakfast, and dinner. Residents occasionally even slept on the balconies.

As Nino Chavinshvili states, the balconies were in a sense part of the street, where residents would keep an eye on city life.38 Renowned architectural historian of Tbilisi, Maia Mania, also notes that “Tbilisi residents’ everyday lives were strongly connected with the balcony and it was of vital importance to Tbilisi. As an important urban element, the ubiquitous overhanging wooden balcony largely determined the image of 19th century

36  Ibid., 7-11.
37  Older balcony houses from the late 18th century can still be found in Tbilisi today, although few remain due to the city’s sacking by the Persian Invasion in 1795. Such an example is at 33. Solomon Brjenis Street in the Avlabari district, a late 18th century house which has been modified several times over the past two centuries. These earlier balcony houses were constructed of bricks made of local clay held together by air-spaced mortar, a local mortar composed mostly of clay and sand with between 10-15% of lime. The walls were typically finished with gaji, a mixture of clay and gypsum, which was used as a type of plaster on both the exterior and interior walls. Personal Interview with Lela Ninoshvili, Conservator at ICOMOS Georgia, February 14, 2019.
Tbilisi.”\textsuperscript{39} Although these houses ultimately had the “usual European roof” that Friedrich Parrot considered an inadequate alternative to the \textit{baniani sakhli’s} “green” roof, the wooden covered balconies also act as climatic controls providing solar shading for the dwellings’ masonry walls. The walls also contained large window openings to promote cross-ventilation.

With the increase in urban development that took place in Tbilisi in the mid-nineteenth century, the city expanded with new neighborhoods outside of the historic core, such as Chughureti, Mtatsminda, Sololaki, Kukia, Didube, and Vere. These neighborhoods were defined by a European urban and architectural forms, centering themselves around grand boulevards like Rustaveli and Davit Aghmashenebeli Avenues. Street patterns evolved from tightly winding medieval streets following the mountainous topography to a uniform grid that shaped the landscape to meet the city’s needs. The 1830s and 40s saw the emergence of the first Tbilisian dwellings which combined local building crafts traditions with European forms imported from Russia. The urban positioning of dwellings also changed at this time. The facades became oriented towards the street, in contrast to traditional balcony houses which had their three-sided courtyards facing out to the street.\textsuperscript{40} Until the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, new development was constructed in the Neoclassicist style, occasionally alluding to Tbilisian craft tradition with the inclusion of a wooden rear courtyard. The architectural practice of merging the traditional building craft with a European style would culminate with the Art Nouveau courtyard house in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Here, the semi-private space of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century balcony house moved to the rear courtyards.

\textsuperscript{40} Chanishvili, “Nineteenth-Century Architecture of Tbilisi,” 16.
2.2 The Early 20th Century Art Nouveau Courtyard House

Tbilisi’s Art Nouveau structures insert themselves into the larger early 20th century movement in a way that highlights place as well as local and social practices (Figure 21 & 22). Since the conception of the Art Nouveau, which proliferated at an unprecedented speed across Europe between 1890 and 1914, academics have argued over its recognition as a style, fad, or a movement. In any case, there is no doubt that this architectural, artistic, and literary development had a relationship to societal, national, and identity-forming campaigns across greater Europe as well as in specific regions. As Paul Greenhalgh argues, the Art Nouveau can be considered as “the first self-conscious modern style in the fine and decorative arts, design and architecture,” and that it is “international and principally urban: a phenomenon based in key cities.” However, he clarifies that, although the Art Nouveau is international, it has “a powerful ethnic identity from city to city and region to region.”

Greenhalgh specifies three main sources of inspiration for the Art Nouveau: nature (i.e. science, metamorphosis, and pantheism), history (i.e. ethnic identities and alternative viewpoints), and symbolism (poetry, religion, mythologies, the new psychology, and sexuality). The façades of the Art Nouveau buildings in Tbilisi most resemble those of the Secession in Central Europe, where “architects were more concerned with the decoration of surfaces” and “made almost no attempt at a formal autonomy.” The Secession “developed inside the baroque paradigm, with much stronger ties to historicism than to its parallel movements in France, England, or Belgium.” In Tbilisi, not only were new buildings and houses constructed in the Art Nouveau style, but older Historicist buildings

42 Ibid.
were retrofitted with new elements like doors, balconies, banisters, windows, and even entire facades (Figures 23 & 24).

The residential building at 4. Romi Street in the district of Chugureti demonstrates the Tbilisian architectural shift from Historicist to Art Nouveau design (Figures 25 & 26). The original Kartvelishvili apartment house was constructed in the latter half of the 19th century as a Historicist building and reconstructed by Simon Kladiashvili (1856-1920) in 1902 in the Art Nouveau paradigm. This thesis argues that the major influence for the adoption of the Art Nouveau into the Georgian architectural language was its “self-conscious re-exploration of the past for the future,” as it proliferated when desires of an independent Georgia were high. Accordingly, contemporary design in Tbilisi should follow the Art Nouveau’s strategy of reinterpreting past architectural strategies for present-day uses and urban patterns.

The Art Nouveau first appeared in Tbilisi in 1901, relatively late compared to the rest of Europe. As Georgia had a highly developed craft industry, the style became popular among architects, craftsmen, and locals, spreading rapidly not only within Tbilisi, but also out to the coastal cities of Batumi, Poti, and Sukhumi, and even to smaller interior towns (Figure 27). As Nestan Tatarashvili, Tbilisi’s expert on Art Nouveau, notes, the style not only spread through the upper class, but to many other social classes. Local craftsmen and residents were very fond of the style. Further, the embrace of the Art Nouveau occurred at a specific historic moment in Georgia, in the final years of the Russian Empire and during to the country’s short independence between 1918 and 1921, the year of the Soviet occupation. At this time, Georgians were searching for and articulating their own

45 Greenhalgh, Art Nouveau: The first International Modern Style.
national and cultural identity, through literature, newspaper publications, and art. As Greenhalgh notes, “ethnic identity became political, and design responded to it.”48 The Tbilisian architectural response thus was not just the adoption of a European style with a modern aspiration, but the complete reinterpretation of the traditional domestic space in both plan and section (Figure 28). Unfortunately for the architecture and craft tradition of the small country, seventy years of Soviet control would eradicate the natural progression of design and dwelling configurations and would create severe pressures on its historic housing.

The Art Nouveau courtyard houses show the integration of traditional and modern materials and building practices. Most of these structures are composed of brick masonry and wood framing for floors and roofs, held together with cement mortar, and finished with exterior and interior plaster. There are a few cases where stone was used for the structural walls. As was the case in the rest of Europe, iron did make its way to Georgia at the beginning of the 20th century, used mostly decoratively on exterior balconettes and staircases but occasionally structurally, encased within floor plates and the roofing systems.49 As within some earlier Neoclassical structures, the Art Nouveau’s rear courtyard balconies are where Tbilisi’s historic building craft tradition emerges. Levels of wooden balconies protrude off the exterior masonry walls creating an exterior circulation system that is connected through a series of linear and spiral staircases. Though often open to the outside, the balconies are occasionally enclosed by glazing, adding another layer of material richness to the already intriguing system. The balconies are often made of local pine, but are also made of larch, which was imported from Russia.50 The rear balcony systems juxtapose the orderly interior spatial layout and circulation, physically creating a three-dimensional organicism to which the decorative reliefs on the facades allude.

48  Greenhalgh, Art Nouveau: The first International Modern Style.
49  Personal interview with Nato Tsintsabadze, Director of ICOMOS Georgia, February 13, 2019.
50  Ibid.
Tbilisi’s Art Nouveau courtyard houses have a distinctive character and identity that is defined by their visual and physical features. These aesthetic and tangible aspects make the experience of moving through the buildings, from the Art Nouveau facades to the traditional wooden courtyard balconies, engaging and dynamic. The character-defining elements of Tbilisi’s Art Nouveau courtyard houses include:

- The Art Nouveau façade with its ornamental plasterwork surrounding windows and defining parapets, and decorative balconies either made of stone or iron (Figures 29 & 30);
- Ornate wooden front doors with ironwork detailing (Figure 30);
- The interior entry hall(s) and main stairwell(s) with intricate wall paintings and floor patterns (some of these paintings have been covered by modern interventions from the buildings’ inhabitants), skylights, and detailed ironwork railings (Figure 31);
- The individual apartment units with Art Nouveau walls paintings and wooden panelling;
- The courtyard entryway as an underpass through the building, defined by ironwork gates that create a constant transparency to the back and which mostly remain open (Figure 32);
- The wooden balcony system defining the rear edge of the Art Nouveau building characterized by intricate lacework detailing: these balconies transition between being open to the exterior and covered with panelized glazing (Figure 33);
- Exterior and interior balcony circulation systems, much of which are made of iron (Figure 34);
• And the greater courtyard which can include mature trees from the late 19th century, patches of vegetation or small garden plots, utilitarian functions like drying laundry, social interactions among residents, and modern-day infill buildings (Figure 35).

In contemporary additions to Tbilisi’s Art Nouveau buildings, these character-defining features should be heightened and alluded to so that natural patterns of living and socializing can flourish and strengthen in these environments.

2.3 Soviet Housing in Tbilisi and Contemporary Adaptations

Soviet housing policies in Tbilisi, as in other Soviet states, were dictated by who was in power at the time. When the Red Army annexed Georgia in 1921, land and real estate immediately underwent nationalization. This included a massive process of expropriation of real estate from the aristocracy, bourgeoisie, wealthy farmers, traders, and businessmen, and its redistribution among the proletariat. In the early 1920s and 1930s, the government implemented a policy of socialist industrialization which drastically increased the amount of migration to urban centers. Consequently, the government enforced planning policies which provided minimal living standards for the urban population. “Communalization” or the establishment of “communal apartments” gave residents a minimum dwelling space of less than 10 m²/person with shared facilities like kitchens, baths, and lavatories (sometimes inside or outside the main structure). These space allowances, decreed in the law of July 17, 1919, were used to justify evictions of ‘the enemies of the proletariat’ (i.e. wealthy property owners) and uplotneniye, the ‘filling’ of under-occupied houses.51 This practice was mainly implemented in Tbilisi’s

historic city where a multi-generational family\textsuperscript{52} would live in one room of a historic building (on average 25m\textsuperscript{2}) sharing bathrooms and kitchens with neighbors (Figure 30). Although communalization aided in relieving Tbilisi’s housing shortage for a short while, it could not overcome the impact of rapid growth. Further, during Stalin’s era of power (1930-50s) very few good quality housing units were erected.\textsuperscript{53}

“Communalization” affected Tbilisi’s Art Nouveau houses. They were built either as single family or multi-family apartment dwellings, with ample room for its residents; however they were divided up in the early years of the Soviet Union (Figure 36 & 37). Extreme overcrowding became a very significant problem within historic dwellings and continues to be today.\textsuperscript{54} Under these circumstances, the semi-private courtyards became valuable social gathering spaces for residents and provided an architectural scaffold for vital community systems to thrive. As Oriel Prizeman writes, “the deep balconies, with impossible large cantilevers impose individualism over the collective in a unique way.”\textsuperscript{55} Despite these social features of the Art Nouveau courtyard house, maintenance of these buildings has become a severe issue, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union (and the convoluted privatization practices that took place) as discussed in more depth in section 3.

In the late 1950s and 1960s, the Soviet Union experienced the “Khrushchev thaw,” a time when censorship and repression were relaxed after Stalin’s iron grip and co-existence with other nations commenced. This period saw mass housing programs with the promotional slogan “each family – separate apartment” take shape. As the

\textsuperscript{52} In 2015, 48% of Tbilisi’s households had three or more adults living in them. Oriel Prizeman, “Maintenance of Shared Spaces: Courtyards of Tbilisi,” Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development 6, no. 3 (2015): 5.
\textsuperscript{53} Ashna Mathema, Joseph Salukvadze, and Max Budovitch, “Georgia Urban Strategy: Housing”, 20, 39.
\textsuperscript{54} In the mid-1920s, average dwelling space was 6m\textsuperscript{2} per person. By the 1930s and 1940s, average dwellings space had reduced to 4m\textsuperscript{2} per person. The 1970s saw the average dwelling space increase to 8m\textsuperscript{2}. The sanitary norm of 9m\textsuperscript{2} per person for dwelling units calculated by the Soviets was not achieved. Matthews, “Social Dimensions in Soviet Urban Housing,” 106.
\textsuperscript{55} Prizeman, “Maintenance of Shared Spaces,” 5.
slogan suggests, having multi-generational families living together in one apartment was becoming increasingly unacceptable among citizens. To meet the housing needs, the government implemented the rapid proliferation of *khrushchevkas*, low-quality, standardized apartment blocks (Figure 38 & 39). These mid-Soviet period buildings were typically five stories high. Each flat had its own kitchen and bathroom (unlike the historic buildings) and the complexes offered basic social amenities like a kindergarten, school, and shops.56

From the 1970s until the Soviet Union’s collapse, the housing authority carried out large-scale construction of pre-fabricated apartment complexes, forming residential districts called *microrayons* (Figure 40). These buildings increased in height to 8 or 9 stories and later to 12, 14, and 16 stories. The complexes had the same basic private and communal amenities as the *khrushchevkas*, but unit sizes were slightly increased, with ceiling heights going from 2.6 meters to 2.75 meters. However, the overall quality of Soviet mass housing in Georgia was lower than that in Slavic and Baltic states and there was little architectural variety. The government built these houses cheaply and quickly, and contractors often stole construction material to resell on the market for the construction of *dachas*, country houses or cottages used as a vacation home.57

During *Perestroika* in the 1980s, the Georgian government sought to alleviate housing shortages by permitting tenants to extend their living spaces. The program was called ‘Habitat-2000’ and the resolution of May 18, 1989 (“On attaching loggias, verandas, balconies and other auxiliary spaces to the states and cooperative houses at a cost of the dwellers/tenants”) allowed residents to build extensions onto their apartments, called *pristrojikas*. These extensions could only be built on multi-unit apartment buildings up to nine stories high. During these years, the government regulated the construction of

56 Ibid. 20, 43.
57 Ibid. 20, 43-44.
the extensions, managing the design, construction, size, and quality. The extensions typically filled former balconies of Soviet housing. However, after the privatization of the 1990s, the construction of these extensions became unregulated and unruly. Residents began building them in the thousands with improper materials and in unsafe locations—many are structurally hazardous and ugly (Figure 41).  

The balcony infill is just one manifestation of a larger housing problem in Tbilisi, discussed in-depth in section 3. By focusing on the pre-soviet housing typology of the Art Nouveau and understanding how Soviet housing policies reformed them spatially, this thesis will present design strategies that can be implemented to alleviate today’s housing hardships in Tbilisi.

58 Ibid. 21.
Figure 13: Darbazi House. Source: Archives at the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation

Figure 14: Construction of Darbazi House. Source: Archives at the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation
Figure 15: Darbazi House Plan and Section
Figure 16: Baniani Sakhli House Section

Figure 17: Social Gathering on Baniani Sakhli Roof. Source: Archives at the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation
Figure 18: Tbilisi’s 19th Century Balcony House

Figure 19: Urban Composition of Tbilisi’s 19th Century Balcony Houses
Figure 20: Balcony House Plan and Section (different buildings). Source: Section Adapted by Author from ICOMOS Betlemi Report, Plan Adapted by Author from George Chubinashvili National Research Centre
Figure 21: D. Sarajishvili’s House (Tbilisian Art Nouveau) circa 1900. Source: Archives at the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation

Figure 22: D. Sarajishvili’s House (Tbilisian Art Nouveau) circa 1900. Source: Archives at the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation
Figure 23: Art Nouveau Iron Balconettes and Staircases

Figure 24: Art Nouveau Balconied Courtyard
Figure 25: Original Historicist Facade at 4. Romi Street. Source: Tatia Gvineria

Figure 26: Art Nouveau Facade at 4. Romi Street
Figure 27: Map of Tbilisi’s Art Nouveau Buildings. Source: Adapted by Author from Nestan Tatarashvili, *Art Nouveau in Tbilisi: Guide Book, Map and Routes*
Figure 28: Art Nouveau Plan and Section
Figure 29: Art Nouveau Facades
Figure 30: Art Nouveau Facade Details
Figure 31: Art Nouveau Entry Halls. Source: Images of Wall Paintings from Tatarashvili, Art Nouveau in Tbilisi: Guide Book, Map and Routes.
Figure 32: Art Nouveau Courtyard Entrances.
Figure 33: Art Nouveau Courtyard Balcony System
Figure 35: Art Nouveau Courtyard
Figure 36: 4. Romi Street Original Apartment Layout (Red = Private Apartment; Yellow = Service Quarters; White = Bathrooms and Kitchens)

Figure 37: 4. Romi Street Current Apartment Layout (Red = Private Apartment; White = Bathrooms and Kitchens)
Figure 38: Tbilisi’s Khrushchevkas

Figure 39: Site Plan of Khrushchevkas. Source: ArchDaily
Figure 40: Tbilisi’s Microrayons. Source: Elizabeth Volchok

Figure 41: Tbilisi’s Apartment Building Extensions
3.0 Urban and Cultural Heritage Challenges in Post-Soviet Tbilisi

Today Tbilisi faces numerous urban, political, environmental, and social challenges that arise from the sudden dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and Georgia’s subsequent shift from a centrally-planned to a market-based economy. These problems greatly affect the preservation of the city’s built heritage, like the Art Nouveau, and lack of quality affordable housing, the topics which the design proposal addresses. Although there have been slow reforms and improvements to Tbilisi’s and Georgia’s housing situation, the government still lacks a comprehensive, nationwide mid- or long-term strategy. As Ashna Mathema, Joseph Salukvadze, and Max Budovitch write in “Georgia Urban Strategy: Housing,” an executive summary on housing in Georgia commissioned by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (The World Bank),

In the housing sector, the lack of rules and implementation of appropriate standards after independence has led to housing being a serious concern today, in terms of quality and affordability. Challenges in the housing sector are wide-ranging, and include: Lack of building maintenance (despite the legal framework for and the widespread existence of home-owners associations); poorly-built and unsafe extensions to many Soviet-era apartment blocks; high cost of new housing relative to income levels; thousands of new residential buildings left incomplete or with unsold units as a consequence of the 2008 financial crisis; lack of access to affordable mortgage finance or housing microfinance for home improvements; absence of a comprehensive government housing subsidy program for the poor; and the inadequacy of the current social housing program.59

From 1991-1992, an economic collapse and civil war concerning the self-declared independent provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia greatly affected Georgia’s post-soviet transition. This violence eventually made its way to Tbilisi in the winter of 1991/1992, resulting in the ousting of President Gamsakhurdia. As a consequence of war

and corruption in the 1990s, Georgia's economy was one of the most severely affected of all the former Soviet states. By 1994, Georgia’s GDP had been reduced to less than a quarter of its value five years previously. In his book, The New Georgia: Space, Society, Politics (1995), Revaz Gachechiladze described the hardships of these early post-soviet years in Tbilisi, “Factories stopped; so did most transport; electricity failed; central heating radiators became useless decoration in the apartments…The city emerged as unprepared for the new situation, unable to purchase raw materials, fuel or machinery at market prices and in the quantities required for an urban settlement of such a size.”

These problems along with an increase in crime and inter-ethnic tensions, resulted in the exodus of many of Tbilisi’s residents to Russia and elsewhere. Most were educated white-collar workers; mostly Russians and Armenians, but also Georgians. Simultaneously, there was a large in-migration of uneducated, poor inhabitants from rural Georgian towns seeking better economic opportunities. Thus, during these early post-Soviet years, a complete social transformation took place in Tbilisi, one that many native Tbilisian residents perceived as the ‘provicialization’ of the capital. Further, the 1990s also saw a large influx of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP’s) from the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia to Tbilisi. This population and the people from rural Georgia had difficulties adapting to urban living, experiencing high levels of unemployment.

The peaceful and bloodless Rose Revolution of 2003 led by Mikheil Saakashvili, with the ousting of President Eduard Shevardnadze, marked the end of leadership by former Soviet politicians in Georgia. Since then, the government has implemented a set of economic and democratic reforms to pursue a pro-Western foreign policy aimed at gaining membership in NATO and European Integration. Although Saakashvili, through the Rose Revolution, reined in much of the corruption of the 1990s that had flourished

60 Salukvadze and Golubchikov, “City as a Geopolitics,” 44..
62 Salukvadze and Golubchikov, “City as a Geopolitics,” 44.
in all sectors of Georgian society by loosening restrictions on government and urban
development policies, his actions also did irreversible damage to the historic city fabric.
Saakashvili’s insistence that the building sector focus on the construction of monumental
glass and steel skyscrapers to create the superficial appearance of a developed country
compromised the historic city to a great and irreversible extent (Figure 42). As Joseph
Salukvadze and Oleg Golubchikov eloquently summarize,

The installation of a market economy coupled with an economic freefall in
the 1990s, the rise of nationalism and the territorial disintegration of Georgia,
as well as its government’s entanglements in the geopolitical tensions between
Russia and the NATO powers have all produced a myriad of previously untested
challenges – which have also left their marks on the city’s social and physical
change.63

As a framework for my design proposal, this research considers five of Tbilisi’s
most pressing urban challenges: a lack of preservation knowledge among Tbilisi
residents and the government’s poor track record of implementing proper preservation
practices; the threat of uncontrolled new private development in the historic city;
poor environmental policies and practices that reduce the quality of life; and a lack of
affordable housing in Georgia coupled with a high number of Internally Displaced Persons
still living within sub-standard living conditions nearly thirty years after displacement.
Most cities around the world face several, if not all of, these challenges to some degree,
but in Georgia they are exacerbated by the fact that the country has had little experience
in self-determination and is struggling with its political, economic, cultural, social,
and consequently urban and architectural identity. A century ago, at the time of the
Art Nouveau’s rapid proliferation, Georgia was grappling with these very questions.
I argue that the Art Nouveau courtyard dwellings offer opportunities to resolve the
reconfiguration of domestic space that was implemented in the historic building stock
during the Soviet era, and can teach current designers and architects valuable lessons

63  Ibid., 39, 49.
about what an equitable and sustainable architectural identity of post-socialist Tbilisi could be.

3.1 Government Apathy Towards Historic Preservation and Lack of Skilled Craftspeople

The Georgian Law on Cultural Heritage regulates cultural heritage protection in Georgia. Since 1991, the Georgian government has not focused greatly on preserving the country's cultural built heritage. Its apathy towards Tbilisi’s historic building stock resulted in the deferral of Tbilisi’s historic district from being registered on UNESCO’s World Heritage List in 2001. UNESCO cited the government’s lack of “legal framework, management structures, and guidelines for the rehabilitation, restoration and control of change in the proposed nomination area” as the main issues blocking the city’s acceptance. Further, Tbilisi’s historic district remains on the World Monuments Fund’s Watch List.

Although government protection of cultural heritage is slowly improving, especially with the rise of widespread public condemnation and activist activity, the situation remains somewhat volatile. For example, over great objection from heritage professionals, a proposed amendment to the law “On Cultural Heritage” in 2013 implemented a “simplified procedure of revocation of the heritage protection status in exceptional circumstances in case of pressing public necessity.” This amendment was a blatant abuse of power to create a pro-development loophole that exploited the heritage protection system.

64 See Appendix A for a summary of cultural heritage management in Georgia.
In another case, the former Ministry of Culture and Monuments Protection sponsored a legal analysis of projects implemented in historic neighborhoods of Tbilisi and Batumi in 2013. They found that in 9 cases out of 11, the law “On Cultural Heritage” had been contravened. According to this study, “public authorities violate legal procedures set by the law, public authorities are negligent to provide enforcement of the law, and public authorities pass laws and regulations in contravention of the law on cultural heritage protection.”67 According to Nato Tsintsabadze, president of ICOMOS Georgia, the Georgian government has the mindset that regulation will hinder economic development. It sacrifices the country’s cultural vernacular heritage to make quick, easy, and short-sighted profits by promoting large-scale development from foreign investors (Figure 43).

Tbilisi residents also lack knowledge and education about historic preservation benefits and its skillsets.68 This is coupled with a great deficit of building and construction craftsmen in Georgia and a mentality among residents that they do not need to maintain their buildings because it is the government’s job to do so. For seventy years during the Soviet era, the government in Moscow maintained and managed all buildings. Consequently, Georgia lost the great craft tradition that had characterized the pre-Soviet building culture. Further, many historic residential buildings have been neglected for decades; in some cases, they are quite literally crumbling around their inhabitants. Tbilisi sits on a fault line and experiences frequent earthquakes (Figure 44). Tsintsabadze also emphasizes that any type of community-oriented work in the preservation sector can help change this outlook to one that is more proactive, something which ICOMOS Georgia

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67 Ibid., 22.
68 Irina Mania, personal e-mail message to author, October 18, 2018.
strives to do in projects such as the Betlemi Rehabilitation Project (Figure 45).69

Government interventions in the heritage sector do not promote a stewardship mentality among residents as the projects do not follow international standards of conservation. The government approaches preservation like it does all development, primarily as large-scale transformational projects to improve the appearance of the city. In some way, this also seems a legacy of the Soviet era. This is particularly problematic, as the execution of the projects contradicts long-term preservation approaches. The government often targets a historic district that is frequented by tourists and “restores” the facades of the buildings with improper techniques. Often the historic structures are demolished and rebuilt with cement blocks, sometimes with an extra floor added to meet the demands of the building owner, as was the case at the Pasha Bank Georgia building at Liberty Square and many of the buildings in the first phase of restoring David Aghmashenebeli Avenue (Figure 46). The careless “restoration” of the Art Nouveau Apollo Cinema on Aghmashenebeli Avenue removed original ornamental plaster details (Figures 47 & 48). This heavy-handed practice often erases much of the historic integrity of the built heritage.

The government does not ask the residents or building owners for any contribution to the work, which means the owners do not feel an ongoing responsibility for their properties. Instead, the government should promote preventative conservation and make preservation and restoration an incremental process on a much larger scale. If the government first did the most critical stabilization work, such as fixing sources of water damage, and continued with slow, constant, and thoughtful repairs from there, whole neighborhoods and their residents would benefit from this process.

This preservation work would impact more people, preserve more historic fabric, and demonstrate sustainable preservation strategies. Repairing numerous buildings “perfectly” in a rush job on main avenues simply to create the appearance that Tbilisi is developing (as was the case on David Aghmashenebeli Avenue) is inefficient and benefits few stakeholders.70

Nonetheless, some good-quality preservation work is currently taking place at Lado Gudiashvili Square in the medieval city, led by the Tbilisi Development Fund71 and ICOMOS Georgia (Figure 49). In 2011, citizens learned that the square was to be mostly demolished and redeveloped with luxury shopping and restaurants (the city had not announced this) (Figures 50 & 51). Huge waves of protest took place, leading the city to reevaluate their plans. Instead, the square is currently being rehabilitated following proper international preservation standards. This project is conserving as much of the original building fabric as possible, with replacements using materials that replicate the original compositions and workers preserving all archaeological artifacts found on site. This example is hopefully the first of many projects in which the city and the Development Fund will approach heritage protection as long-term investments for the betterment of the city.72

3.2 Tbilisi’s Volatile Real Estate Market

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tbilisi has experienced an onslaught of

70 Interview with Nato Tsintsabadze, President of ICOMOS Georgia, February 13, 2019.
71 The Tbilisi Development Fund is a non-profit organization established by the Tbilisi Municipality in 2010. It is fully financed by the Tbilisi City Hall. The Fund’s main priorities include: the rehabilitation of Old Tbilisi to unite the main touristic routes; the rehabilitation and restoration of Tbilisi’s historic buildings in the main touristic areas (not solely in Old Tbilisi) in order to create additional attractive hubs; the restoration of painted historic entrance halls to residential buildings; the rehabilitation and development of museums; and the development of recreational zones. Natia Natsvlishvili, personal email to author, April 9, 2019.
uncontrolled new private development, severely threatening its historic urban fabric with rapid demolition. The city did away with the planned development characteristic of the Soviet times in favor of a real estate market driven by market forces. The new development is drastically out of scale with and unsympathetic towards Tbilisi’s historic built environment. It is also largely unaffordable to Tbilisi residents who have lived in the historic center for generations. As a result, high market values and rents are pushing the settled population out. The luxury development is mostly marketed towards foreigners such as Russians, Ukrainians, Turkish, and Iranians, as well as Georgian expats who are returning to invest in the country.  

Salukvadze and Golubchikov divide Tbilisi’s post-Soviet development into three phases:

1. “Do-It-Yourself Urbanism” of the 1990s, characterized by political instability, economic hardship, weak state institutions, and small-scale development based on limited financial means. During the 1990s, the real estate market was poorly regulated, a result of weak institutions and poor governance. Locally, citizens referred to the land and real-estate market as the “wild market,” also suggesting the violence that ensued due to its volatile state. The 1990s saw very little investment in significant development projects. Instead, developers focused their energy on projects that required little investment and had a quick return, such as gas stations, restaurants, car repair shops, bars, markets, and guesthouses.

2. “Investor urbanism” of the late 1990s and early 2000s, characterized by a better economic situation, the strengthening of business and banking sectors, development on formerly-restricted public spaces, and the subsequent proliferation of infills, over-densification, and the destruction of urban spaces.

73 Interview with Irakli Zhvania, urban planner in Tbilisi, February 15, 2019.
3. “Politically-determined urbanism” of the mid-2000s to the present-day, characterized by the consolidation of state power, allowing the government to be a major participant in urban development. Saakashvili’s “Rose Government” initiated many large-scale urban development projects, mostly located in the city’s historic center, significantly altering it. The drafting of a new Masterplan in 2009 put some regulatory standards in place, but the government often ignores them.  

3.3 Maintenance of Historic Housing

As noted earlier, market reforms and the mass privatization of land and real estate began in 1990 with the fall of the Soviet Union. On February 1st, 1992, the Cabinet of Ministers issued the Decree No. 107, ‘On Privatization of Dwellings in the Republic of Georgia.’ With this decree, the state divested itself from all responsibilities of building ownership and maintenance by transferring ownership to the tenants for a nominal fee. The government also transferred the responsibilities of building maintenance and insurance to the owners. Today, Georgia has one of the highest home-ownership rates in the world with 95% of housing being privately owned.

With the sudden transfer of homeownership to residents who were not used to maintaining their own properties and who had little resources to do so, the housing conditions in Tbilisi deteriorated (Figure 52). Residents could not afford to maintain multi-family apartment blocks and there was no system that required owners to maintain common spaces. As such, building problems like leaking roofs, broken elevators, lack of thermal insulation, and structural issues rapidly compounded. In the early 2000s, the municipal government initiated several programs for housing maintenance, the most

74 Salukvadze and Golubchikov, “City as a Geopolitics,” 52-53.
important of which was the establishment of homeowners’ associations (HOA’s). Then, in 2004, the government established the Tbilisi Corps, a unit for developing the HOA’s.\textsuperscript{77}

There are many financial benefits for multi-unit apartment buildings to establish an HOA, a major one being that the municipality co-finances repairs of common areas, like courtyards. The city subsidizes 50%-90% of repair costs and the members of the HOAs must raise the remainder of the funds. Then, as a gesture in return, the municipality pays back the funds raised by the HOA, so the apartment building can use them to implement further environmentally related upgrades, like planting trees.\textsuperscript{78} As of 2016, there were more than 6000 HOAs in Tbilisi.\textsuperscript{79}

There is currently an inadequate public and social housing program in place in Georgia. Mathema, Salukvadze, and Budovitch write, “in Georgia’s housing market, ‘quality’ and ‘affordability’ appear to be mutually exclusive.\textsuperscript{80} The historic and Soviet housing stock is seriously overcrowded and deteriorating, and Georgia has a high poverty level, with the average Georgian earning the equivalent of $400 USD/month (and pensioners earning $70/month). Thus, it is imperative to build good quality affordable housing. Despite this urgent need, the Georgian government does not have a clear strategy for a social housing.\textsuperscript{81} As family structures have changed, younger couples seek their own apartments to raise families, rather than living with their parents. However, due to the high costs of new apartments, these younger couples cannot afford to live on their own and so must live with their parents and grandparents.\textsuperscript{82} As Oriel Prizeman notes, although “poverty has been defined rhetorically as ‘the best conservator’ or the ‘friend of preservation,’ this is in part because people who are unable to afford to transform

\textsuperscript{77} Salukvadze and Golubchikov, “City as a Geopolitics,” 46.
\textsuperscript{79} Salukvadze and Golubchikov, “City as a Geopolitics,” 46.
\textsuperscript{80} Mathema, Salukvadze, and Budovitch, “Georgia Urban Strategy: Housing,” 91.
\textsuperscript{81} Natia Natsvlishvili, e-mail message to author, November 10, 2018.
\textsuperscript{82} Conversation with Natia Natsvlishvili, February 12, 2019.
their environments become victims of them and their physical environments in turn are protected from change.”

In summary, housing issues in Tbilisi include a high demand for more living space than the Soviet model, especially by young people who want to own their own home and by Internally Displaced Persons who require better living conditions; a deteriorated existing building stock; and no overall policy to create new affordable housing or rehabilitate the existing housing.

3.4 Environmental Issues

As is the case with many developing countries, Georgia and Tbilisi are experiencing an onslaught of environmental challenges. Private development is encroaching on land designated as public parks or environmentally-protected zones, land for which there is a dire public need, as it provides a refuge from the polluted and congested streets. Wendy’s Restaurants and other franchises are popping up in former neighborhood squares (Figure 53) and large-scale developments, like the recently-cancelled Budapest Hotel project, are threatening public parks. Several activist groups such as the “Guerilla Gardeners” and “Oxygen Ninjas” have protested this abuse of power, halting or delaying some of these developments. Nonetheless, public space continues to shrink at an alarming rate (Figure 54). The city is also struggling with an increase in pollution due to the rapid increase in private vehicles, most of which are secondhand, and a lack of vehicle emissions regulations (Figure 55). In 2016, the International Energy Agency named Georgia as having the highest mortality rate in the world caused by air pollution, with nearly 300 deaths per 100,000 people.

One notorious example of private development that ignored environmental

83 Prizeman, “Maintenance of Shared Spaces,” 3.
protection zones is the Panorama Development project, an egregious display of wealth and exclusivity that will dominate a hill-top overlooking Tbilisi’s historic town (Figure 56). Currently in construction, it is funded by Bidzina Ivanishvili, Georgia’s richest and most powerful man, who was prime minister from 2012-2013. It will host a luxury complex with a seven-star hotel, business centre, conference halls, and a golf course. Further, it will be connected to Tbilisi’s central Freedom Square by two cable cars which will pass over the city’s historic district (Figure 57). Tbilisi’s historic city is a Historic Preservation Zone, thus development should be strictly regulated. However, developer connections and wealth have led authorities to turn a blind eye to illegal construction. Ivanishvili had himself already ignored the environmental and historic zones with the construction of his glass enclave on a nearby hill which also overlooks the old city, a villa which boasts a private zoo and art collection.85

Although this type of illegal development happens fairly regularly, there are signs of change. Environmental protection groups and activists’ voices are becoming so loud that government authorities are beginning to pay attention. Environmental activists won a six-year legal battle against an illegal development in January 2019. The Hotel Budapest was a private hotel development that had been awarded a building permit in 2013 to construct an eight-story structure in the middle of Vake Park, Tbilisi’s largest public green space. Building in a recreational zone is illegal but Tbilisi’s mayor, Gigi Ugulava, had granted an exception for the project with a special zoning agreement. When Tbilisi environmental group “Green Alternative” heard about this project, they filed a complaint in court and camped out at the site in protest (Figure 58).

The court took two years to review the case, finally ruling in favor of ‘Green Alternative’ in June 2016. It ordered the mayor’s office to reconsider the permit. However,  

the two investor companies of the hotel project, Tiflis Kostava and Graali, appealed the ruling. The court of appeals found in their favor and ruled that the special zoning agreement was legal.\textsuperscript{86} After environmental activists like “Guerilla Gardeners” heard that the case was deadlocked, they called on the newly elected mayor, Kakha Kaladze, to prevent the hotel construction. The mayor stated that he would do everything within his power to prevent the construction, and finally in January 2019, he announced that the municipal government had reached an agreement with the hotel’s investors to cancel the project.\textsuperscript{87} This is considered a great victory for the residents of Tbilisi, but there remains a great need for more public green space and environmentally-friendly policies in the city.

3.5 Internally Displaced Persons in Tbilisi

In the self-declared breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, pro-Russia citizens expelled ethnic Georgians in the 1991/1992 civil war and again during the 2008 Russian occupation of these provinces (Figure 59). Thus, Internally Displaced Persons are a major social and political issue in Georgia. Because these people are displaced within their own country and are not international refugees, they are not eligible for international aid. Many have migrated to Tbilisi in search of safety and economic stability, yet they still face numerous hardships. As of 2016, IDP’s composed 10% of Tbilisi’s population. Many live in ‘Collective Centers’ (state-owned buildings converted from other functions like hotels and schools) and their unemployment rate is higher than 50% (Figure 60). In the late 2000s, President Saakashvili evicted many of Tbilisi’s IDPs to areas further from the city center by giving them some moderate funds to buy apartments in far-out locations. However, as there is inadequate social housing in Georgia and no true framework to manage the integration of IDPs into the local population, these displaced


\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
people and their substandard living conditions will continue to impact Tbilisi and Georgia in the future.88

88 Salukvadze and Golubchikov, “City as a Geopolitics,” 44, 45.
Figure 42: Tbilisi’s New Development. Source: The Calvert Journal
Figure 44: Tbilisi’s Deteriorating Historic Building Stock

Figure 45: ICOMOS Betlemi Quarter Restoration Project
Figure 46: Restoration of David Aghmashenebeli Street
Figure 47: Apollo Theater Before Restoration. Source: Georgian Journal

Figure 48: Apollo Theater After Restoration. Plaster Detailing Has Been Removed.
Figure 49: Restoration of Lado Gudiashvili Square Source: Agenda.ge

Figure 50: Lado Gudiashvili Square Before Restoration. Source: Skyscanner
Figure 51: Redevelopment Proposal of Lado Gudiashvili Square by Zechner & Zechner. Source: World Architecture News

Figure 52: Deteriorating Art Nouveau House
Figure 53: Dunkin Donuts on a Former Public Square

Figure 54: Percentage of Vake Park Sold to Private Hands Since 2002 Source: Safe Space Tbilisi, France24
Figure 55: Cars Parked on Sidewalks of Tbilisi

Figure 56: Panorama Project, Funded by Bidzina Ivanishvili. Source: Osservatorio Balconie Caucaso Transeuropa
Figure 57: Panorama Project, Cable Car Loading Station at Liberty Square

Figure 58: Activists Protesting Against the Budapest Hotel Development in Vake Park.
Source: France24
Figure 59: Migration of IDPs from Occupied Territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Tbilisi

Figure 60: An Abandoned Soviet Building Used as an IDP Collective Housing Center. Source: Dezeen
4.0 Architectural and Preservation Response

The Art Nouveau courtyard house falls within Tbilisi’s tradition of building open and democratic domestic structures and spaces that have a social function. The courtyard is the most communal and arguably democratic space in Tbilisi, as it supports neighbor-to-neighbor interactions and blurs traditional perceptions of public and private. This space is shared: it is not privately owned, not state-operated, not municipally controlled, and not co-owned. However, the residents of the surrounding apartments care for the courtyards and use them for utilitarian functions, like hanging drying laundry, parking cars, and in some cases for small garden areas. As Prizeman further states, “to remove the specific conditions of co-habitation and joint responsibility [that the courtyards foster] is to destroy as much as the built fabric can maintain.”89 This thesis argues that the Art Nouveau courtyard houses provide an architectural opportunity for self-determination by Tbilisi residents. The gradients of privacy that center on the semi-private courtyards are an ideal catalyst for creating successful equitable housing types for present-day and future Tbilisi. Housing that focuses on social issues of self-determination and economic processes are not a drastic departure from the evolution of pre-Soviet Tbilisian domestic types. Rather, it is a continuation.

4.1 Site and Program

This project takes the form of a speculative narrative depicting the evolution of Tbilisi’s Art Nouveau courtyard houses and its inhabitants to an eventual autonomous system that is self-sustaining and separate from government and corporate intervention. It is a collective movement of coop developments that promotes the sustainability and self-determination of the inhabitants living within the Art Nouveau houses. Further, this system creates an economic means for the residents to preserve and maintain their

89 Prizeman, “Maintenance of Shared Spaces,” 5.
housing in a building type that architecturally signifies an openness to the greater society. It reinvigorates the communal aspect of the semi-private courtyards and considers how community-oriented design and historic preservation can promote self-determination among Tbilisi’s residents.

The project follows a possible timeline and speculates on what post-Socialist and even post-post-Socialist Tbilisi could be like. To do so, the design addresses both the urban and building scales, and uses a series of adaptable tactics that can achieve the autonomous system. The project suggests what the building and urban scales of Tbilisi could look like in 10 years, 30 years, and 60 years, allowing for possible speculations on what Tbilisi could present in the very far future.

The design focuses on the Art Nouveau courtyard houses in the Chugureti neighborhood (left bank) of Tbilisi (Figure 61). This site was selected because:

1. Tbilisi residents built many Art Nouveau courtyard houses in this area at the start of the 20th century. Persecuted Germans (mainly from Wurttemberg and Baden) also settled in this district in the mid-19th century and called it Alexandersdorf. They too had a tradition of courtyard gardens and incorporated this with the traditional Tbilisian courtyard dwelling.90

2. The left bank of the Mtkvari River is the lowest and warmest part of Tbilisi. Consequently, the district has the highest levels of pollution, as it gathers between the mountains paralleling the river and enclosing the city. It is therefore a good starting point for introducing environmentally conscious design interventions.

3. The government has not yet completely altered and commercialized the area as it has with the medieval center: residents still live in the buildings and there is much restoration work that needs to be done.

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4. Nonetheless, gentrification is encroaching on this area and the residents and buildings are threatened by new development inappropriate for the context.

As the Georgian government has focused its energies on building new private luxury development for foreign investors, the Art Nouveau courtyard houses, with their aspirations about a future independent Georgian Republic and how architecture can manifest these desires, are the ideal building type for the development of a completely democratic and autonomous self-organization. The semi-private rear courtyards will be the catalysts for new programing and community-based design and preservation. To create this future post-soviet autonomous system, I looked at several contemporary case studies of self-organizing movements, as well as architecture and adaptive reuse projects which postulate on how space can be reorganized into a more communal cohabitation. These case studies include:

- The Zapatista Movement in Chiapas, Mexico (Figure 62)
- Cooperation Jackson in Jackson, Mississippi (Figure 63)
- Communal Villa by DOGMA (Figure 64)
- Ecological Reconfiguration of an Urban Center (Philadelphia) by Ecosistema Urbano (Figure 65)
- The adaptable and financially viable structures of Santiago Cirugeda
- The intervention at Castillo de Garcimuoz by Izaskun Chinchilla
- Combining Social Housing with Tourism in Havana, Cuba by Iwo Borkowicz

The proposed autonomous system in Tbilisi is composed of an urban network with nodes located at the Art Nouveau courtyard houses (Figure 66). Each node combines
living with specific social and economic programming based on alleviating the urban and heritage challenges that Tbilisi faces (discussed in section 3). The architectural tactics allow for the programming to adapt as time progresses. The programs include:

1. a makerspace/live center,
2. a meeting forum where democratic decisions related to the system can take place.
3. a green energy production center,
4. a vertical garden for food production, and
5. an IDP housing and health center.

This programming allows for the residents of the system to live and work outside government forces. Each node has a main programmatic function; however, the tactics allow for the other four social and economic programming strategies to also form at each node on a smaller scale. The initial five nodes of the system are located at 4 Romi Street, 6 Ivane Javakhishvili Street, 39 Mikheil Tsinamdzgvrisvili Street, 49 Davit Aghmashenebeli Avenue, and 36 Davit Aghmashenebeli Avenue.

1) In response to the lack of trained craftspeople and need for building preservation resources and education, 4 Romi Street evolves into a make/live center, providing makerspace studios and education space for craftspeople and conservationists. It partners with ICOMOS Georgia and the Georgian Heritage Craft Association to make this renovation financially feasible for the building's residents.

2) To meet the demand for the ever-increasing number of social and environmental activists protesting government intervention in Tbilisi, 36
David Aghmashenebeli Avenue becomes a meeting forum where various organizations can rent space from the house’s owners to meet and organize.

3) 6 Ivane Javakhishvili Street transforms into a green energy production center to generate clean energy for the autonomous system to function.

4) 39 Mikheil Tsinamdzgvrishvili Street converts into a vertical food production garden where produce for the autonomous systems’ members grows, and

5) 49 Davit Aghmashenebeli Avenue attempts to alleviate the stresses experienced by Georgia’s Internally Displaced Persons by becoming an IDP housing, job training, and health center.

In addition to these economic and social programs, an urban system of greenways is formed between the Art Nouveau “nodes.” This will refer to the historical gardens that the Tbilisi citizens and German settlers designed in the centers of the city blocks in Chugureti. Over time, and especially during the chaotic “do-it-yourself” development phase on the 1990s, these once open green sanctuaries became filled in with impermanent houses and garages. In 2015, the Tbilisi urban design firm, Studia 21, completed a masterplan for the Chugureti neighborhood around the main boulevard, David Aghmashenebeli Avenue, in which it proposed to reinstate these interior greenbelts by relocating the residents of the infill houses to new development on the perimeters of the blocks. The firm calculated that if one story buildings on the block perimeters gained three to four extra floors to become the maximum height of most historic buildings in the neighborhood, the new housing could accommodate all of these residents plus more. This would reverse the current practice of pushing current residents out of the historic city for new development to take place.
Figure 61: Project Focus Area (Left Bank of Mtkvari River)
are resolving the problems that were not resolved in the villages.

Figure 62: The Zapatista Movement in Chiapas, Mexico. Source: “People without Faces (Documentary about the Zapatistas).” Youtube.

Figure 63: Cooperation Jackson in Jackson, Mississippi. Source: Cooperation Jackson
Figure 64: Communal Villa by DOGMA. Source: Hidden Architecture

Figure 65: Ecological Reconfiguration of an Urban Center (Philadelphia) by Ecosistema Urbano. Source: Ecosistema Urbano
Figure 66: Urban Network of the Autonomous System in Tbilisi’s Art Nouveau Houses
To determine how an architectural intervention and the various programming could be inserted into the Art Nouveau courtyard houses, I chose to focus on 4. Romi Street, the makerspace center that would partner with ICOMOS Georgia and The Georgian Heritage Crafts Association. The intervention tactics as well as the intervention locations are derived from the layering of material and spaces within the Art Nouveau houses. The layering found within these buildings as well as how this could be extrapolated is described in the next series of diagrams analyzing 4. Romi Street.
Figure 68: Interior Rooms Layer

Figure 69: Balcony Layer
Figure 70: Courtyard Layer

Figure 71: Interface Between Building and Balcony
Figure 72: Possible Extension Around Courtyard

Figure 73: Possible Extension Beyond Courtyard
4.2 Tactics

The proposed design uses three tactics to implement the program strategies: nodes that allow for users to access necessary utilities such as electricity and internet, an adaptable scaffolding frame that allows for various programming to take place on it, and integrated furniture units which enable the residents to easily convert between living and working while preserving existing building fabric. All tactics are fabricated using existing materials.

4.2.1 Nodes

Each Art Nouveau house is a “node” in the larger autonomous system, and within each Art Nouveau building and courtyard system, there is a grid of nodes which are used to access utilities. These nodes are positioned on a grid of 15’ x 15’, allowing for a square footage between nodes of 225sqft. Nodes within the courtyards run around the façades of the surrounding buildings allowing for the adaptable scaffolding system to attach into them. This then brings necessary utilities into the scaffolds themselves. The integrated furniture units can also plug into these nodes. During the first 10 years, these nodes provide essential and easily attainable utilities like electricity and internet access. However, as time progresses, these nodes also adapt bringing heavier utilities such as new plumbing and gas systems, so the residents can have greater access to facilities such as bathrooms, kitchens, laundry, and water sources for gardening (Figure 75).

4.2.2 Thin Scaffolding System

There are two types of adaptable scaffolding systems within the courtyards. The framing of both systems has electricity and internet access points as they access the utility nodes. The frames which attach to the wooden Art Nouveau balconies are lighter and help support the historic structure while allowing for maintenance access. They are
essentially smart façade systems with shading devices to provide programming within the courtyard and help cool the wooden balconies in the hot summer months. If the wooden balcony system is facing south, solar panels can also be attached to the scaffolding system to produce electricity. Further, the shading devices, when down, can act as a screen to project movies, converting the courtyard into an outdoor cinema (Figure 76).

4.2.3 Thick Scaffolding System

The second type of scaffolding framework is for neighboring masonry buildings which also enclose the courtyard system. This frame is more robust than that for the wooden balconies and therefore extends out to make room for accessible platforms. The lower two platforms are wider and can accommodate programs such as makerspace and meeting areas, while the upper platforms are narrower for vertical gardens and solar panels. Again, this frame adapts for different programming and weather, having shading devices to extend programming beyond the scaffold and create a greenhouse in the winter months (Figure 77).

4.2.4 Furnishing Unit

The integrated furniture systems allow for residents to easily change between living and working, providing storage area for work appliances and fold-way units for living. They are fabricated using accessible materials such as plywood, cabinets doors, bedding, and electrical systems. These units are used to help increase density within the Art Nouveau houses and act to allow for the preservation of interior walls. Many of these buildings have intricately painted walls and instead of demolishing them to introduce new programming, these furniture systems can adapt themselves within the existing context (Figure 78).
Nodal Access to Utilities (Electricity, Internet)

Utilities (Kitchens, Bathrooms, Laundry)

Building Conservation Education Center

Make/Live

Vertical Gardens/Green Energy Generators

Decision-Making Forum for System’s Participants

Health Center

Figure 74: Sites of Tactic Implementations at 4. Romi Street

Figure 75: Nodal System in Art Nouveau House and Courtyard (4. Romi Street)
Figure 76: Thin Scaffolding System to Attach to Wooden Balconies

Short Term: Scaffolding for Building Restoration
Long Term: Shading System for Climatic & Environment Control
Long Term: Shading System Adapts for Providing Programming
Long Term: Shading System Adapts for Rain Water Collection

Figure 77: Thick Scaffolding System to Attach to Surrounding Courtyard

Short Term: Nodes Provide Electricity and Internet
Short Term: Scaffolding System Plugs into Nodes to Provide Electricity & Internet
Long Term: Wider Scaffold on Bottom for Larger Programs (Market); Higher Platforms for Vertical Garden; Shading System
Long Term: Shading System Adapts for Different Programs

Figure 78: Furnishing Unit

Live Single
Live Aggregate
Live with Covering for Privacy
Work
Figure 79: Implementation of Furnishing Unit Tactic and Thin Scaffolding System Tactic Within Art Nouveau House
Figure 80: Implementation of Thin Scaffolding System and Thick Scaffold System Tactics Within Courtyard
Figure 82: Courtyard with Interactive Scaffolding System
Figure 83: Courtyard with Interactive Scaffolding System
Figure 84: Apartment Room with Furnishing Unit (Live)
Figure 85: Apartment Room with Furnishing Unit (Work)
5.0 Conclusion

The post-socialist city is an urban phenomenon that architects, designers, and historians have only recently begun to investigate. It is a complex system that cannot be generalized, as each city has its own history, identity, geography, and built form. The post-socialist city also requires a deep understanding of its pre-soviet and soviet era evolution to postulate on what its post-socialist architectural and urban identity could be.

For Tbilisi, this thesis argued that the city’s post-socialist identity is inextricably linked with its historic built heritage. The Art Nouveau courtyard house presents itself as an opportunity to catalyze the creation of a contemporary architecture in Tbilisi. This building type’s spatial layout with the semi-private courtyards suggests an openness to the greater society, and architecturally represents what an independent Georgia meant at the start of the 20th century. The semi-private courtyards also emerge from a centuries-long tradition of including communal spaces within Tbilisian domestic types. Social gatherings among family members and neighbors is part of the city’s urban culture.

Post-socialist Tbilisi offers countless opportunities for contemporary design to insert itself into the historic fabric. The insertions, however, should reflect upon and respect the rich heritage and historical and cultural layers of the city. Further, they should support the future survival and preservation of Tbilisi’s built heritage. The proposed design of an autonomous system with programmatic nodes at the Art Nouveau houses gives agency back to its inhabitants to promote economic development and the maintenance of the dwellings. By creating a system which rejects financial and organizational dependence on government and corporate interventions, Tbilisi residents can determine what their futures and the future of their city can look like based on the rich foundation of their built cultural heritage. Although these ideas are speculative and propose an ideal future, it is my hope that advocates for Tbilisi’s built heritage can use this...
strategy to implement them within the historic city.

This thesis offers substantial ideas about what post-socialist Tbilisi could look like. However, future work needs to be done on studying the strategies of financial implementation. Self-organizing systems and preservation work can be successfully achieved only if properly managed and financed. If the proper partnerships are created, Tbilisi’s Art Nouveau houses could offer the city a great cultural and social asset that lies beyond the building fabric. These buildings have the potential to create lively community hubs that celebrate Tbilisi’s extraordinarily rich, dynamic, and inspiring built heritage. This heritage deserves to be respectfully preserved and used for the future benefit of Tbilisi’s citizens.
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Adaptive Reuse


Studies of Spatial Evolution in Vernacular Building Types and Their Implications on Urban Form


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Appendix A: Cultural Heritage Management in Georgia

The Georgian Law on Cultural Heritage regulates cultural heritage protection in Georgia. It was written in 2007 and has been amended twice: first on November 21st, 2008 and again on December 25th, 2013. It refers to movable and immovable monuments, complex objects, cultural heritage protection zones, and tangible cultural heritage.91 Listed movable, immovable, or complex objects are classified as:

- Archaeological (Remains of more than 100 years)
- Architectural (Buildings, Castles, Cult Buildings etc.)
- Engineering (Bridges, Tunnels, Canals, Aqueducts, etc.)
- Urban
- Parks and Gardens
- Paleographic
- Monumental Painting (Frescos, Wall Paintings, Mosaics, etc.)
- Memorial (Related to the Historic Event of a Person)
- Fine Arts
- Ethnographic
- Documental (Manuscripts, Publications, etc.)
- Property Linked with the Development of Science and Technology 92

The law classifies two categories of heritage sites: a monument, and a monument of national significance. All monuments are protected by law, and monuments of national significance can be considered for presentation to the list of World Heritage Sites.

Currently in Georgia, there are 43 Intangible Cultural Heritage Monuments, 4,221 movable monuments, and 7,577 immovable monuments, 986 of which are considered of national significance. Also, Georgia has three internationally significant sites recorded on the

World Heritage List (Mtskheta, Gelati Monastery, and Upper Svaneti). Georgia’s number of immovable monuments (i.e. buildings) is rather small. Slovenia, a former-communist country of similar geographical size, has 30,000 registered sites. The Law on Cultural Heritage defines a “Cultural Heritage Protection Zone as an area, which surrounds immovable cultural heritage properties and/or is within the site of their location or influence, to which a special regulatory regime is applied and the purpose of which is to protect cultural heritage located therein from undesirable impact.” The law specifies two types of protection zones: an Individual Protection Zone (includes the physical and visual protection area of a monument) and a General Protection Zone (includes the zone of the protected historic part, the zone of regulated development, the zone of the protected historical landscape, and the zone of the protected archaeology).

The ICOMOS document, “National Policy of the Cultural Heritage Sector of Georgia” (2014), states that the strength of the Law on Cultural Heritage is its emphasis on the “holistic character of the heritage environment.” However, its weaknesses include:

- Lack of clarity due to the “undeveloped state of organizational and legal practices” of heritage protection in Georgia;
- the list of immovable monuments has an unequal representation of architectural types and geographical regions (most registered monuments are either dwellings or religious buildings, and 80% of registered dwellings are in Tbilisi);
- the list does not contain historical towns and contains very few archaeological sites; and
- the law does not include cultural landscapes, a category which is very relevant to

94 Vardzelashvili, “Georgia National Cultural Heritage Policy.”
95 Ibid.
Georgia due to the country’s large and very historic wine production tradition.

Further, the law has only begun to include intangible heritage objects; such as Georgia’s deep tradition of dance, music, and craft-making.96

There are several governmental, religious, and non-profit institutions which regulate and manage cultural heritage in Georgia. Federally, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia is the authority overseeing the state heritage protection policy in the country.97 It “sets up and implements the state policy for cultural heritage, enacts rules and procedures for these activities, sets up the protection zones and regulations and presents to the Cabinet of Ministers for adoption.” The National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia (NACHPG), founded in 2008, “is an operational institution responsible for the implementation of national cultural heritage policy.”98 Other cultural heritage overseers include the National Museum of Georgia, the George Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation, Tbilisi City Hall, the Agency of Protected Areas, the Georgian National Commission for UNESCO of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church, and several NGOs like ICOMOS Georgia, ICOM Georgia, Monument’s Friend, and Heritage for Future.

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97 In July 2018, the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection and the Ministry of Education and Science merged to become the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia.
98 Vardzelashvili, “Georgia National Cultural Heritage Policy.”
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