# 5 Tashkent / Uzbekistan
## Conflicting Relations. Mahalla, Soviet Modernism, Global City

> These golden valleys – dear Uzbekistan,
> The courageous spirit of your ancestors is with you!
> *(national anthem of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 1992)*

The complexity of the various formations that make up Tashkent's urban heritage is immediately apparent, and the cityscape of Uzbekistan's capital is dominated by signs of unredeemed promises and structural contradictions. The fragmentary nature of its spaces, which resist being organized into a meaningful whole, has been discussed many times before.[1] Contrasting forms of urbanism and life blend in complex ways. This is more than apparent in the city's spatial structures. The stark contrasts between the modernist Soviet city with its wide and imposing spaces of power and the large-scale architecture constructed since independence are immediately apparent. Yet, in structural terms, both the newly erected shopping and administrative district, built in the late-modern steel and glass of a global city, and the grand neo-Timurdic buildings of postcolonial Uzbekistan stand in the tradition of spaces of control and the representation of state power of the Soviet metropolis.[2] In terms of urban space, it can be shown that the deeper break is with the traditional 'mahallas', which invoke an entirely different conception of the city and the urban, and whose formless sprawl penetrates and undermines the zoned 'trajectory space' of the districts of central authority.[3]

Tashkent is like a magnifying glass articulating all the complex contradictions and negotiations around the 'correct' way to modernize and to join the globalized world – including the ubiquitous question of what role (which and whose) traditions can and

1 Hartung, Hauptstadtinszenierung, 2012, 79–81.

2 Hartung, Hauptstadtinszenierung, 2012, 79.

3 On the concept of trajectory space, cf. Vinken, Ort und Bahn, 2008; Löw, In welchen Räumen, 2020; and the essay on *The Crises of the Modern City* in this volume (Chapter 2).

should play. This chapter turns its attention to the contradictory dynamics of branding and appropriation strategies within Tashkent's heterogeneous urban spaces. Representative examples of urban heritage are analysed from different perspectives and at different scales: in addition to historic monuments and built heritage, the focus is on spatial structures and social spaces, cultural traditions and heritage politics.

## Regressive Identity Politics and Urban Heritage

In Uzbekistan, questions of heritage are always also questions of national self-presentation. By means of a concerted cultural and heritage policy, the young state is seeking to generate a national identity that it has never possessed.[4] Uzbekistan is not an organic unity that corresponds to some linguistic or cultural area, but rather has its origins in colonialism. It came into existence in the 19th century as the Tsarist Russian Governate General of Turkestan. Tashkent has been the capital ever since. The country received its current geographical borders under Soviet rule as the Uzbek Socialist Republic. Uzbekistan, "the most populous and arguably the most culturally diverse of all Central Asian States",[5] is full of tensions and contradictions, including those between the majority Uzbeks and the Tajik and Kazakh minorities, as well as the 'Russians' (themselves a heterogeneous group), who are strongly represented in Tashkent, and the descendants of the Koreans forcibly resettled by Stalin in 1937. Although Cyrillic was replaced by the Latin alphabet in 1990, both scripts are still common in the Tashkent cityscape. Alongside the Uzbek language, Russian remains the lingua franca of the educated classes.

The government is systematically pursuing an orchestrated heritage policy that utilizes Uzbekistan's cultural legacy to establish a national 'brand'. One example of this is the revival of the myth of the Silk Road, which had a precursor in the *Project Silk Road*, launched in 1988 with support from UNESCO.[6] And UNESCO continues to pursue identity-political goals in the field of immaterial heritage, for instance, by supporting traditional handicrafts, particularly weaving.[7] Whether it wants to or not, it thereby also supports the regressive identity politics of Uzbekistan's authoritarian and patriarchal elites – both new and old.[8] A central element in these identity politics is the synthetic-

4 Laura L. Adams has published a monograph extensively analysing nation building in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, with a focus on the culture of national festivals, cf. Adams, The Spectacular State, 2010.

5 Kosmarski, Grandeur and Decay, 2011, 33.

6 Mentges, The Role of UNESCO, 2012, 216.

7 Mentges, The Role of UNESCO, 2012, 114–115.

8 Adams, The Spectacular State, 2010, 47–58 and passim; Mentges, The Role of UNESCO, 2012.

seeming cult of Timur and the establishment of Timur as the "Father of the Nation" and legendary "Founder of the Uzbek State".[9]

*Figure 1: Timur rides again. Equestrian statue in front of Hotel Uzbekistan (Photo: J. Blokker 2014)*

In 1993, in a highly symbolic act, a statue of Timur riding a horse was placed overlooking the city's central square, which also now bears his name, in a spot that was formerly occupied by sculptures of Stalin (1940) and Marx and Engels (1967) (fig. 1).[10] The so-called Timurdic style, which draws from sources including Iranian architecture, influenced most of Tashkent's grandest buildings,[11] including City Hall, the parliament, the senate building and Amir Timur Museum. The latter functions as both a museum of Timur and the Timurids and symbolically of the Uzbek nation; it is also depicted on the 1000 sum banknote (fig. 2): architecture as bricks-and-mortar heritage politics.[12]

9 Timur (Temür ibn Taraghai Barlas, also known as Timur Lenk ‚Timur the Lame, Tamerlane) completed the Islamization of Central Asia in the 14th century, following the conquests of the Mongol conquests and made Samarkand to the capital of his short-lived empire, which stretched from the Caspian Sea to India and incorporated large swathes of Western and Central Asia. On the Timurdic rebranding, see Paskaleva, Ideology in Brick and Tile, 2015, 419; Kosmarski, Grandeur and Decay, 2011, 42; Adams, The Spectacular State, 2010, 38–43; and Bell, Redefining National Identity, 1999, 188.

10 Hartung, Hauptstadtinszenierung, 2012, 76–77. Cf. also Adams, The Spectacular State, 2010, 25–32, which contains a list of streets and squares renamed since 1990.

11 Meuser, Architektur in Zentralasien, 2012, 62–63.

12 Hartung, Hauptstadtinszenierung, 2012, 75.

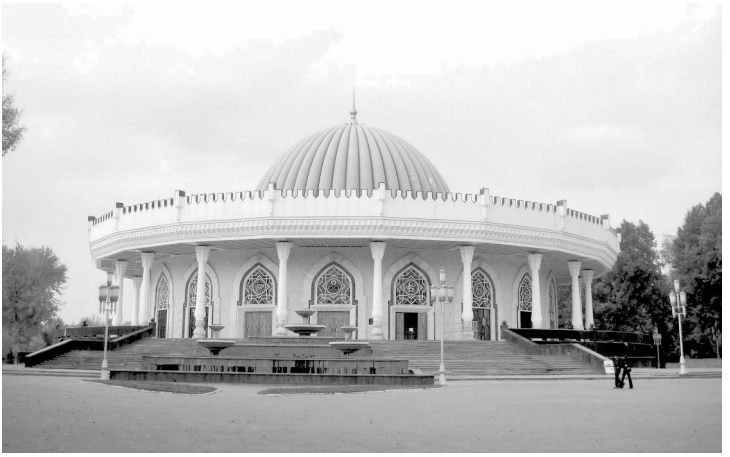

*Figure 2: Brick-and-mortar heritage politics. The Amir Timur Museum in the "Timurid" style (Photo: Rjruiziii 2009)*

Uzbekistan's authoritarian government has been emphasizing the country's membership of the Islamic cultural sphere ever since independence, making a clean break with the Soviet doctrine of state secularism. This has been used to recentre 'traditional' ways of life and social roles. Alongside secularism and 'Western' lifestyles, values such as gender equality have been suppressed in favour of patriarchal structures.[13] Particularly the mahallas – the traditional semi-autonomous neighbourhoods – have been invested with the hope that they could provide anchors of cultural and social identity – hopes that, in the context of reactionary and repressive social and cultural politics, can, as we will see, be subject to critical examination.

## A Dual Urban Structure

The caesuras and contradictions that immediately strike every traveller to Tashkent bear witness to a colonial period characterized by upheavals and catastrophes. Uzbekistan's capital, today the home of two million people, stood for a long time in the shadow of Samarkand and Bukhara, and underwent a period of dynamic development only after the Russian conquest.[14] As the capital of the Governate General of Turkestan, Tashkent was expanded in splendid fashion under Tsarist rule. The ancient Asian and Islamic settlement with its characteristic structures was joined by a colonial new town, which was intended to act as the engine of rapid growth, and which, following connection to the railway network in 1898, transformed Tashkent into a city of 200,000 in 1910;

13 At the same time, however, the government pursues a model of loyal Islam and severely represses hardline Islamist tendencies, often as a pretext for threating opposition movements with detention, torture and jail.

14 On the general history of the city, cf. Lorenz, Stadtgeschichte Taschkents, 2012.

it ultimately became one of the largest cities in the Tsarist empire.[15] As the capital of the Uzbek Socialist Soviet Republic from 1924, Tashkent became the largest industrial city in Central Asia, particularly when the Soviet Union transferred heavy industry that was vital to the war effort to its southern territories, the harder for the invading Germans to reach.[16] The population exceeded one million as early as 1965.[17] Plans to rebuild Tashkent as a Soviet metropolis had already been forged in 1964, but it was the 1966 earthquake that provided the opportunity to subject the devastated city to a structural overhaul. The rebuilding of Tashkent as a large-scale planned city based on industrially fabricated large blocks was conceived of as a national flagship project that would demonstrate the capabilities of the Soviet community of nations.[18] Following the demise of the Soviet Union, the rebuilding of Tashkent as a national capital and global city – of which the Soviet-era rebuilding may be considered a precursor – was an opportunity to position some large-scale government architecture and palaces of glass and steel in the open spaces of the Soviet city.

It has often been said that Tashkent has exhibited a dual urban structure since Tsarist times.[19] This is characteristic of colonial cities and can be traced back to the powerful need for segregation on the part of the colonisers. The Tsarist new town, whose centre can still be traced in the street plan around the central Amir Timur Square, was positioned some five kilometres east of the old town; the two parts only merged later on, with the Ankhor Canal acting as the visible border between them.[20] The stark contrast between the organic Islamic-Asian city and the planned Tsarist colonial city has been noted by many travellers:[21] on the one hand, a "labyrinthine network of streets around the grand bazaar with its traditional mud-brick architecture, on the other, the imperial echo of Saint Petersburg in the tradition of 18$^{th}$ century European urban planning […]".[22] This European city was largely built over by later Soviet planners; only occasionally does one come across corridor streets between closed-perimeter blocks on the European scale within the rational Soviet urban machine.

This duality has in essence persisted, despite some claims to the contrary, down to the present day.[23] While Soviet modernization efforts might have sought to overcome the division by building over both the Tsarist city and the Islamic town, the modernization plans forged in Moscow were largely left unimplemented. Even the ambitious *Mosoblproekt* (1937–38), a massive reconstruction campaign that envisaged to erect large four-storey blocks around a dense central district was only executed in a rudimentary way (along the central axis).[24] The old and the new – partially constructed – cities remained largely separate. When Tashkent was rebuilt following the 1966 earthquake,

15 Lorenz, Stadtgeschichte Taschkents, 2012, 107–108; Kosmarski, Grandeur and Decay, 2011, 39–41.
16 Hartung, Hauptstadtinszenierung, 2012, 82.
17 Lorenz, Stadtgeschichte Taschkents, 2012, 107–108.
18 Hartung, Hauptstadtinszenierung, 2012, 83.
19 Lorenz, Stadtgeschichte Taschkents, 2012; Stronski, Tashkent, 2010, 254.
20 Lorenz, Stadtgeschichte Taschkents, 2012, 107.
21 Lorenz, Stadtgeschichte Taschkents, 2012, 95.
22 Hartung, Hauptstadtinszenierung, 2012, 82.
23 Stronski, Tashkent, 2010, 254
24 Stronski, Tashkent, 2010, 48, 54, 56–71.

many buildings were demolished in both the Tsarist and the traditional residential areas to make room for an extensive planned city on the models of Le Corbusier or Niemeyer .[25] What emerged was an exemplary administrative and commercial center, the very definition of a functionally-zoned and interconnected city with demonstratively emphasized avenues and traffic corridors (fig. 3).[26] Owing to the lack of private transport, the promise of modernity associated with these plans has still not been fulfilled. Irregular clusters of huge apartment blocks stand around erratically within the loose grid of the planned city, whose spaces barely strike the observer as urban.[27]

*Figure 3: Urban planning on a grand scale. View from the Hotel Uzbekistan over Amir Timur Square (Photo: J. Blokker 2014)*

Yet the city's historical dualism has not been overcome – merely transformed. What may strike the Western visitor is that this apparently functional and Fordist city of trajectories is not content to conform to a rational pattern of cleanly delineated zones but continues to be subverted and infiltrated by urban forms from earlier cultural eras. At the edges of the modern functional spaces can be found "microspaces of improvised living: market stalls, rows of booths […]."[28] Along the main roads, which may have as many as twelve lanes and are frequently screened off behind concrete walls or fences designed to hide them from sight, the informally proliferating single-storey dwellings of the mahalla[29] residential areas may be seen from time to time, their irregular and

25 Chukhovich, Building the Living East, 2012, 220, 225.

26 Cf. the essay on *The Crises of the Modern City* in this volume (Chapter 2).

27 Hartung speaks of "landmarks of urban dissolution", Hartung, Hauptstadtinszenierung, 2012, 84.

28 Hartung, Hauptstadtinszenierung, 2012, 85.

29 For an overview of the history, transformation and organization of the mahalla: Sievers, Uzbekistan's Mahalla, 2002.

often unpaved streets appearing suburban or even rural (fig. 4).[30] There could be no greater contrast between these two forms of the city. Here, the large-scale, grand city of trajectories, there the small-scale system of compounds, its winding system of cul-de-sacs screened off from passing traffic.[31] The mahallas, residential districts organized on neighbourhood lines, are vital for the cultural and social order of traditional groups in Uzbek society (more on this below). Spatially, these districts are structured by the needs of their inhabitants to live and communicate, and not by those of crossing and transit: the modern zones and the trajectory city are subverted and undermined by the network city of the mahalla; the dualism of Tashkent's space has been transformed into a contradictory meshwork.[32]

*Figure 4: An informally proliferating residential district. Mahalla in Tashkent (Photo: J. Blokker 2014)*

Meanwhile, within this complex pattern, the spatial and ethnic divide between Asians and Europeans remains. The cause of this was, in the first instance, that the newly built apartments were originally intended for skilled workers and other privileged individuals, of whom Russians made up the majority; above all, however, there has always been and continues to be a strong resistance to life in large apartment blocks among Uzbeks and other Asian population groups as a result of their cultural and social customs.[33] Sources from the 1970s make sharply clear how extreme the

30 Hartung, Hauptstadtinszenierung, 2012, 86.

31 On the structure of the compound, cf. Hartung, Hauptstadtinszenierung, 2012, 90–92.

32 Tashkent is thus Le Corbusier's very nightmare: the creator of the Fordist city was constantly concerned with preventing the organic city he considered as deficient in terms of both spatial and sanitary terms, from infecting the beauty and health of his functionalist city machine, cf. Vinken, Ort und Bahn, 2008, and the essay on *The Crises of the Modern City* in this volume (Chapter 2).

33 Stronski, Tashkent, 2010, 270.

ongoing segregation was then, describing the "Uzbek" districts (mahallas) as no-go areas for "Russians".[34]

## 'Civilizing the Orient'

This simultaneity of the zoned trajectory city and the small-scale and largely informal neighbourhoods is the result of an unresolved conflict of modernity. Up until Uzbekistan's independence, urban planning meant modernization on the Western model and was, as can be seen, closely associated with the goal of 'civilizing the Orient', i.e. the region's Islamic-Asian heritage. Over a huge area, civilizing was a euphemism for eliminating. The Russian colonial city was built a secure distance from the old Tashkent as usual; from a Western perspective, the Asian city was defective, dirty, narrow. The broad, lantern-lit boulevards and stone buildings of the new town were the antithesis of the unmappable alleyways with their 'primitive' mud-brick huts.[35] Not only the colonized population was excluded from the European city but also the workers and poor that had been drawn to Tashkent; they were settled outside the colonial city. Such segregation is an expression of a sense of superiority that fears those who are subject to discrimination as a source of infection and violence – and the origin of the desire to recast the 'oriental' in the mould of the European.[36] Under the Soviets, this civilizing mission was seen in historical-materialistic terms, namely as the political task of overcoming class contradictions and redeeming a 'backward' society. Yet this mission had no less of a destructive effect on the traditional residential quarters. Moreover, the Soviets' efforts at modernization were far more directly aggressive towards the old town; in 1929, plans were even laid to tear it down completely and create a park in its place.[37] While it proved impossible to implement this and similar projects, zoning regulations, improvements to sanitation and construction projects were performed under the paradigm of modernization, aiming at "progress" and "civilization".[38]

From the Western perspective, the goal of creating consistent living standards throughout Soviet society required planned cities, large blocks and the elimination of the "'urban village' of chaotically arranged mud-brick homes".[39] Urban planning was an aspect of social and cultural policy that aimed at eliminating a 'backward' culture and implementing ideologically founded re-education. Even the scale of the apartments was designed to encourage the spread of European nuclear-family norms. The replacement of compounds that were home to extended families by apartment blocks manufactured on an industrial scale also fulfilled the desire for social control. In the new city, children would no longer be cared for in private compounds, but in centralized state-run nurseries, while kitchens were kept deliberately small in order

34 Kosmarski, Grandeur and Decay, 2011, 48.
35 Lorenz, Stadtgeschichte Taschkents, 2012, 95–96.
36 Lorenz, Stadtgeschichte Taschkents, 2012, 96.
37 Stronski, Tashkent, 2010, 54.
38 Stronski, Tashkent, 2010, 57–58.
39 Stronski, Tashkent, 2010, 60.

to encourage family members to eat separately from each other in canteens provided for this purpose in schools and factories.[40] Nor did the often-remarked-upon (and rightly so!) formal 'orientalization' of the prefabricated high-rises contradict the goals of development and progress. The often elaborate decorations – mass produced concrete components based on 'oriental' designs often derived from traditional Uzbek textile patterns – were intended to evoke an Uzbek "national style", in accordance with Stalin's dictum that national culture under the dictatorship of the proletariat should be "national in form, socialist in content" (figs 5, 6).[41]

*Figures 5, 6: "National in form, socialist in content". Soviet housing blocks with 'oriental' decoration (Photos: J. Blokker 2014)*

The imposition of egalitarian apartments for nuclear families went hand-in-hand here with the cultivation of an "oriental-arabesque" regional style.[42] After 1966, very few Soviet planners and architects seriously considered adapting rational spatial planning procedures and industrial housing construction to the lifestyles of the Turkic population of the city and analysing in concrete terms the extent to which the mahalla system could be integrated into socialist planning.[43] The architect Mitkhat Bulatov, for instance, argued that the "mahalla spirit" had to be destroyed, but could still be transformed into a

40 Lorenz, Stadtgeschichte Taschkents, 2012, 113–115.

41 Stalin, Deviations on the National Question, 1942 (1930), 207.

42 On the concepts of the national and the regional in this context, cf. Chukhovich, Building the Living East, 2012, 217–218. Even Stalinist architecture in Tashkent had made an attempt at mimicking the language of regional forms (albeit filtered through neo-historicism), as paradigmatically realised in the Alisher Navoi Theatre completed in 1947; Navoi Prospekt, which was laid out in 1937, destroyed much of the old city, replacing it with modern buildings of culture and governance featuring "typically Uzbek" forms of construction. Oswald/Demydovets, Bauten und Projekte, 2012, 193–195.

43 Stronski, Tashkent, 2010, 146–153; Chukhovich, Building the Living East, 2012, 225–230.

kind of Soviet "micro-district".[44] The few significant experiments in this direction after 1966 included the experimental avantgarde building in Micro-District C-27 (1975), where Korobtsev and Khalilova created piles of residential cubes that ensured each family had a private outdoor space.[45] Also spectacular is the Zhemchug high-rise, which has been called a "vertical mahalla". Designed by Odetta Aidinova, this sixteen-floor residential tower includes an interior courtyard for each set of three storeys as a semi-public common area.[46] However, these are all exceptions, prototypes that never entered mass production; and the two contradictory city forms – planned city and mahalla – continue to exist as parallel worlds.

## Processes of Self-Discovery. Heritage und Heritage Communities

On independence, the modern/oriental binary pair was deprived of its colonial logic. The state no longer represented 'European' modernity, with its sense of a calling to oppose 'backwardness' and 'underdevelopment' – alongside the exotic, the dark and the alien – in the name of enlightenment, secularization and rationalism. Yet in Tashkent there is still little evidence of coherent urban planning that is focused on the needs of the inhabitants or takes account of the elements that make up their culture. The expansion of the centre, as mentioned above, which aims to centre to create a global city and a modern economic hub, unabashedly built on the grandeur and power of the Soviet city, even if individual buildings were "de-Russified" in the course of their modernization.[47] The trajectory spaces that are now often branded as "Timurdic" are antiurban and do little to promote the development of public life; now as before, they ignore the patterns of life of the majority of the city's inhabitants and the spaces of their everyday lives. Götz Burggraf considers the development of public space in Tashkent since 1991 as the "reflection of a two-way process of self-discovery": while state agencies have attempted to create expressions of national identity and to represent this effectively in the public space, representatives of civil society are pursuing a different set of interests; the "double nature" of the city is being consolidated by the fixation on major projects and an ineffective system for balancing different interests.[48] As Hartung points out, "Eternal Tashkent", the glossy official publication commemorating Tashkent's development that was published in 1998, presents the old city as something that should hurry up and vanish.[49] When the presidency changed hands in 2017, it came with hopes of politi-

44 Stronski, Tashkent, 2010, 151.

45 Meuser, Architektur in Zentralasien, 2012, 56.

46 Meuser, Architektur in Zentralasien, 2012, 57 and Oswald/Demydovets, Bauten und Projekte, 2012, 214–215. Cf. also Kalinovsky, Laboratory of Socialist Development, 2018, 125.

47 These include the Senate Building and the House of the Ministries, Oswald/Demydovets, Bauten und Projekte, 2012, 190–191 and Hartung, Hauptstadtinszenierung, 2012, 84–85. On the post-socialist cityscape cf. Adams, The Spectacular State, 2010, 25–33.

48 Burggraf, Der öffentliche Raum, 2012, 152, 155. Hartung observes that characterizing the endless uninhabited spaces of the government quarter as "public space" is problematic. Hartung, Hauptstadtinszenierung, 2012, 79.

49 Hartung, Hauptstadtinszenierung, 2012, 86–87.

cal reform and greater economic openness. Yet the status of the 'oriental' city remains precarious under the new ruler. The *Tashkent City* project (2017) followed the established pattern of a late modern glass-and-steel city of business and bureaucracy.[50] Its realization necessitated the prior clearance of two mahallas, whose residents were rehoused elsewhere.[51] At least the *Modern Mahalla* project is now giving some thought to the future development and modernization of the traditional residential areas. This project proposes to "redesign" 505 neighbourhoods, and plans that are circulating show major structural changes, which is likely to mean rebuilding from scratch.[52] At the same time, the backlog of massive apartment buildings requiring rehabilitation in the wide-open spaces of the Soviet-era residential areas has reached an alarming level.

It is clear that the various layers of the city's architectural history enjoy very different degrees of attention and appreciation among the different heritage communities. For international professionals and lovers of architecture, Tashkent is no longer an "undiscovered gem", especially given the large expanses of occasionally spectacular Soviet modernism that have survived and produced so many iconic structures. These include Tashkent's underground stations,[53] the state circus[54], the Hotel Uzbekistan[55], the Chorsu Bazaar (fig.7) [56] and the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan (fig. 8) to name but a few.

Such icons of the city enjoy enormous popularity, at least among those educated Tashkent residents who are interested in architecture; they are shown to visitors with great pride. Crucially, however, my Uzbek Master's students explicitly did not evaluate them as "monuments" in the sense of built heritage, although many are important sites of identification, including the circus, which was one of the largest in the Soviet Union, and the Chorsu Bazaar at the heart of the decimated old city (fig. 8).[57] Growing identification with the city's Soviet-era cultural buildings was most recently seen in protests at the demolition of the Dom cinema, a concrete structure from the early 1980s.[58] By contrast, the mass-manufactured housing blocks, for all the complexity of their façade decoration, enjoy considerably less popularity. It seems that, in them, the memory of the destruction of the Islamic city and its lifeworlds – by earthquake *and* bulldozer – is still alive.

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50 Matyakubova, Tashkent City, 2018, 3

51 Matyakubova, Tashkent City, 2018, 5–7.

52 Matyakubova, Tashkent City, 2018, 7–8, with reference to an article from 2017, cf. Sovremennoi mahalle radi ne vse, GazetaUz, 20 August 2017.

53 Website Matador Network, To see the best art and architecture.

54 Oswald/Demydovets, Bauten und Projekte, 2012, 228–229.

55 Oswald/Demydovets, Bauten und Projekte, 2012, 234–235.

56 Oswald/Demydovets, Bauten und Projekte, 2012, 220–221.

57 In March 2014, I held a day-long teaching seminar in Tashkent at the Usbekisch-Deutschen Zentrum für Architektur und Bauwesen (UDZ), an academic institution operated jointly by the Potsdam University of Applied Sciences and the Tashkent Institute of Architecture and Civil Engineering as part of the Uzbek-German master's degree course in building conservation and heritage conservation. Topics covered included historic preservation and the preservation of international cultural heritage. There was a lively discussion of the status of individual architectures and structures. This was continued during excursions in the city, most of which were led by students.

58 Matyakubova, Tashkent City, 2018, 8–10.

*Figure 7: Iconic Soviet Modernism: Chorsu Bazaar*

*Figure 8: State Museum of History (Photos: J. Blokker 2014)*

The only structures referred to literally as historic monuments or built heritage by the Master's students (as well as presumably by most of Tashkent's cultural tourists) are showpieces of Islamic architectures, of the kind that have been granted UNESCO World

Heritage status in Samarkand and other sites,[59] but are relatively poorly represented in Tashkent. The most frequently mentioned example in Tashkent is the – much renovated – Kukeldash Madrasa (fig. 9). It has again been used as a Koran school in recent years, and appears to stand as a placeholder for old Tashkent, which from this position, near the dome of the grand bazaar, can be hard to detect amidst the modern cityscape.

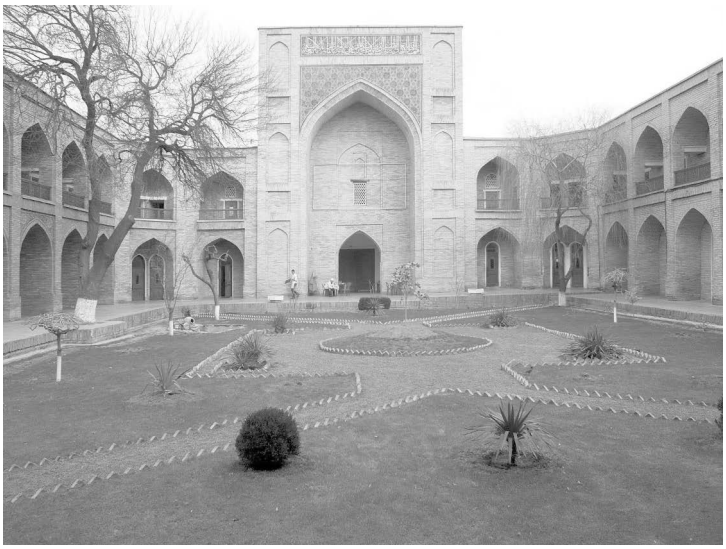

*Figure 9: UNESCO World Heritage. Kukeldash Madrasa (Photo: J. Blokker 2014)*

Another point of reference that serves as a source of identity formation, according to my observations, is the new religious centre that has developed around Hazrat Imam Mosque since it opened in 2007. Created by means of extensive restoration and reconstruction, the Timurdic ensemble includes mosques, madrassas and mausoleums dating from the 16th to the 19th centuries, and contains the oldest surviving copy of the Koran.[60] These complexes and monuments, however, have little influence on the city; Soviet planning has left them isolated and insular. From the perspective of classical architectural conservation, by contrast, the traditional residential districts, the often faceless mahallas, are entirely invisible. Yet for historically informed urban planning, this is an absolutely vital layer of the city. It is no exaggeration to say that the possibility of reconciling tradition and future will above all be decided by how Tashkent deals with the traditional urban spaces of these neighbourhoods.[61]

Uzbekistan's mahallas are not treated as historic monuments, but are perceived as culturally significant spaces, as heritage of the kind that helps to form identities in the broad sense that surpasses the mere concept of cultural heritage. There is no possibility

59 Website Wikipedia, List of World Heritage Sites in Uzbekistan.

60 Dieckmann, Tausend und eine Macht, 2014.

61 For details of the challenges and the new legal regulations since 1991: Sievers, Uzbekistan's Mahalla, 2002, 118–152.

of productively steering tradition here by means of legal stipulations aimed at conserving material substance or preventing alterations. As sites of constant transgression and transformation, the houses and compounds of Tashkent's mahallas are rarely more than a century old. In their wealthier areas (given the inward orientation of their structure, it is often hard to identify the personal wealth of those who live there), gentrification has set in. This gentrification has seen many unauthorized cases of privatization of common lands and public space.[62] The withering away of the mixed-use mahalla structures into purely residential districts appears unstoppable, with the loss of the once indispensable mahalla house and the infrastructure of small neighbourhood centres with their tradespeople's compounds, kiosks, shops and teahouses.[63] New residential areas, for all that they pass on traditional ways of living together, are often hard to tell apart from European-style suburbs.

Since the mahalla is such a highly loaded symbol for "Uzbek" culture and way of life, its future is the crucial question for the 'right' path to modernization. This is where the conflicts between traditional ways of life and the constantly shifting demands of a globalized society play out; and this is where the question arises of how and in which spaces the inhabitants of Tashkent wish to live and will be able to live in the future. The city's official concepts and framework plans are reluctant to engage with this question. There is no master plan for socially responsible, sustainable and culturally sensitive urban planning. In view of the significance that the mahallas have not only for the identity of the Uzbek people but also in concrete terms for the everyday life of the city,[64] scholars and activists have rightly called for more transparency, communication and participation in the city's planning measures.[65] Though the demolition of traditional residential areas, and the compulsory resettlement that this entails, regularly provokes opposition, the residents' room to manoeuvre is often narrow as a consequence of their limited ownership rights. They also suffer from crumbling infrastructure caused by a lack of investment in mahallas that are facing long-term rehabilitation measures. In the short-term, a system to manage complaints and fair compensation for those facing rehousing would bring relief; but in the long term, what is needed is a system for balancing the interests of the city and its citizens that has a firm institutional and legal basis, e.g. the establishment of binding property rights and procedures for civic participation in planning processes.[66]

## Traditional Urban Spaces – Contaminated Heritage?

Clearly this goes beyond problems of compensation and civic participation; it ultimately concerns the fundamental issue of the 'right' way of living – a question that emphatically

62 Kosmarski, Grandeur and Decay, 2011, 52–53.

63 Hartung, Hauptstadtinszenierung, 2012, 92.

64 In 1989 around one third of Tashkent's residents still lived in mahallas, Sievers, Uzbekistan's Mahalla, 2002, 117.

65 Matyakubova, Tashkent City, 2018, 9.

66 Matyakubova, Tashkent City, 2018, 7.

invokes that of the 'right' way of life. At its heart, this concerns the issue of what kind of space will be given over to tradition in a society that is conceiving of its own path to modernity. Most authors, however, see the mahalla as having already provided an answer to the question of the right way to live in Tashkent.[67] Western authors praise the mahalla as a paradise of compounds, perfectly adapted to the climate, earthquake-proof, in tune with the local way of life, organic, ancient and "still successful after all this time": all that remains, in their view, is thus to capture the essence of the Asian city and its mahalla structure and adapt this to current needs.[68] In local descriptions of the city and in guides for travellers, Tashkent's traditional districts are often glorified as an earthly paradise.[69] Academic authors, who seek to cast a critical gaze over Uzbek urban policy, also see these as places "of community and connectedness".[70]


*Figure 10: Mahalla – a paradise of compounds? (Photo: Varandej 2015)*

To my mind, these statements need to be challenged from two directions. The first concerns the plausibility of such a planning approach. Is it desirable for a city with a population in the millions to favour such a low-density form of architecture even in central areas? How can a city with an endless expanse of single-storey residential compounds meet all of the new challenges ahead, such as those of urban sprawl: excessive land use and expensive infrastructure, not only for local public transport but also for energy and water – problems that will likely only intensify with accelerating climate change? Is it even possible to reconcile the mahalla with a property sector run on free-market lines, or would these areas have to be collectivized to facilitate a less-intensive

67 For a critical perspective, see Sievers, Uzbekistan's Mahalla, 2002, 123.

68 Hartung, Hauptstadtinszenierung, 2012, 93.

69 Website Uzbek Travel, About Uzbekistan.

70 Matyakubova, Tashkent City, 2018, 5.

form of residential building in highly desirable city-centre areas? Living centrally in one- to two-storey, small-scale structures is a pattern we tend to find elsewhere in informal settlements that are largely free of market forces. In addition, it is possible to identify fault lines between the supposed "paradise of compounds" and a pluralistic and democratic (and gender-equitable) community life. Mahallas do not have public spaces in the full sense of the word, but rather form closed enclaves that are decoupled from passing traffic. Similar to gated communities, they systematically exclude social change and intermixing.[71] Such infrastructure as exists serves only the neighbourhood; the mahallas are socially homogeneous and exclusive. One cannot simply pick a mahalla, but strict rules are enforced about who may move in; leaving voluntarily may also lead to ostracization.[72]

The mahalla, one must constantly remind oneself, is far more than merely a spatial unit in the sense of a neighbourhood. In the Arab and Asian world, it is a widespread and legally acknowledged instrument of institutional self-government for city districts, with an elected leader and a council of elders.[73] The mediating function that it plays between families and the state is traditionally also connected with powerful functions for social regulation and control – something that the Soviet authorities encouraged and exploited.[74] The mahalla is "one of only a few effective traditional structures that can unite representatives of various ethnic and religious groups through the creation of a common identity based on shared residence. However, throughout the history of these communities, political authorities have often attempted to manipulate these institutions to enhance the state's legitimacy".[75] The post-independence project to strengthen the mahalla follows in this tradition.[76] The process of "mahallization"[77] is an inherent aspect of an authoritarian heritage and identity policy.[78] The process is ambivalent at least: "Thus, the old neighborhood institution *malhalla* – which existed even throughout the Soviet era and represents an interface between state and local communities – is more or less instrumental as a new organizational unit of political control, using old patterns of social practices: Family, kinship and patriarchal structure organize the life of citizens on a local level."[79]

Even if some authors stress the mediating role of the mahallas and compare them with the NGOs that operate in the cities of the Global South, it is hard to deny that they stand less for the self-organization of an egalitarian society of citizens than for the stabilization of a patriarchal structure that is defined by "blood ties" and kinship.

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71 Goziev, Mahalla, 2015.

72 Sievers, Uzbekistan's Mahalla, 2002, 98, 136.

73 Sievers, Uzbekistan's Mahalla, 2002, 95–102.

74 Sievers, Uzbekistan's Mahalla, 2002, 113–114.

75 Dadabaev, Community life, 2013, 181.

76 For details, see Sievers, Uzbekistan's Mahalla, 2002, 118–120, 131–150.

77 Also "malhallization". On the concept, see Mentges, The Role of UNESCO, 2012, 220. The spelling "malhalla" is unusual in Uzbekistan.

78 It has been accompanied by a process of juridification and formalization that may actually serve to weaken the institution in the long term. Sievers refers to this as "grassroots absolutism", Sievers, Uzbekistan's Mahalla, 2002, 152–154, 152.

79 Mentges, The Role of UNESCO, 2012, 220. Italics in the original.

Human rights groups point out that the Uzbek government uses mahallas to suppress dissidents, religious minorities and women and to curtail their rights.[80] When I was teaching in Tashkent, I became aware that the topic of the mahalla was not an easy one for the ethnically and culturally heterogeneous groups of students to discuss, and that it was easier to speak openly in private contexts. The level of social pressure exerted on individuals by their surroundings in everyday situations (such as when choosing whom to marry) was perceptibly high (even if it was accepted as unavoidable). My impression was that the dominant speakers, who tended to be Uzbek men, saw the mahalla as a largely unambivalent frame of reference and source of identity, while the Russians, Korean women, and Uzbek women were more likely to remain silent on the topic. The complaint was voiced, for instance, that women were expected to move to their husband's mahalla (and to the house of their parents-in-law) after marriage and were often forced to break off all contacts to their mahalla of origin – and hence to their parents and other relatives.[81]

The question of the mahalla makes particularly clear just how complex issues of "urban heritage" become as soon as we look beyond the narrow concept of "built heritage" and take into account the space of the city as a whole and the structural, social and emotional aspects of urban life. Only when we take all of these together can we see the various formations of urban heritage. Sustainable urban development, to sum up this chapter's findings, depends directly on how the various heritage formations can be articulated and weighted to be included in future plans and transformation processes. In general terms, urban heritage, as the case of Tashkent demonstrates clearly, is easy to instrumentalize, whether for heritage politics, nation building or branding, as well as for reactionary or repressive social politics. The example of the mahallas makes clear that patriarchal social structures with their mechanisms of control and repression are being defended and consolidated in Tashkent's debates over planning policy and urban development – and this in the name of tradition and cultural heritage.

80 The Equal Rights Trust, After the Padishah, 2016, in particular 168–169.

81 On this, cf. also Sievers, Uzbekistan's Mahalla, 2002, 99.