

RESEARCH IN ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Norway and Russia have been closely related through the ages, both geographically and historically, and have experienced similar problems relating to climate, building maintenance and national wooden architecture. As a result, the parallel study of architectural conservation and restoration theories and practices in both neighbouring Northern states makes for a stimulating collective monograph.

Architectural Conservation and Restoration in Norway and Russia delves into the main challenges of historic and contemporary architectural preservation practices in the two countries. The book consists of three main parts: the discovery and preservation of historical architecture in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century; contemporary approaches to former restorations and the conservation and maintenance of historical architecture; and, finally, current questions concerning preservation of twentieth-century architectural heritage which, due to different building technologies and artistic qualities, demand revised methods and historical evaluation.

This is a valuable resource for academics, researchers and students in different areas of architecture (medieval, nineteenth-century, wooden and contemporary architecture) as well as in the fields of art, architectural history, cultural heritage and Scandinavian and Russian studies.

Evgeny Khodakovsky is Head of the Department of Russian Art History at St Petersburg State University, Russia.

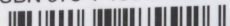
Siri Skjold Lexau is Professor of Art History at the University of Bergen, Norway.

ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION

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ISBN 978-1-138-27992-6



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Architectural Conservation and Restoration in Norway and Russia



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Edited by Evgeny Khodakovsky and Siri Skjold Lexau

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2018
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Khodakovsky, Evgeny, editor. | Lexau, Siri Skjold, 1951– editor.

Title: Architectural conservation and restoration in Norway and Russia / edited by Evgeny Khodakovsky and Siri Skjold Lexau.

Description: New York : Routledge, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017016569 | ISBN 9781138279926 (hb) | ISBN 9781315276205 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Architecture—Conservation and restoration—Norway. | Architecture—Conservation and restoration—Russia (Federation)

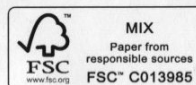
Classification: LCC NA109.N8 A73 2017 | DDC 720.28/8—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017016569>

ISBN: 978-1-138-27992-6 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-27620-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Goudy
by Apex CoVantage, LLC



Printed in the United Kingdom
by Henry Ling Limited

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Editors

Evgeny Khodakovsky is the Head of the Department of Russian Art History at St Petersburg State University, Russia. He lectures on the history of the art and architecture of the Russian North, Russian Medieval Art, folk art, wooden architecture and the history of restoration in Russia and Europe.

Siri Skjold Lexau is Professor of Art History at the Department of Linguistic, Literary and Aesthetic Studies, University of Bergen, Norway. Her primary research activity is linked to the history of architecture and urban studies. She has published widely on the history of transformation of sites and buildings.

Contributors

Ilya Antipov, Assistant Professor, PhD at the Department of the History of Russian Art, St Petersburg State University. The main topic of his research is the history of Old Russian architecture, building materials and technology. He has conducted archaeological investigations on many monuments of Novgorodian architecture of twelfth to seventeenth centuries. Laureate of the Prize of the Government of Russia (2015).

Andrei Bode, Architect-Restorer, PhD in Architecture. Researcher at the Institute of Theory and History of Architecture and Urban Planning, Moscow. Research and creative interests: history of wooden architecture, ancient traditions. Author of books and articles on the wooden architecture of Russia and problems of restoration.

Ksenia Chemesova, independent researcher. She holds a Master's Degree in Art History from St Petersburg State University. Her fields of interests are the medieval architecture of Scandinavia and Western Europe, as well as restoration history.

Hans-Henrik Egede-Nissen is a cultural heritage conservation officer at the Norwegian Defence Estates Agency. His PhD thesis (2014) from the Oslo School of Architecture and Design raises questions about the universal relevance of authenticity. He takes a particular interest in nineteenth-century architecture as well as military architecture from all periods.

Emilia Khodinitu, Public Relations Manager, Department of Marketing, the Palace of Culture for Educators – the Yusupov Palace, St Petersburg, Russia. Her fields of interests are contemporary museum architecture, urban planning, museum management, digital museum learning.

Daria Liubimova, independent researcher. Her primary research interest is the history of Soviet architecture from early constructivist theories to the city-planning and urban development of the 1950s–1960s.

Maria Medvedeva, Head of the Research Archive at the Institute for the History of Material Culture, Russian Academy of Sciences. She holds a PhD in

History. Her main fields of interest are the archival research and the cultural heritage management in the Russian Empire and early Soviet Russia.

Dag Myklebust, former Senior Adviser at the Norwegian Directorate of Cultural Heritage. He has a Master's Degree in Art History, and from 1984 he worked with Building Preservation in the Directorate. From 1991 on, he shifted to international work, representing Norway in the Cultural Heritage Committee in the Council of Europe. Between 1995 and 2010, he was the leading specialist in the Norwegian-Russian co-operation on Cultural Heritage Protection. He provides research on the early history of the Norwegian Directorate of Cultural Heritage.

Arina Noskova, Research Fellow and the Scientific Secretary of the Department of the Wooden Architecture at the Scientific-Research Institute of the Theory and History of Architecture and Urban Planning. She specializes in wooden ecclesiastical architecture of north-western Russia and archival research.

Per Schjelderup, Restoration Architect, Schjelderup & Gram Architects, Stavanger. Associate professor at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Stavanger. He is, together with partner Live Gram, responsible for several cultural heritage restorations of national significance.

Ekaterina Staniukovich-Denisova, Senior Lecturer at the Department of Russian Art History, St Petersburg State University. Her main fields of interest are the architecture of St Petersburg of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Russian-European relationships in art and culture, Swedish and Finnish architecture, archival collections, city-planning and culture heritage.

Dmitriy Yakovlev, Project Architect at the Central Scientific-Restoration Project Workshops (Moscow), Historian of Architecture, a member of the Union of Restorers of Russia, Laureate of the Prize of the Government of Russia (2015). His projects are mostly related to the Russian medieval architecture (Moscow, Novgorod the Great, Solovetsky monastery).

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13 Experimental preservation of an arctic settlement Piramida on Spitzbergen

A Russian view of the 120 hours 2015 architectural competition

Ekaterina Staniukovich-Denisova

The environmental approaches that have become particularly popular in the contemporary architecture of the Scandinavian countries are also being extended to historical objects undergoing preservation. It was the Norwegians who in 2015 made the experimental preservation of a semi-abandoned settlement on Spitsbergen the subject of the architectural competition *120 Hours* that raised a number of basic issues relating to the preservation of buildings from the recent past. In this chapter I shall discuss the variety of solutions put forward by participants in the competition for architecture students on how to deal with the embodiment of a Soviet utopia of the 1950s–1980s in the Arctic: the unique settlement called Piramida or Pyramiden. The non-restrictive design criteria with regard to the functioning of the object (regarded as a "site") stimulated a search for conceptual approaches across a wide spectrum (including art objects and performances) that reflect the transformation of the concept of architecture in the twenty-first century.

The Arctic as a unique territory of dialogue and innovation

Historically the arena for direct contacts and cultural interaction between Russians and Norwegians has been the Arctic region and, above all, its sea routes.

To the Russian mind, the Arctic, which in the twentieth century emerged from historical isolation and increased in significance many times over, is a natural continuation of the cultural concept of the Russian North. Environmental conditions and the course of historical development in that part of Russia determined its specific regional identity, in which, more than anywhere else, features of the national culture and character have survived undistorted by conquests and extraneous external elements. This has made the Russian North particularly attractive at times when there was a search for national origins and a reassessment of future courses for the thinking metropolitan intelligentsia.

A distinctive feature of Northern culture is its location in extreme geographic and climatic conditions. The folk culture of the Russian North formed at the extreme of the survival of the ethnos, when the question of its continued

existence was a real and pressing one. In such a “threshold situation”, a culture will mobilize all its inner resources. Mechanisms of self-preservation become engaged that are bound up with ensuring its integrity. In the struggle for survival, many insignificant features are abandoned and the urge to preserve cultural identity, reflectivity and introversion increase strongly. The culture looks to its original foundations. The role of its self-awareness increases, serving as a buttress for its self-preservation (Terebikhin 1993: 144f). To all appearances, what has just been said can to a large extent also apply to the Northern Norwegians, with whom today’s Pomors often feel a sense of common genetics.

In the twenty-first century, due to the ever-increasing accessibility of the unexploited riches of the Arctic and the latest explorations of the continental shelf, it is becoming a new geopolitical region, the “geotory” (Riabtsev 2015) of a dialogue between developed countries in which the two basic concepts of “preservation” and “development” exist side-by-side.

The Spitsbergen or Svalbard archipelago is often termed the key to the Arctic due to its unique geographical position and unique status in international law (Portsel 2011). Russian Pomors, as well as the (Norwegian) Vikings, visited the archipelago long before its official discovery in 1596, when the Dutch mariner Willem Barents added Bear Island and the “land of sharp-pointed mountains” – Spitsbergen – to his chart (Zinger 1975: 31, 33, 41). Subsequently, these lands were opened up and exploited by mariners from the countries of Northern Europe. The Pomors, who called the archipelago Grumant, were drawn to its eastern part, which was located closer to Russia. As late as the beginning of the twentieth century, Spitsbergen did not belong to anybody. Industrialists of various nationalities, primarily Norwegian and Russian, engaged freely in economic activity there. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1920, representatives of the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark, Italy, Norway, France, the USA, Sweden and Japan agreed a treaty placing the land areas of Spitsbergen under Norwegian sovereignty, but at the same time all 41 states that acceded to the treaty (including the USSR from 1935) obtained the right to carry out industrial, commercial and scientific research activities there on a basis of complete equality and the demilitarized status of the archipelago.

The need to increase coal supplies led to the purchase of plots of land on Billefjord and the construction by the Soviet Arktikugol’ group of enterprises of a coal-mining plant and a workers’ settlement attached to it. The place became known as Piramida – “The Pyramid” – from the shape of the mountain that towers above it. During the war, the inhabitants and equipment were evacuated, and it was only in 1946, with the arrival of 600 polar workers, that construction of the mine and settlement really began.

Actually, the colony, with a population that rose to over 1,000, continued to develop right up to the moment when the mine closed due to unprofitability in 1998 as a settlement that reflected the finest achievements of Soviet construction in Arctic conditions. The technologies required to build in permafrost conditions were experimental, but so too were the means developed to provide for the psychical and psychological comfort of people working in the extremes of polar

night and polar day. This opportunity appeared thanks to an ideological mandate to demonstrate the advantages of the Socialist way of life in comparison with the neighbouring Norwegian settlements. In the Cold War era, the life of the shift-working miners was supposed to serve as “a model of the Communist future”. They were guaranteed complete social security: wages considerably above what was usual in the country and excellent conditions – free catering, a swimming pool, a hothouse, farm and their own amateur music and dance group. The architectural-spatial construction that was created successfully met the task of producing a favourable artificial environment and life-support systems. Even after being abandoned almost twenty years ago, the settlement (which is still the property of a Russian state-owned enterprise) is impressive for the degree to which utopian intentions were actually accomplished.

After the political events involving Russia in 2014, which also had a negative effect on collaboration in the Arctic (Lukin 2014: 54–64; Portsel 2014), the architectural competition focussing on a Russian settlement on Spitsbergen could have been regarded as a challenge to Russia’s interests (Osnovy 2008), if it had acquired international resonance in the political sphere.

The 120 hours 2015 competition and the Russian settlement of Pyramiden on Spitsbergen

The Norwegian architectural competition *120 hours* (five days) was initiated by students of the Oslo School of Architecture and Design in 2010. Its original aim was to create a platform to present projects by Norwegian students to the worldwide architectural community, but it quite rapidly acquired an international character.

The competition is open to students from all over the world, who can enter either as a single person or in teams of up to three working together. (Here and below all information about the competition and projects have been taken from the official site: www.120hours.no.) The participants’ intensive work over a five-day period is preceded by discussion in the format of talks or lectures devoted both to the broad cultural, environmental and architectural context of the chosen object, which has not yet been announced to the entrants, and issues relating to the development of contemporary architecture as a whole. More talks follow at the end. As can be seen from the competition results, it is precisely these discussions that determine the vector of the majority of projects, and their content can be sensed fairly easily. The jury invariably includes someone from the faculty of the Oslo School of Architecture, a representative of the student body and a couple of international experts who are practicing architects.

The first competitions were directed towards solving local problems within the city that were being actively discussed by its citizens and the professional community. This sort of practice is typical generally for teaching projects in architecture. The twentieth century provides us with many examples of a practicing architect who also taught setting his students as exercises projects on which he himself was working, participating in a real design competition. The most outstanding

example is the Constructivist Ivan Leonidov's brilliant graduation project for the Lenin Institute of Library Science in Moscow (1927). Anyway, in 2011 the location offered to the entrants was Tullinløkka, an open space in the centre of Oslo; in 2012 they were asked for a "long-term strategy" for an internal courtyard space; in 2013 for the design of a dock in Geiranger fjord; in 2014 the theme was "sustainability" in a parkland recreation zone.

The 2014 event already attracted considerably more entries, submitted from around the globe, and for the first time the competition website presented not only the projects that took the top three prizes but also another ten given an honourable mention by the jury and the remaining more than 600 submissions.

In my opinion, the 2015 event played a special role in changing and expanding the framework of the competition itself. Up until that time, the proposed tasks were in essence confined to a single construction. Now, though, the choice was a whole urban organism in a unique geographical location with an eloquent past and a history in literature and film.

The theme chosen for 2015 was "Experimental Preservation". The organizers promised: "The assignment will challenge you to redefine the traditional concepts of preservation, to question existing frameworks and experiment beyond established rules." The jury, too, this time included not only practitioners and teachers of architecture but also an exhibition curator specializing in contemporary art. So, the project moved beyond the limits of just specialists "talking shop", and the stage was set for multipolarity and multiple vectors in the forthcoming entries. The striking and imagination-stirring nature of the object and the international topicality of the theme encouraged an expansion of the range of competition entrants. In the 2015 section on the website, we find no fewer than 725 fully completed project proposals.

It is no coincidence that the choice as the focus for the participants' ideas and efforts fell on the Soviet coal-mining settlement of Pyramiden on Spitsbergen, presented as a ghost town. Its mine was closed in 1998. The settlement was shut down and effectively abandoned. The cold dry climate strongly retards decay, but things left in the building were systematically looted by delinquent visitors. Since 2007 the Russian state-owned Arktikugol' group, which still owns the vacated settlement, has been making efforts to turn it into a tourist sight and base with a hotel for excursions in the picturesque surroundings.

The central area of the settlement took the form of a strongly elongated rectangle covered with a lawn, something unique above the Arctic Circle. Either side of it were the residential blocks (for men, women and families), a house of culture (community centre), a canteen and other buildings (Fig. 13.1).

The largest buildings were five-storey blocks of the mass housing type common back in the Soviet Union. Besides designs for linear towns, the Mall or Champs-Élysées, as the inhabitants called these, evoke persistent associations with Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer's Brasília.

An enduring symbol of the place is its industrial transport installation: a cableway raised high on wooden posts for the great buckets that carried the coal from the mine down the slope of the mountain. Among the identifiable landmarks are

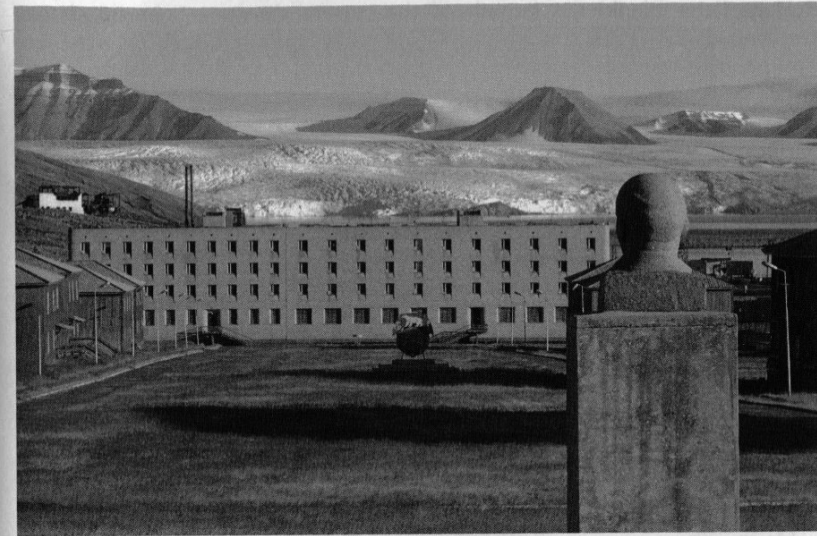


Figure 13.1 The Pyramiden settlement, Spitsbergen. Photograph by Per-Erik Skramstad, 2010.

a monument in the form of a portrait bust of Lenin set on a pedestal gazing at a glacier and the stepped-spire monument with the Pyramiden name-sign in Russian and Norwegian and the last load of coal extracted at its base.

Architectural structures, even abandoned ones, are elements of the cultural space. That is to say, besides their functional, constructional and aesthetic qualities, they continue to be the bearers of a host of meanings, symbols and ideas. By forming shapes, architecture organizes space in which "the values adopted by the society become materialized" (Ikonnikov 2006:11). Due to its permanence and obviousness, architecture predominates over a culture's other means of communication or "symbolic forms". In a number of the projects, we shall see how entrants translate the existing structures into the category of symbols.

Many projects play on the idea of the Arctic as a frozen (in a literal and metaphorical sense) part of the planet, devoid of history, where everything remains eternal and unchanged. The erroneousness of this belief has been shown by Emerson, who predicted that the role of the Arctic will grow in such highly important aspects of our common future as energy security, climate change, globalization and the balance between economic development and environmental protection (Emmerson 2010). Other popular lines proved to be interpretations and connotations relating to the literary world of magic realism from Kjartan Fløgstad's 2007 book *Pyramiden: Portrett av ein forlaten utopi* and fantasies on the theme of the episode about the place in the History Channel's *Life after People* series.

Spitsbergen's real-life situation also dictates unusual approaches.

Hans Peter Blankholm formulated the current threats – “climate change (melting of the polar ice and rising sea levels; decreasing permafrost; wind erosion; re-growth) and human impact (demographic influx, economic expansion, atmospheric pollution, petro-industrial and mineral exploitation, hydroelectricity, fishing industry, tourism and recreation)” – faced by the Arctic's archaeological heritage, and also cultural resource management strategies of open information and interdisciplinary dialogue that should undoubtedly be extended to cultural heritage as a whole. Blankholm considers the most important of these to be “to strengthen continuity and development of archaeological research, education, and public outreach in the Polar regions of the World; to promote dialogue and collaboration between researchers and the public; to facilitate the development of methodological and theoretical directions; and to enhance awareness of research on cultural resource management and the protection of sites and monuments in the Polar regions” (Blankholm 2009:24).

The realities of the constructions' existence in the Arctic, along with other, natural peculiarities of the locality (a concealed on-going endogenous fire in the mine; the encroachment of the islands' native fauna – polar bears and birds – into the habitat deserted by humans) provided a starting point for many entrants.

Meanwhile, the law on environmental protection in force on the Svalbard archipelago states that traces of human activity on the island, from 1945 onwards, are protected and form part of the cultural heritage of the territory.

The 2015 winners and innovative approaches to the idea of preservation

The winner in 2015 was a project entitled *Remember work?* by Jarand Nâ and David Ottosson, both from the Lund School of Architecture. The annotation for the project, which is its strongest feature, pragmatically conveys a message about the need to preserve the memory of the colossal amount of human labour invested, irrespective of its character – forced or altruistic: “Work is at the heart of politics and restauration [sic].” The authors propose combining two approaches to perpetuating the memory of labour. “One way to memorialize work spatially is to put in additional work to preserve it. This creates a potentially endless, recursive loop, one which can give a positive sentimental experience – but one we feel Pyramiden perhaps doesn't need. Another way to commemorate work spatially is to re-enact it.” The shock-workers mining coal should be replaced by “a repurposed industrial robot, that might be reprogrammed to work in hospitality, curation, or to maintain a video feed” moving around a continuous star-shaped track (Fig. 13.2).

Second place went to *Axis of Pyramiden* by a team of three from the Czech Republic – Matyáš Švejdík, Marek Nedelka and Pavel Špringl – for the idea to “leave the place to live its own life, we leave it to the birds, foxes, polar bears and few lost ar[c]tic wanderers, for whom Pyramiden is going to be a small laboratory”. They proposed preserving a virtual image of the settlement, by creating



Figure 13.2 The winning project of 120 Hours 2015 Experimental Preservation – *Remember work?* Jarand Nâ and David Ottosson (Lund School of Architecture). Source: www.120hours.no.

a light installation based on its existing town-planning axes (from the centre to the harbour and centre to the mine) with several beams forming the edges of a gigantic pyramid visible from space. They saw the non-material character of their method of preservation as being analogous to the *120 Hours* architectural competition (Fig. 13.3).

The third-placed entry *The Frozen Dream of Pyramiden* by Hong-Anh Do and Hoang-Anh Tran (Ecole d'Architecture de Paris, France) modernizes Viollet-le-Duc's conception of conservation that should be accompanied by an improvement of the object being preserved. They also regard the *120 Hours* 2015 competition itself as "one of the media technique[s] to bring the non-physical value of Pyramiden to society". In their project, the pair would seek to get the media involved "to attract attention to Pyramiden" by having journalists experience the harsh conditions of life on an expedition while shooting a month-long reality television programme at the settlement.

Since 2014, the jury has also selected ten more noteworthy projects, which as a rule represent either the main tendencies or the most original solutions. They stand out for their interdisciplinary character and reflect various approaches to the idea of preservation, from traditional to radical: conservation, maintenance, modernization, replication, inventory-taking, cataloguing and more.

In the installation *Vanished into thin air . . .* by Agnieszka Lewicka, Monika Frydryszak and Michał Witkowski (Warsaw University of Technology, Poland, Fig. 13.4), seamless mirrors covering the façades of several of the large buildings reflect the untouched landscape and symbolize the sudden historic disappearance of such a political giant as the Soviet Union and of the settlement of Pyramiden together with its inhabitants.

In *Pyramiden. Polar Bears. Preservation?*, Dominic Walker, Deborah Adler and Tim Rodber (University of Sheffield, UK) decide that we need to protect Pyramiden from humans and leave it to the bears: "If bears cannot reproduce fast enough they may need a hand (pun intended). Why not clone the polar bears in the newly build lab?"

The Catalogue, a project by Gabriel Wulf (Architectural Association, UK), proposes taking an inventory, by dismantling and sorting out the components of the existing buildings: "Rethinking the value of the physical substance, the actual materials of the buildings as originals, containing memory and cultural value . . . Taking apart the existing buildings, and arrang[ing] their materials on the former footprint of the building, a collection, an inventory of the past is created. Catalogued, rearranged, and re-sorted, these stacks of materials open up the possibilities of reimagining and re-memorizing the past in the present. And at the same time, the newly created collection creates a spatial experience and inspirational source. On a stroll through the town, every building will be represented in its individual way. Like this, a former wooden structure, catalogued as piles of mostly wooden elements triggers the imagination and experience in a completely different sense than the piles and stacks of a stone building. . . [T]he catalogued inventory represents a new beginning, laid out as source materials for future development and ideas."

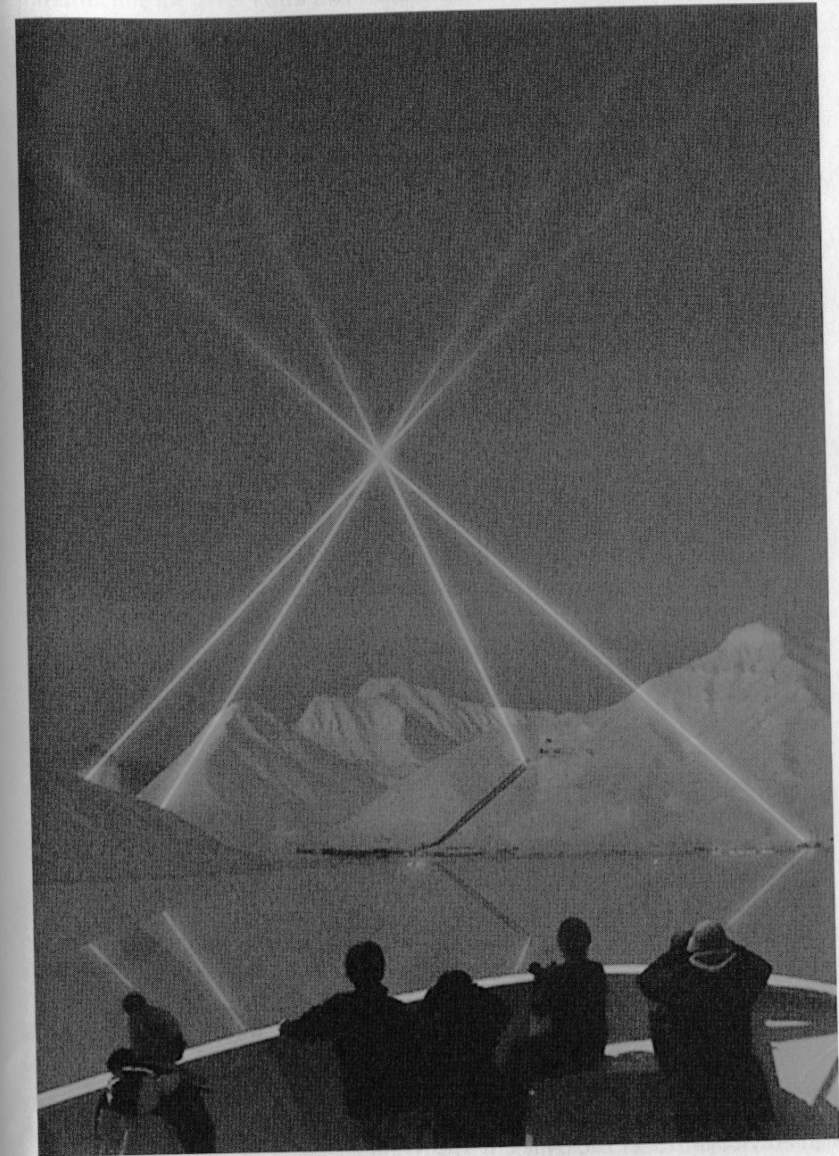


Figure 13.3 The second prize of *120 Hours* 2015 Experimental Preservation – *Axis of Pyramiden*. Matyáš Švejdlík, Academy of Arts, Architecture & Design in Prague; Marek Nedelka, Technical University of Liberec; Pavel Špringl, Technical University of Liberec, Czech Republic. Source: www.120hours.no.

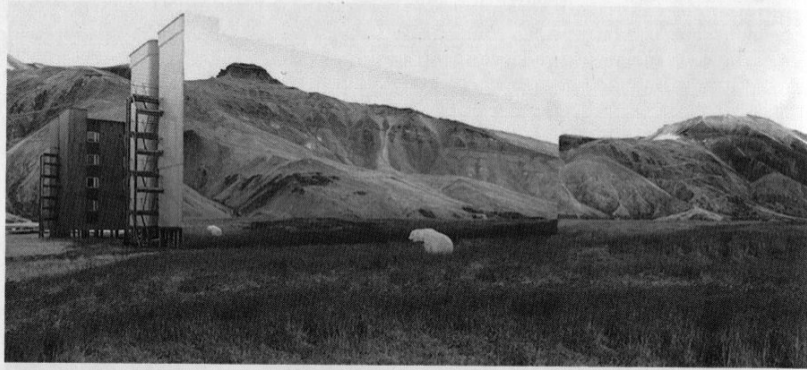


Figure 13.4 The Polish project that received an honourable mention at 120 Hours 2015 Experimental Preservation – *Vanished into thin air . . .* Agnieszka Lewicka, Monika Frydryszak and Michał Witkowski (Warsaw University of Technology, Poland). Source: www.120hours.no.

Before the material remnants of Pyramiden become lost due to the melting of Svalbard's permafrost and glaciers, Martin Henseler, Marc Timo Berg and Lucas Becker (BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg, Germany) propose saving its spirit for posterity by *Translocating Pyramiden*: "By casting the outer shells of the buildings in concrete, the volumes and textures are preserved. The encased buildings will be translocated to all 41 signatories of the treaty. We want each state to have [its] own share of the cultural artefact from Pyramiden before it is disappearing."

In the project *Ruin of the Immediate Present*, Rebecca Ploj, Liam Denhamer and Anya Martsenko (AA School of Architecture, London) suggest celebrating "the 'failure' of Pyramiden, re-inventing it as a ruin, a place of pilgrimage dedicated to aesthetic admiration", along the lines of Piranesi's *Scenographia Campi Martii*.

In *Preserver Preserved*, Bennett Oh, Mark Wang and Wayne Yan (University of Waterloo, Canada) propose moving the fertile soil, which was at one time brought from the mainland and provided fruits and greenery for the inhabitants' enjoyment, "into the existing architecture as an initial gesture of safekeeping. By seeding the buildings with the potential for life, this intervention allows us to document the existing layout of the site while creating a radically new interpretation for the function of these buildings in the future."

The Finnish project *Tapis vert* by Johanna Brummer and Heini-Emilia Saari (Aalto University School of Art, Design and Architecture) suggests that the signatory countries of the Svalbard Treaty jointly take care of the lawn grown artificially on imported chernozem soil, each watering its own section as a mark of dedication to the future.

The hypothesis of Jessica Jiang, Sun Jae Choi and Helena Rong (Cornell University, USA) is that "destruction, adaptation, and preservation are symbiotic

subsystems. [Their project] *superCloud* proposes the construction of a data center, infrastructure for server farms that handle internet traffic, that archives the memory of Pyramiden and then imposes this new programmatic order on the site."

The most radical method suggested for preserving the memory was to set a date – 20 February 2015 – invite guests and burn the settlement down in an eye-catching way, as Nero once did with Rome. *Pyramiden on Fire* was proposed by Sixuan Li, Kun Ma and Ya Liu (University of Sheffield, UK). This piece of performance art would be intended to "remind us to introspect current action in architectural preservation".

Russian proposals

For the first time in 2015, a Russian project, *Imprint*, was among those receiving an honourable mention. Anvar Garipov, Lyubov Timofeeva and Radmir Gelmutdinov (Ural State Academy of Architecture and Arts) ponder upon what is more important to preserve – the material or the content, whether there is a difference between copy and original in post-modern culture. Their idea lies in preserving the contrast between the naïve idealistic creation of the human being (the urban structure) and the magic of nature, enhancing it by the creation of a new precise grid of raised walkway-streets. Such a human creation, whatever its ultimate fate might be, will testify to outer space about the presence of our species (Fig. 13.5).

More than 40 projects from Russia are featured on the site. Most strongly represented is Kazan State University of Architecture and Engineering with 17 entries, while others come from students of architecture in Moscow, St Petersburg, Saratov, Nizhny Novgorod, Yekaterinburg, Tomsk and Rostov-na-Donu.

The very attractive and highly romantic project *Stars and Constellations* from Polina Shtanko and Xenia Bylinina (Moscow Architectural Institute) suggests covering the mountainside and bay in a myriad of little lights to make it seem that the polar sky has come down to Earth. *The City of 1000 Pyramids* by Maria K (Moscow Architectural Institute) covers the mountainside with a host of pyramids encasing both preserved and new structures. *The Town Frozen in Time* by Ilsiyar Rakhimova (Kazan) repopulates the settlement with concrete statues of its former inhabitants, the miners and their families. The cableway inspired students from Saratov to create a big-dipper-type "fairground ride" in the project *Energy for Conservation* and a glazed promenade in *The Melting Way*.

Some of the entries conceive of Pyramiden as a place where many people have been happy. *Sky Village* by a team based in St Petersburg – Ivan Mylnikov, Anna Kutilina (Russian Academy of Fine Arts) and Ivan Karnitskii (Saint Petersburg State University of Architecture and Civil Engineering) – suggests creating new living and working spaces in floating airships.

The project *Medics of Pyramiden* by Karina Ashrapova (Kazan) proposes recognizing the cyclicity in the development of the place and populating it with hermit monks devoting themselves to meditation. *Peace! Labour! May!* by Alena Pavluk (Moscow State University of Civil Engineering) calls for role-playing, acting out a May Day procession on location. *Lenin, salute!* by Leilya (Kazan)

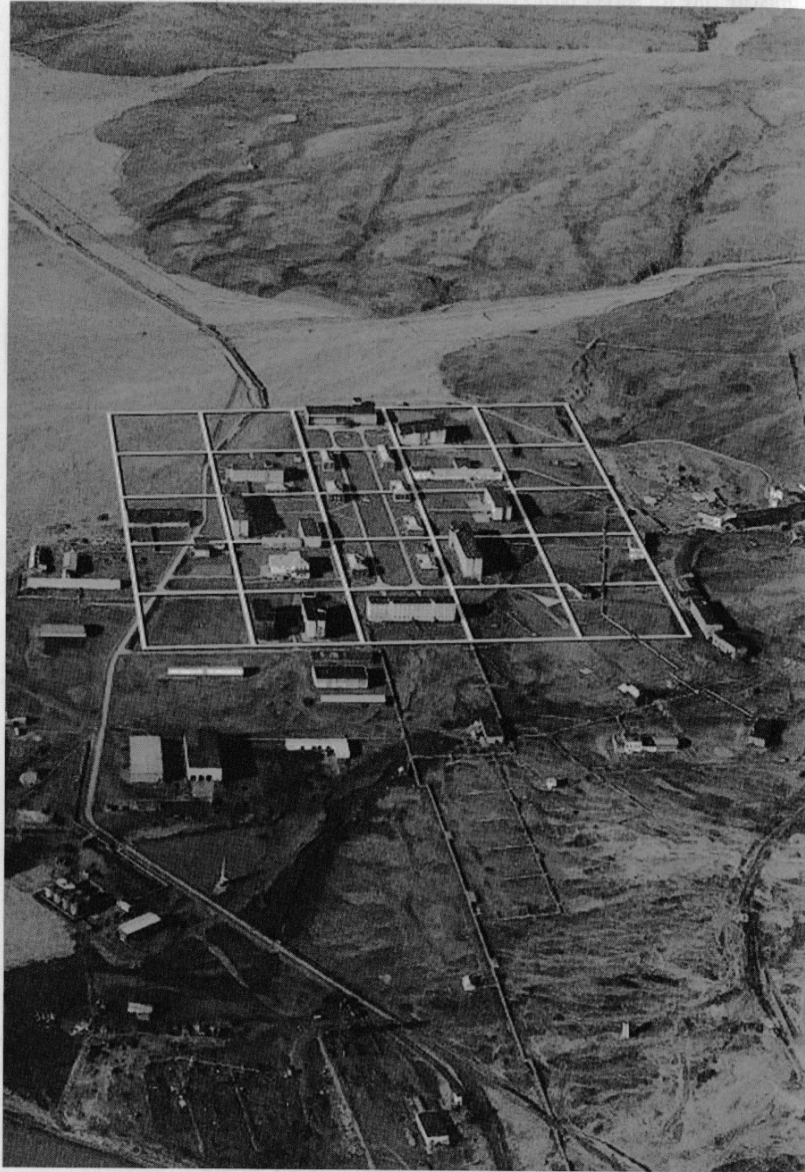


Figure 13.5 The Russian project that received an honourable mention at *120 Hours 2015* Experimental Preservation – *Imprint*. Anvar Garipov, Lyubov Timofeeva and Radmir Gelmutdinov (Ural State Academy of Architecture and Arts, Yekaterinburg).

suggests bringing statues of Lenin from all parts of the former USSR and arranging them like in the Museion sculpture park on Krymsky Val in Moscow, while *A Masoleum (sic)* by Diana Bibisheva (Kazan) proposes re-creating the shape of the Lenin Mausoleum in Red Square around the monument to Lenin in Pyramiden.

In *The Town of Eternal Happiness*, Alisa Silanteva (Kazan) suggests giving the place to different countries for 30 years at a time, so that each of them uses it to hold its own celebration and to create its own utopia but then at the end of its time takes everything away so as to hand over the site to the next state just as it was. The project *The Mystery of Pyramiden*, by Darya Kozlova and Maria Shapchenko (Saint Petersburg University of Architecture and Civil Engineering), presented in comic-book style, turns the settlement into a setting for role-playing games and interactive entertainments, with the money raised from them going towards the restoration of the buildings. The project *Pyramiden Cinema* by Gulfia Kutlahmetova (Kazan) turns the buildings of the settlement into sound stages for a film studio. *Ice Town* by Valeriya Miftakhova (Kazan) calls for a fashion week once a year to breathe life into the settlement. The project by Arseniy Tyurin, Maksim Mikhailov and Nadezhda Luchinkina (Nizhny Novgorod State University of Architecture & Civil Engineering) called simply *Pyramiden* proposes creating an Internet site that tells about the history of each building with the aim of raising money for the restoration of, for example, the sports arena.

In *Black Hole*, Daria Nasonova and Pavel Nasonov (Moscow Architectural Institute) propose installing several small particle accelerators in each building that will preserve past reality for us at the site, using the supposed properties of black holes, while Liliya Kucherenko (Southern Federal University) with her *Ice Pyramid (sic)*, suggests preserving the buildings like mammoths using cryotechnology, placing each of them within a non-melting cube of ice linked to its neighbours by clear galleries. A ghost-town “pyramid”. *The town without people. The town of birds* by Milyausha (Kazan) calls for bird-boxes to be put up all over the settlement’s buildings.

The number of entries was very high, and so I have had to restrict myself to just a few that, perhaps subjectively, seemed the most striking.

It is pleasing to see that students representing all Russia’s leading architectural institutions of higher education have become involved in international competition activity. It is obvious that the entrants do carefully study the competition rules and listen to the lectures provided. Unfortunately, though, in this 2015 competition, in which participants from Russia might have gained an advantage from their knowledge and understanding of the specifics of Soviet architecture, that potential was not exploited. The Russian projects stood out little among others produced with talent and at a fairly high professional standard. Only in a few, including the one given an honourable mention, can one detect a distinctive tradition. In saying this, let me note that representatives of prominent European architectural institutions do to a large extent retain the distinctive character of the national achievements of their own architectural schools. An identifiable set of French, British and German projects directly draw upon, interpret and update aspects of European architectural theory, including restoration theory in its historical aspect. Entrants evidently drew upon the ideas of Piranesi, Winckelmann,

Viollet-le-Duc and Le Corbusier, the modernist icons of Tatlin, Buckminster Fuller, Pei (the Louvre Pyramid) and Niemeyer. In Scandinavian and Finnish projects the emphasis is most often on preserving the ecological environment.

Very many became enchanted with the magic of a utopia, a striving to preserve its spirit or its content. A distinctive feature of the 2015 competition was the predominance of an approach to the architecture structure(s) as a piece of contemporary art: an art object, an installation, a performance, a show. This, too, was preordained by the competition organizers, among other things by inviting onto the jury not just experts on architectural issues – the architect Julien De Smedt, known for his works in Oslo (Holmenkollen Ski Jump) and Århus; Maria Fedorchenko, who teaches the re-programming and transformation of the historical centres of Russian cities (Architectural Association School of Architecture in London) – but also Pernilla Ohrstedt, an author of the *Future Memory Pavilion* commissioned by the Preservation of Monuments Board in Singapore and a curator of the Canadian Pavilion at the 2010 Venice Architecture Biennale.

The overwhelming majority of projects did not make use of actual experience of construction in Arctic conditions, problems of design and materials that have been actively tackled by the engineers of Arctic countries from the second half of the twentieth century onwards. It would be very desirable for the results not to become a cause of controversy, but, on the contrary, strengthened collaboration between Russian and Norway and would be to the benefit of the Russian settlement of Piramida-Pyramiden that still exists on the map of Spitsbergen. Without a doubt, this brainstorming exercise for young minds should also be of benefit to their teachers and practicing architects who encounter a similar task.

In any event, this competition provides a very interesting cross-section for analysis in various fields in and around architecture – and an occasion to ask many questions, both national and global. What is being taught in architectural higher education in different parts of the world? How is the vision of architecture changing, and what new tasks is the architectural rising generation setting itself? Is there a danger of architectural extremism emerging from the extremism in contemporary society?

We have received several hundred answers to the question, what is “experimental preservation” in Arctic conditions, but can we say that we have found the right one? It seems unlikely.

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