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Introduction

All over the world one can see a tendency to build the most extravagant, enormous giant and astounding buildings. Sometimes constructions of such a building affect the existing historical parts of the city. Struck by the observations of changes going on in the beautiful and full of history city of Baku in Azerbaijan author started to analyze what had happened. This paper will discuss the process of changing in the historical town – Baku in Azerbaijan in comparison with the achievements of European urban planners and architects.

The transformations of the image of the historical cities could have diverse forms. They may concern the changing of public spaces, constructing contemporary buildings and urban revitalization of historical districts. All of them are present in Baku. A great amount of public spaces were refurbished, some new were added; for example the boulevards over the sea bay were enlarged. New buildings are being permanently built all over the city, some of them really extravagant, extremely modern and with complex structure; in some of them one can find an echo of the historical, Azeri architecture. The buildings in the Old Town are systematically renewed. The conversion of the city image is really great, but is it a prestige, what should be the main aim of changing?

Baku

Azerbaijan arose from the previous Socialistic Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan. The main natural resource and the main source of wealth of the country is the oil. Baku is the biggest town in Azerbaijan and the capital city; moreover, it is one of the biggest towns of the region. Furthermore from almost 9.5 million citizens of the country more than 2 million live in Baku1.

1 http://www.stat.gov.az/map/indexen.php (access 04.03.2015).
Baku is situated on the South banks of Absheron Peninsula, located picturesquely on the hills around of Baku Bay, by the Caspian Sea.

As the capital city of the one of the Soviet Republic Baku had all important functions of the city – seat of the government and state offices, universities, theatres and philharmonic, museums etc. As a historic town Baku has it Old Town (Içeri Sheher) and it has its history which dates back to the ancient times. It is told that town origin is in the 3rd century.

The long history of town is represented by a wide range of monuments. The oldest one comes from the 6th century. However, the settlements developed in that area even earlier, though the austere landscape is rather not tempting. Nonetheless, the mild climate, drinking water, salty lakes (source of such worthy salt) and of course petroleum (which occurs even on the surface of the ground) attract people to live there.

Until the half of 19th century Baku was the fortress (surrounded by medieval fortifications) with suburbs – port town with custom offices. The first great impact to the transformation of the town in the 19th century was the transfer of provincial authorities from Shamakhi to Baku. After an enormous earthquake in 1859 Shamakhi was almost completely destroyed. Then by the decision of Tsar Alexander II Baku became a seat of government of the governorate with the great opportunities to development as a port town connected by the railway with other parts of Russian Empire².

The second impact to growth of the town was the development of the petroleum industry. Of course the oil was used for centuries, but invention of an easy way of obtaining the kerosene from the rock oil caused increase of demanding

for petroleum in fifties of 19th century. Consequently, the town became the big industrial city during several dozen years. Number of citizens increased more than thirty times from 1850 till 1907 and of the same time area of the town grew more than twenty times. (See the bar chart Fig. 1) New habitat and industrial districts were built.

During Soviet times the city was still developing and changing. The Baku’s underground was built; new settlements of blocks of flats appeared all around the town, some new buildings in the inner space as well. Network of public transport was maintained in the town. But in the same time there was a lot of neglected areas as well as in the living quarters as in the industrial parts of the city. Though, the city growth was still outstanding many quarters remained like they had been in the past – in the first years of 20th century. These areas were filled by one or two stories buildings with the small courtyards, without proper living conditions.

**Baku – values of the city**

It is obviously impossible to bullets all the advantages of the Baku, so only these with the biggest meaning and importance for this paper (topic of conference) are going to be described.

The first one – the Old Town (Içeri Şəhər) which is located on the hill sloped down to the bay of the Caspian Sea. A network of the narrow streets creates a labyrinth of alleys sometime blind, often turning surprisingly, sometimes with stairs, sometimes just sloped, and giving unexpected and stunning views and openings. The loggias and balconies – one of the main features of Baku’s architecture, overhang above the streets. Everywhere the limestone is used, as the best local building material but sometimes the walls of buildings are clad of plaster and painted. Some of balconies are unclosed with light walls of different materials and colours. Besides, the Old Town is fulfilled with great monuments such as the Shirvanshah Palace, Maiden Tower, mosques, baths, caravanserais and of course living houses. Everything gives great opportunities to preserve, to emphasize, to enjoy the unique character - genius loci of the place. The Old Town was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2000 as a “Walled City of Baku with the Shirvanshah’s Palace and Maiden Tower”.

The second one is the quarters with 19th and early 20th century architecture. At the turn of 19th and 20th century new quarters, streets and a great number of new buildings were built all around the core (Old Town), among them some really unusual, gorgeous, showing the wealth, strength and the modern image of the city. Some of them might be representative for European architecture from that period. However, mostly they are in historical styles with references to the local tradition, the streets and avenues with buildings from that phase resemble the streets of European cities.

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3 Soviet times: from 1920 to 1991.
And the third one – there are the public spaces especially Philharmonic Park (before called Gubernator’s Park), square adjacent to the Old Town walls and the boulevard on the Caspian Sea banks. In the hot and dry climate and the hostile soil conditions the greenery is kept only by the watering and grounds care, but it alleviates/soothes the climate of the high density inner space, giving shadow and adding moister and by the way it has a big impact on the image of the town.

All mentioned areas create the historical districts and date back to 19th century or earlier. They are characteristic for Baku and “tell us about its history”, so the individuality should be preserved.

**Baku in 21st century**

The crucial fact for the present time growth was the independence of the country, which began in 1991. It took some years to establish constant and predictable political situation – the conditions for uninterrupted development. Systematically an amount of money spent on construction and in the same time number of constructed buildings rose in the whole Azerbaijan (as we can see on the graphs Fig. 2 and 3) and of course thereby in Baku (though one can guess, that the percentage of expenditure was higher in Baku as a capital city compared with other parts of country). The reason for the fast growth is that Azerbaijan has started to administrate the funds which come from selling the petroleum.

![Fig. 2. Picturesque “streets” of the Old Town](image)
*Source: drawing by Maria Agajew.*
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Fig. 3. Volume of construction works carried out own forces

Source: http://www.azstat.org/MESearch/search?departament=4&lang=en (access 05.03.2015).

Fig. 4. Submitting into use of residential building by all sources of finance total square meter

Source: http://www.azstat.org/MESearch/search?departament=4&lang=en (access 05.03.2015).
Nowadays the city develops and flourishes. Each year brings new buildings, roads, investments, plans or ideas. As richness increased, at the same time, the image of the city has started to change. Once again the rising of prosperity is visible and citizens are proud of their city.

A lot of money is spent on revitalisation, development, refurbishments and conversions. Unfortunately in Baku, in many cases the chosen methods of conduct cause the loss of characteristic features of the city.

Examples of noticeable disadvantages of changes:

- Losing the uniqueness, diversity, identity

In the searching of beauty some public gardens were changed. The example – a Philharmonic Park was renovated. It was a little bit neglected park, without perfectly manicured lawns. But truly the park was well maintained. Different species of shrubs and flowers naturally filled the spaces between low walls, which created the terraces essential for using sloped area of the park. In the park there were some interesting objects, among others a fountain (of the plain, modest form, integrated with the slope of the hill), the watering place with drinking water and the bust of famous Azeri poet. After renovation everything is changed. Smooth lawns, walls of stone (keeping the terraces), new pavements and the stones with copies of famous drawings from Qobustan\(^5\) are in the park. The bust of the poet is no longer in the park, watering place disappeared and the fountain was completely transformed. Assessing all the changes one can say that everything could be approved (though not without any regrets) but not a new fountain. It is sandwiched between philharmonic building (from 1910-1912) and the medieval old town walls. In decoration and design of the fountain and its surrounding a lot of historical forms, details are used. Moreover it is built of white and black stone with gilded elements. The forms and details are not modest and unpretentious. They are historical, but they are not from “the tradition of the place”. Furthermore, the richness of forms, contrasting colours and abundance of gilding is striking, odd and curious, especially in the place near such important monuments. During renovation other strange thing was done: a big clock was put on the town walls – the modern clock which light at the night.

Some changes were also made on boulevard, among others new exotic species of trees and new sculptures appeared along wide sidewalk. The biggest astonishment is caused by the group of Mexicana people with sombreros and guitars.

An addition of the new, extraneous forms, elements and details to the historical places cause enormous changes in the perception of the space, disappearing of special character of the place. Moreover lack in the overall view in the character of the city induces disorder in forms of decoration.

- Unification of historical buildings (in case of schematic renovation)

In the Old Town the renovation is preceded and some results may be a little bit confusing because all buildings are unified. The plaster is removed from the stone wall of the buildings, the overhanging balconies get cladding of dark wood.

\(^5\) The drawings in the Qobustan are made by ancient men. More at http://gobustan.si.edu/introduction (access 13.04.2015).
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There is the misgiving that soon all old town becomes dull and uninteresting. It would lose its unique character, local colour and differentness. Moreover “a number of the Old City’s heritage buildings and houses have recently been demolished and replaced by new structures”¹⁶

- Reducing possibility of recognition of the important elements of the historical layout on the panoramas of the city

During the first years of 21st century the changes were not visible, the town lived the slowly life. Old Town was mysterious labyrinth with Shirvanshah Palace on the top and the Maiden Tower at the foot of hill, near boulevards (as it at the previous time was just at the sea bank). From the top of the contiguous hill (on which we can get with funicular) the vista of the town was impressive. The Old town was easily readable in the view. Maiden Tower – one of the kind, one of the greatest monuments of Baku, its most recognizable symbol constitute the accent in the frontage of boulevard, though some high-rise buildings were visible.

Gradually more and more new/modern high buildings (tower blocks) appeared in the landscape of the city. Nowadays the “forest” of the high-rise buildings is visible on the vista, creating a disorder and completely destroying the previous beauty. Nowadays the Maidhen Tower disappears in view between new structures.

Moreover a new hotel was built on the border of the Old Town (2012). Exactly some historical building (of local importance) were demolished to build luxury Four Season Hotel. It is a part of the frontage of the Neftchilar Street, but it is more than two times higher than existing buildings. Additionally, the footprint of the hotel covered footprints of three demolished buildings with yards and alleys. So it destroyed layout of historical location and it dominates over existing structures and of course it competes with the Maiden Tower especially in the vista of town.

**Juxtaposition**

Knowing the images of the other towns and processes going on there one can compare the consequences of different way of proceeding. Vienna and Paris with their Donaucity and La Défense, Dublin with its revitalisation of Temple Bar, Berlin with its Careful Urban Renewal will be taking in the consideration.

**Temple Bar and Berlin**

Temple Bar in Dublin is a well-known and widely disseminated case. Though the Temple Bar, the part of Dublin dates back to medieval times, in generally it comes from the 18th century. In eighties of 20th century this historical part of the town became a little bit neglected, unkempt, improperly maintained, it was caused by plans of demolishing the existing buildings and converting the area to the transport facilities – bus station. At the same time due to conditions of the unrepaired buildings the rent cost in the area was really low and it attracted

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different artistic activities, sole traders, small businesses, eccentric, second-hand shops to locate there. At the news about planned changes the local community started to fight against demolishing but for revitalization. After some consultations the new, innovative method of revitalisation was carried out. The method respected desires of users, tended not to raise the rental fees, preserved existing enterprises and introduced more vitality and more liveliness to the built environment by enhancement and development of cultural functions. The method was named cultural revitalisation.7

The matrix of the district was characteristic – narrow streets small quarters – as in the old part of the town, not high buildings, different materials of cladding, different functions. The revitalisation has been proceeding according to the plan, which developed rather than changed existing urban layout. New functions were intended to bring life to the neglected district, not to dominate. The process has not change the image of the quarters; existing street network has been preserved; the diversity of materials, colours and size remain the same; new buildings appeared (new buildings were added to feel the gaps), but buildings in the same scale like existing structures repeating the grid of the ambient quarters.8

Now, we can see the living town maybe not perfect but true full of colours, the uniqueness of the area was kept and the character remain like it was before. All improvements have been made with small impact and careful touch.

Another example of way of proceeding is the Careful Urban Renewal in Berlin, during International Building Exhibition so called IBA. In eighties of 20th century great action was conduct to improve the life conditions and situation in the West Berlin. A great amount of funds was use for conduct Exhibition (total cost of spending reached approximately one thousand of millions of German marks).9 However, the goals were not to amaze, not to astonish, but to focus on the preservations, improvements and participation of the wide range of collaborators and users (e.g. tenants). So, nowadays one can observe part of the city kept in the human scale with facilities suitable for denizens.

Vienna and Paris

The historic centre of Vienna was inscribed on the World Heritage List by the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO in 2001.10 The core zone was established and the buffer zone was constituted to protect the views. The historical centre of Vienna has been preserved as wonderful, precious gem. Very clear, easy to read urban layout has been protected and emphasized by the generations of planners. Among the documents which induced the good conditions of the historic townscape of Vienna there are: Preservation of Monuments Act from 1923 with later

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amendments, the Vienna Building Code from 1930 (with the later amendments). The Vienna Building Code includes inter alia The Vienna Old Town Conservation Act, The City of Vienna Land Use and Development Plan and The Vienna Nature Conservation Act\textsuperscript{11}.

A modern office centre with contemporary high skyscrapers, up-to-date and magnificent architecture (and of course with straight fast connection by underground) was located on the other bank of The Danube. So, nowadays one can admire a beautiful vista of the town from the hills located to the North-West. Due to the preserved layout of town and strict rules connected with new creations in the built environment of historical town it is easy to find out and recognized particular buildings of the town.

Of course there is pressure to build higher especially in the surrounding of buffer zone of protected core, but all attempts are assessed by the authorities and moreover by the committee\textsuperscript{12}. A complex of new structures around main railway station is the example. Proposed height of the building was lowered according not to destroy the views from the Belvedere Park.

La Défense – the business district in Paris origins in sixties of 20\textsuperscript{th} century. It was established according to the demands written in the Athens Charter from 1933. The outlines have changed a little from that time, but results visible in panoramas of the town are valuable. High rise buildings are located on the one area. In the centre of city Eiffle Tower dominates over quarters of similar height cut by alleys designed by George Haussmann. In the view delicate accents appear: domes and spires of the churches or public buildings.

**Conclusions**

The decision makers (policymakers), investors like to emphasize their prestige by the extravagant, exaggerated, ostentatious investments. The goals are to strengthen the prestige and rank of the country or the enterprise and to manifest the richness. The tendency to build higher could be visible in every country and every town and the city, but in many cases some legal limits exist and they help to prevent mistakes in development. Sometimes constraints could be annoying but overall they work for all citizens of the town, denizens and enjoyers. The reasonable law rules conditions of building new structures which could have affected existing historical development. The obeying of the rules results in conservation and creation spaces of human scale with a good way of displaying historical structures and monuments, preservation genius loci of places, closed in inter alia: details, functions, existing layouts of streets and quarters, sizes of buildings, materials and citizens who live there and use it. The methods of proceeding in Baku (described above) in many cases denied the good practices.

\textsuperscript{11} Reports on the Requests and Recommendations Made By the World Heritage Committee Regarding the World Heritage Site “Historic Centre of Vienna (Austria). September 2002, pp. 18-19.

\textsuperscript{12} Mission Report Thirty-seventh session Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of UNESCO. Phnom Penh, Cambodia. 2013, p. 15.
It is obvious that Baku is a rich city with great opportunities to build new, modern and outstanding buildings, but when it is done without proper attention to the past, to the history of the town and its monuments could cause the loss of all the virtues. The goal of creating a beautiful city with a high prestige could be missed. City must live and must change but the advantages and disadvantages should be calculated and estimated, considering not only the nearest neighbourhood but also the townscape and vistas of the town. Baku is dominated by the new buildings. The old Baku is disappearing, it seems like the place with no worth, with no value, which one can be ashamed of.

Observing the changing in Baku conclusion might be one: money rules, but results could be unexpected, like the loss of the identity, the unique physical character of the city, its ‘genius loci’. As far as Baku is concerned the fast and unlimited development and many investments in the public spaces have caused a lot of transformation not always to the better vision of the image of the city. At the same time, the development in some European city is proceeding in other ways preserving existing historical built environment.