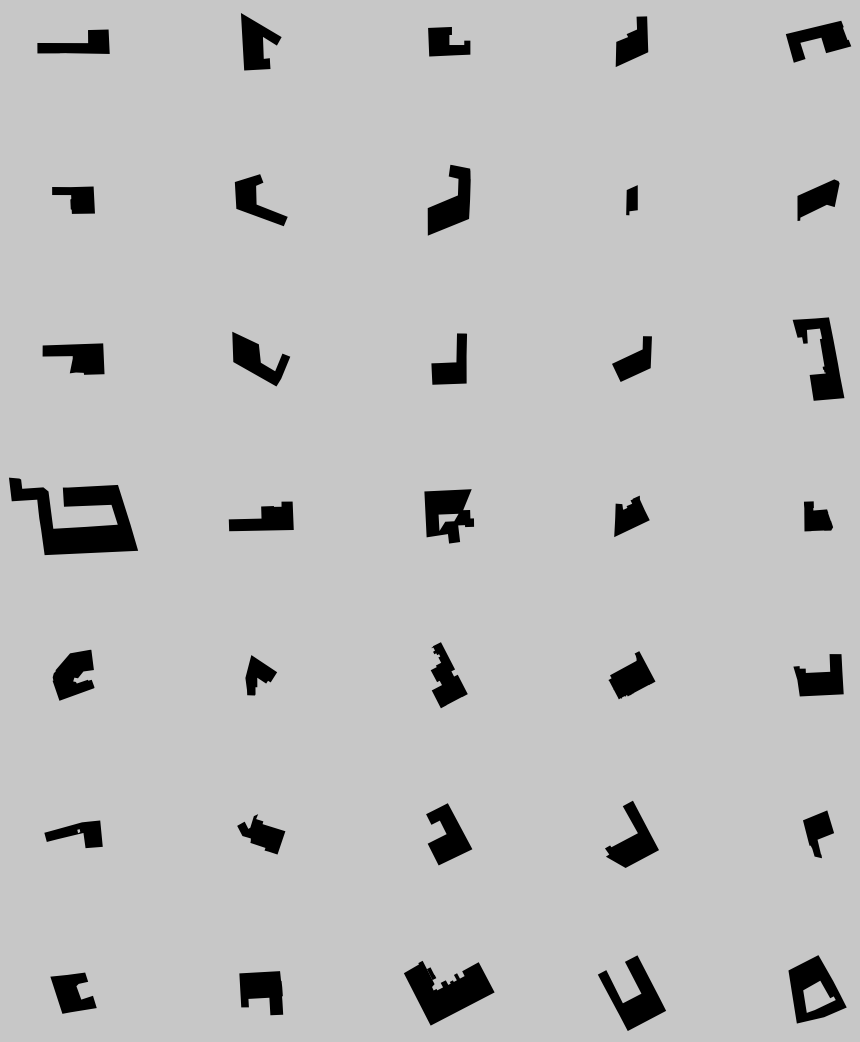
Courtyards of Tbilisi

Tracing Architectural, Communal and Perceptual Transformations Through The Socio-Political Maelstrom



POLITECNICO DI TORINO
Department of Architecture and Design
Masters of Architecture for Sustainability

COURTYARDS OF TBILISI

Tracing Architectural, Communal And Perceptual Transformations Through The Socio-Political Maelstrom

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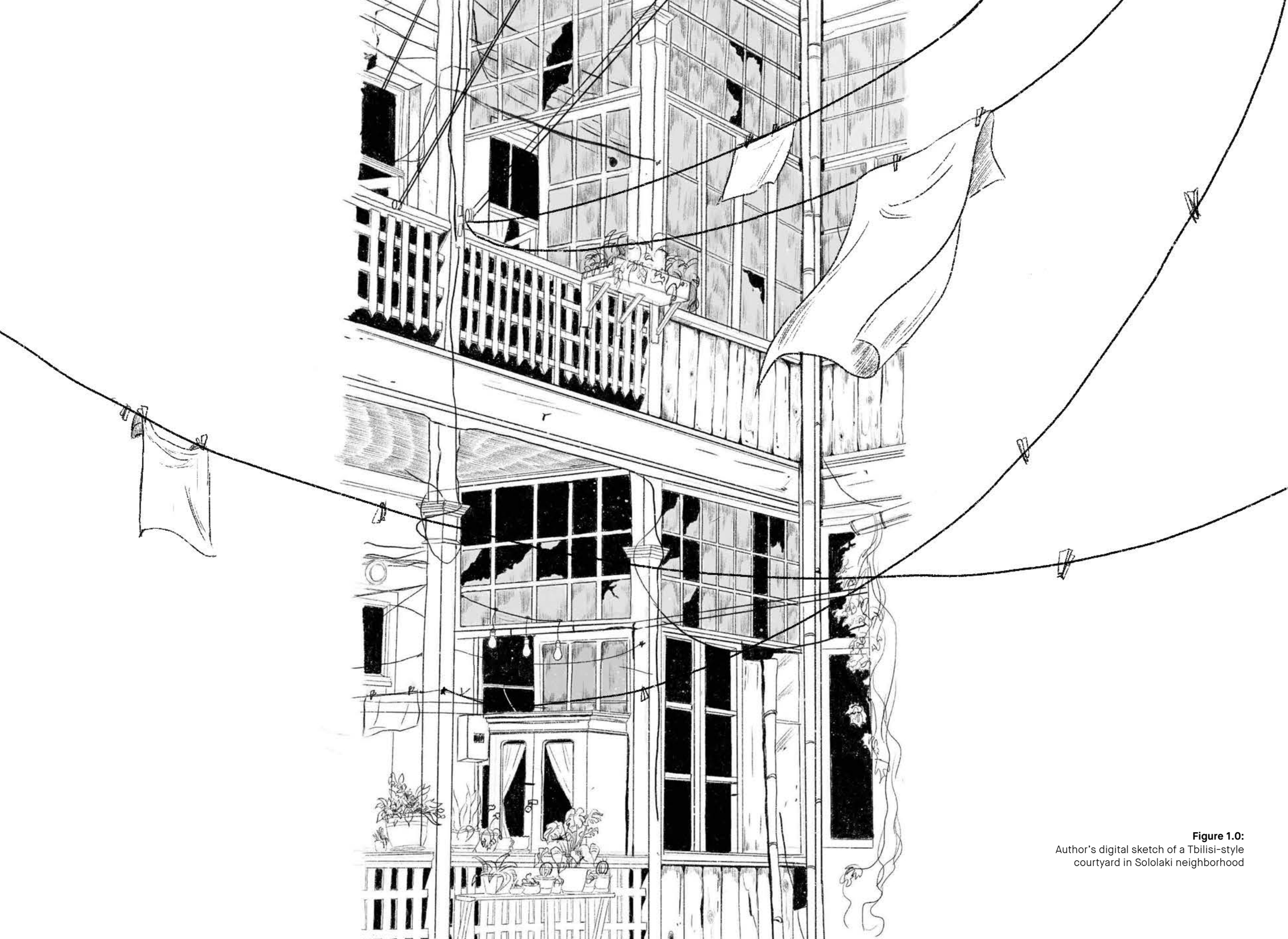


Figure 1.0:
Author's digital sketch of a Tbilisi-style courtyard in Sololaki neighborhood

Abstract

ENG

Tbilisi has undergone and continues to experience palimpsest transformation shaped by diverse political forces and cultural shifts. The city bears an enduring imprint of the ideology of many empires and political forces. Historical traces are evident, from the whole city to its individual buildings. This thesis aims to analyze political dynamics and their influence on social and spatial changes using the typology of Tbilisi-style courtyard houses as a primary lens to explore how these transformations unfolded over time.

The way Tbilisi style courtyard houses came to us today is a result of almost three centuries of political turmoil. We see the historical shift from authoritarian tsarist regime to the authoritarian communist regime and finally to capitalist democracy.[1] The Tbilisi style-courtyard houses emerged in the nineteenth century as single - family bourgeois houses,and were later converted into Soviet communal apartments, following the Post-soviet period with its privatization, which further fragmented these spaces and provoked improvised resident-driven adaptations. In this continuous socio-political maelstrom a completely unique way of life was born, creating the courtyard living as a cultural phenomenon today infused with nostalgic narratives and tales of neighborly bonds. Notwithstanding its symbolic significance and cultural heritage status , their physical state conveys a contrasting narrative. Many of them endure inadequate conservation due to political neglect and informal adaptations.

The thesis aims to tell the story of courtyard houses and contextualize them, as both an architectural type and a lived social space, and tries to analyze them as “assemblages”[2], heterogeneous and complex systems of architectural modifications, everyday practices, and collective memory embedded in daily habits[3] that continuously reassemble over time. Through research on the urban and political history of Tbilisi, the sequence of transformations were reconstructed which provided basis for further narrowed analysis of the selected houses. Ultimately,thesis advocates that Tbilisi-style courtyard houses are more than just historical backdrops, they represent layered narratives of resilience and nostalgia and become the main protagonists of the story. Through the methodology of everyday observations, documentation of the houses and speculative, interpretative sketching, it seeks to bridge the reality and perceptions, and explore the contradictions between nostalgic narratives and lived experiences.

1 .

Van Assche, Kristof, Joseph Salukvadze, and Nick Shavishvili. City Culture and City Planning in Tbilisi: Where Europe and Asia Meet. Dortmund: SPRING Research Series, 2009.

2 .

DeLanda, Manuel. Assemblage Theory. Edinburgh University Press, 2016

3 .

Connerton, Paul. How Societies Remember. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

რეზიუმე

GEO

თბილისმა განიცადა და კვლავ განიცდის პალიმფსესტურ ტრანსფორმაციას, რომელიც ჩამოყალიბდა მრავალი პოლიტიკური ძალისა და კულტურული ცვლილებების შედეგად. ქალაქი ატარებს სხვადასხვა იმპერიისა და პოლიტიკური ძალის იდეოლოგიის კვალს. ეს ნაშრომი მიზნად ისახავს პოლიტიკური დინამიკისა და მისი გავლენის ანალიზს სოციალურ და სივრცულ ცვლილებებზე, თბილისური ეზოების ანალიზის მეშვეობით.

თბილისური ეზოების განვითარების დინამიკა და დღევანდელი სახე, თითქმის სამსაუკუნოვანი პოლიტიკური არეულობის შედეგია. ჩვენ ვხედავთ პოლიტიკურ ცვლილებებს ავტორიტარული ცარისტული რეჟიმიდან, ავტორიტარულ კომუნისტურ რეჟიმამდე, საბოლოოდ კი კაპიტალისტურ დემოკრატიამდე. თბილისური ეზოს ტიპის სახლები მეცხრამეტე საუკუნეში გაჩნდა, როგორც ბურჟუაზიული საცხოვრებელები და მოგვიანებით გადაკეთდა საბჭოთა კომუნალურ ბინებად, შემდგომში, კი პოსტსაბჭოთა პერიოდის პრივატიზაციამ საცხოვრებელი სივრცეები კიდევ უფრო დაანაწევრა და გამოიწვია მაცხოვრებლების მიერ თვითნებური, იმპროვიზირებული ადაპტაციები. ამ უწყვეტ სოციალურ-პოლიტიკურ მორევში დაიბადა სრულიად უნიკალური ცხოვრების წესი, რამაც შექმნა ეზოს ცხოვრება, როგორც კულტურული ფენომენი, რომელიც დღეს გაჟღენთილია ნოსტალგიური ნარატივებითა და მეზობლური კავშირების ისტორიებით. ეზოების სიმბოლური მნიშვნელობისა და კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის სტატუსის მიუხედავად, მათი საგანგაშო კონდიცია პარადოქსულია მათ გარშემო არსებულ სოციალურ ნარატივთან.

ნაშრომის მიზანია, თბილისური ეზოების ისტორიის მოყოლა და მათი, როგორც არქიტექტურული ტიპის და საცხოვრებელი სოციალური სივრცის, კონტექსტუალიზაცია და ანალიზი, როგორც არქიტექტურული მოდიფიკაციების, ყოველდღიურობისა და კოლექტიური მეხსიერების ჰეტეროგენული და რთული სისტემების ერთობლიობა. თბილისის ურბანული და პოლიტიკური ისტორიის კვლევის დაწყევით, ცხადი გახდა, ეზოების ტრანსფორმაციების თანმიმდევრობა, რამაც საფუძველი ჩაუყარა შერჩეული სახლების ვიწრო ანალიზს. საბოლოო ჯამში, ნაშრომი გადმოგვცემს, რომ თბილისური ეზოები, არა მხოლოდ ისტორიული ფონია, არამედ ისინი წარმოადგენენ მდგრადობისა და ნოსტალგიის მრავალშრიან ნარატივებს და ხდებიან ამბის მთავარი გმირები. ყოველდღიური დაკვირვების, სახლების დოკუმენტირებისა და სპეკულაციური, ინტერპრეტაციული ესკიზების შექმნით, ნაშრომი ცდილობს რეალობისა და აღქმების დამაკავშირებელი ხიდის დადებას და ნოსტალგიურ ნარატივებსა და რეალურ გამოცდილებას შორის წინააღმდეგობების შესწავლას.

Acknowledgements

To Prof. Filippo De Pieri who has been an amazing support thought this process. Thank you for allowing me the freedom and space to create this thesis. Thank you for your inputs,suggestions and inspirational words.

To my family, for their endless support, patience, and love. To my mom, who is my greatest source of strength and to whom I owe all the love in the world for being my biggest inspiration.To my dad, for always knowing how to make me smile, even in the stressful moments. And to my brother, my best friend and sharpest critic. To my aunt for her guidance through Tbilisi's archives and libraries and to my whole family for their support —this thesis exists because of you.

To my dear friends in Tbilisi, Keti and Mariam, to whom I owe endless gratitude. I shamelessly borrowed their time and resources to gather valuable materials from Georgia, and they never hesitated to help. Thank you for being the most amazing friends and my biggest supporters. Without your unconditional support this experience wouldn't have been as pleasant.

Ultimetly, to my friends in Turin, thank you for making this journey far better than it could have been. I deeply appreciate the time we spent together and the valuable exchanges of ideas over lunch.

მადლობა!

INDEX

“THERE IS SOMETHING HERE YOU CAN FIND NOWHERE ELSE”

_Resident of Tbilisi-style courtyard house

intro

Introduction

Conversations about communal living in Georgia almost inevitably circle back to the Tbilisi courtyards, a typology deeply embedded in the city’s social memory and perception of identity. Considering its diversity and different social living structures, stories differ but there are ones that always left me with enormous curiosity, ones sometimes sound too good to be true in the modern communal experiences or exaggerated and overly romanticized. In fact Tbilisi style courtyards as we say in Gerogian, "Ezo" houses and their residents are always filled with unlimited stories of social living, proud of their understanding of the neighborhood , thinking it was an example of tolerance and resistance. The relevance of these yards has always been given by its social dynamics and in fact due to this reason carries the nickname of “Italian yard”, even though from an architectural perspective it is a distinctively Georgian phenomenon. The quote ‘Italian yard’ derives from the social and spatial transformations that these yards underwent during the Soviet period. Initially built under Russian rule as single-family bourgeois houses, these buildings were later subdivided and converted into communal apartments,“kommunalkas”, transforming both their architecture and the patterns of daily life. Due to this change in social dynamics and the coexistence of multiple families created an environment full of noise and activities, It was precisely this environment that led to the designation as “Italian yards”, the term so extensively adopted that today is the most commonly known and generally recognized.

These semi-public, semi-private enclosures shaped by inward-looking apartment buildings are living spaces shaped by decades of improvisation, negotiation and communal practice. They have become central to local narratives of identity, belonging, the sense of neighborhood and memory which are very often too romanticized in Tbilisi residents, in popular discourse and tourism as a symbol of shared past.

Background and Context

Tbilisi-style courtyards emerged and developed through the long-term influence of different political forces and reflect the sociopolitical and ideological shifts that have shaped and formed not only these typologies of Courtyard houses, but the whole city’s history and physical appearance.

They are an accumulation of histories: Imperial Russian rule , Soviet transformations, and post-socialist shifts - Each leaving its ideological mark on the city and allowing the observers to read it like a palimpsest. To fully grasp the transformations of these houses and address the continuous pithy polemic around it, it is important to understand how Tbilisi has evolved as a physical mash-up of several eras, empires and ideologies of different states. All was reflected in Tbilisi style courtyards which will be analyzed through the urban and political history, since the main propulsive force of their transformations were the ideologies of different political powers. Courtyards of Tbilisi with its essence today is less an architectural typology and more cultural phenomena, that inevitably embodies a self-standing microcosm.

Tbilisi courtyards emerged in the 19th century. Tbilisi, the city that was almost completely burned down and reduced to smoldering ruins due to the Persian invasions, was annexed by the Russian empire in the beginning of the century in order to seek help, and soon became the administrative center of Tsarist Russia in Transcaucasia. Precisely at that time it was decided to transform Tbilisi from the fortified town to an European-style city, the construction of previously common traditional terrace houses were prohibited by law and Remodeling has begun with westernization and adoption of Art nouveau facades. Even though the most traditional architecture in Tbilisi was already destroyed by the constant warfare, now was as also prohibited to construct them.Thus city was slowly losing its style and identity, however despite the European construction, Georgian character could not fully imitate this modernity and began to incorporate its traditional architectural elements inside the courtyard. Traditional wooden gallery-type balconies, open staircases, bridges and passageways, all hidden behind the European facades. This is how the unique typology and fusion was born with absolute contrast inside and outside. Such houses were built for rich merchants and industrialists at the end of the 19th and beginning of 20th century and were one or two story single family bourgeois houses in newly established residential districts. One of them was Sololaki, the chosen neighborhood for the analysis, which is particularly significant since it was one of the first planned quarters outside the historic city walls,originally grid-planned, intended to house the opulent bourgeoisie until the Socialist regime.

After Georgia got incorporated into the Soviet Union, the government started declaring the owners as enemies of the country and confiscated their properties. This was where the radical transformations began, under the Soviet Union these houses were divided into rooms and housed refugees from different regions. Just like that, the coexistence of people of different ethnicity, social class and religion has prompted ,as residents now recall “harmonious”,In reality forced, coexistence of complete strangers settled in the once luxurious houses sharing kitchen, bathrooms, hallways. "Italian courtyard” as a cultural phenomenon was born and started reflecting the new socio-economic order of the country.

All these political transformations and historical dynamism formed an intricate city organism, filled with memories and collective consciousness of adaptation and resistance. These nostalgic narratives have consistently sparked my curiosity especially when the reality of these buildings often stand in stark contrast to its material reality and their deteriorated conditions,due to the political negligence,ad-holic transformations by residents, contested ownership, and the challenges of gentrification. Today they are in danger of disappearance of their both material and non-material heritage. In this political turmoil, Tbilisi courtyards epitomize a fascinating assemblage of chaotic yet patterned nature of transformations in the turbulent history of the city and become the central inquiry of this thesis.

Observing and analyzing them puts an observer into a very unusual position. What you see and what you hear is contradictory, these houses exist in tension between narrative memory and lived reality. Balconies once open to neighbors are closed off, shared yards are subdivided that gives way to more individualistic patterns of dwelling.

On the other hand there are common sentiments of residents:

“EVERYBODY SHARED EVERYTHING”

“THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT LIFE HERE THAT EXISTS NOWHERE ELSE.”

“NEIGHBORS ARE LIKE FAMILY”

Methodology

This selective nostalgia highlights closeness and solidarity, emphasising social connections that were previously firmly solidified, that their traces are still present. Simultaneously it overlooks the overcrowding, lack of privacy, and infrastructural hardships that also define courtyard life. It is important that generational gap also plays a part, elders narrate courtyards as spaces of belonging and identity, while younger inhabitants often view them as inconvenient or outdated due to the lack of privacy they provide.

This thesis tries to examine the transformations, patterns and perceptions of Tbilisi yards where these spaces are approached not merely as architectural typologies, but as sites of collective memory, habitual practice, and everyday spatial production. Tbilisi-style courtyard houses become the main protagonist through which broader socio-political and architectural transformations of the city are explored, revealing how everyday life and collective memory intersect and shape the lived experience, and how lived experience shapes the physical space. Thesis seeks to analyze and contextualize them as an intricate assemblage of different elements and explore how idiosyncratic characteristics of these houses can be read as spatial expressions of social coherence, fragmentation and adaptation, it further tries to examine the mismatch between memory and physicality that creates a contradiction: courtyards are both celebrated and neglected, romanticized and marginalized and tries to address in what ways nostalgic narratives surrounding of Tbilisi-style courtyards influence, obscure or conflict with their contemporary socio-spatial realities.

The study adopts qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology, to allow research to address both the physical evolution of the yards and understand the layered history and the lived experiences of residents.The research begins with the engagement with political and urban history of Tbilisi to help further understand the transformations of courtyard houses and make easier to situate the evolution of courtyard houses within broader processes of transformations. Historical research sets the base for the further narrowed analysis of Tbilisi-style courtyards. Extensive fieldwork and documentation were carried out in two summers of 2024 and 2025, including the photographic surveys, observational notes and sketches, collection of tales and stories, and the everyday use of the yards in the chosen district of Sololaki. Initially the research started absurdly broad and came to the current structure with trial and error. After visiting, and documenting 40 yards in Sololaki neighborhoods, the selection was subsequently narrowed down according to the availability of the archival sources, existing plans, the presence of distinctive social or architectural features and most importantly the accessibility for fieldwork to allow everyday observations. This framework led to fragmented but nuanced analysis of the evolution and transformations of these yards and its social dynamics.

The on-site observations not only provided empirical data but also served as a basis for the more personal, speculative interpretation of the concepts of assemblage and the production of these spaces through speculative sketching. The sketches and illustrations are all done during the visit, some are clear representations of the yards, some show the everyday objects and typology of the objects present in every yard, however research finished with the speculative, imaginative representation of Tbilisi style courtyard. Created through the layering of exaggeration of observed elements from various courtyards. It serves as a conceptual tool rather than literal depiction and tries to embody the fragmented and incremental nature of these spaces. Furthermore not just the final result but the process of making this sketch mirrors the very dynamic it seeks to capture, the randomness of the extensions and uncertainty of the elements reflects the contingent nature of courtyard houses, emphasizing how they changed through countless small acts of appropriation, adaptation and negotiation. It functions both as a methodological experiment and a visual metaphor.

Historical Timeline

Architectural and Social Transformations in Tbilisi Courtyards

Politics

- 1795 — Persian Invasion
- 1801 — Tbilisi was reduced to ruins
- 1864 — Annexation of Kartli-Kakheti by the Russian empire and the the start of imperial rule
- 1917 — Entire Georgia was absorbed into the Russian Empire
- 1918 — Collapse of Russian Empire after the Russian Revolution
- 1921 — Proclamation of the Democratic Republic of
- 1922 — Red Army invades Georgia becomes a Soviet republic
- 1991 — Georgia joins the USSR
- 2003 — Georgia declares independence from the
- 2005- — Rose Revolusion
- Acceleration of gentrification in historic districts and ivestor ubranizm

Architecture

- 1801-1917: - Changes in urban planning and introduction of some European-style grid planning.

  - Transformation of domestic architecture.- Wealthy merchants adopted European-style architecture and bourgeois houses started to emerge. Eclecticism emerges with the fusion of European, Georgian and Oriental motifs.

- 1922-1991: Bourgeois houses subdivided into communal houses. (kommunalkas), development of standardized housing blocks, and monumental public buildings.

  Standardization was applied to new construction: panel buildings, “Khrushchovkas”, and other uniform housing blocks.

- 1991-Present: **Fragmentation** of previous community apartments: many former kommunalkas were altered or subdivided by the residents.

  Flats were extended, or partially rebuilt with the informal, resident driven interventions and apartments were privatized.

  Deterioration of historic courtyard buildings, government neglect and gentrification pressures

Social

- 1795 — Population got reduced and scattered
- 1864: Capitalist developments during the 1860s and the emergence of Tbilisi as a commercial and cultural hub. Merchants gain wealth and social power, resulting in increased visibility of social stratification.
- 1991: Rural-to-urban migration increased urban populace and filled standardized houses.

  Communal living established compact, multi-family environment including common kitchens, bathrooms, and entrances.
- 2003: Alterations in community dynamics: privatisation transformed communal living patterns; formerly common places became semi-private or abandoned. Fragmentation of community and Subdivision and personalization of communal spaces provoked nostalgic narratives about communal living.

1795 | 1801 | 1864 | 1917 | 1918 | 1921 | 1922 | 1991 | 2003 | 2005-

1801-1917 | 1918-1921 | 1922-1991 | 1991-Present

Under Imperial Russia | **Under Soviet Union** | **Independent Georgia**

Part 01

Tbilisi in Transition

Socio-Political Turmoil And Urban Development

Feudal Foundations

Throughout its existence,the capital of Georgia,Tbilisi, founded in the 5th century AD, has experienced complex and stratified transformations. Since its establishment it has faced numerous invasions and been given shape by multiple external forces over time, resulting in the destruction of much of its architecture. Tbilisi's history is a dynamic interplay of conflict and peace, destruction and renewal, periods of decline and blooming wealth. Located at the conjunction of the continents of Europe and Asia, At the intersection of diverse cultures and ideologies, Tbilisi's strategic location has conferred both geopolitical and economic importance and thereby leading to a persistent struggle for survival and resistance.[4] Despite numerous setbacks, Tbilisi was continuously demonstrating resilience in its capacity to recover and rebuild. The city's ability to evolve in a consistent and continuous manner was hampered by ongoing armed battles, which have disrupted its urban identity and hindered its spatial growth. During invasions, newly formed districts were periodically destroyed, forcing inhabitants to move to the city's more fortified parts for safety. Upon the restoration of peace, efforts to reconstruct damaged structures and populate unoccupied districts were starting over.[5]

Throughout the Middle Ages, Tbilisi was formed within the inner boundaries of its walls, and went through all the stages of a feudal city. The historical territory of the city is characterized by its diverse landscape and rich topography, emerging as a stronghold in the kura valley. It was located near Mtskheta, the ancient Eastern Georgian capital and a significant religious and cultural center of the Orthodox Christianity. This area became the focal point of early urban development. By the end of the 6th century, Tbilisi (at that time named Tiflis) was already an important centre trading with Byzantium and Sasanian Empire, and had effectively replaced neighbouring Mtskheta as the capital of Kartli (East Georgia).[6] A succession of regional powers, including the Arabs, the Mongols, the Ottomans, and many more fought for dominance over the city throughout the medieval period. However, from 523 Georgian aristocratic governors predominantly ruled the city, the reign in this region was abolished, and the new capital of Georgia, Tbilisi, was transferred to the victorious feudal class. [7] Presumably, Tbilisi during this Feudal period was the political,

4.

Salukvadze, Joseph, and Oleg Golubchikov. "City as a Geopolitics: Tbilisi, Georgia — A Globalizing Metropolis in a Turbulent Region." Cities 52 (2016): 39-54.

5.

Meskhia, Sh. Tbilisis istoria [History of Tbilisi]. Vol. 1. Tbilisi, 1990.

6.

Ibid

7.

Tsintsadze, V. Tbilisi, Arkhitektura Starogo Goroda i Zhilie Doma Pervoi Poloviny XIX Stoletia [Tbilisi, Architecture of the Old City and Residential Houses of the First Half of the 19th Century]. Tbilisi, 1958.

cultural, and trade center of Georgia. In the 7th century, the Arabs dominated Kartli, and it got involved in the extensive Arab trade system. Since then, in the 12th century, Tbilisi has served as the capital of a powerful state in Central Asia, a state that stretched from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea. The unification of the country[8] was accompanied by the flourishing of national self-determination of Georgian culture. The diverse themes of architecture started to be built, in addition to temples, fortresses and palaces.[9] However, the period of peaceful reconstruction was interrupted again in the 14th century when the Mongol hordes invaded Tbilisi that led to the repeated destruction of Tbilisi. In the 15th century, the Turks conquered all of Asia Minor and the Balkans, and Georgia became geographically surrounded by Muslim states. In the 15th-16th centuries, Tbilisi was ruled by Persians, Turkmens, and Turks, which destroyed the city several times, yet each time it was rebuilt and continued to evolve again and again. A small historical period of relative peace began in the 1730s, when the city yet again began another reconstruction. French travelers who visited Tbilisi Jean Chardin and Joseph Piton Tournefort, left the first surviving sketches of the general view of Tbilisi. According to Chardin, Tbilisi at that time was one of the most beautiful, densely populated cities in the East, sharply built with beautiful temples, public buildings, shopping arcades, and caravanserais.[10]

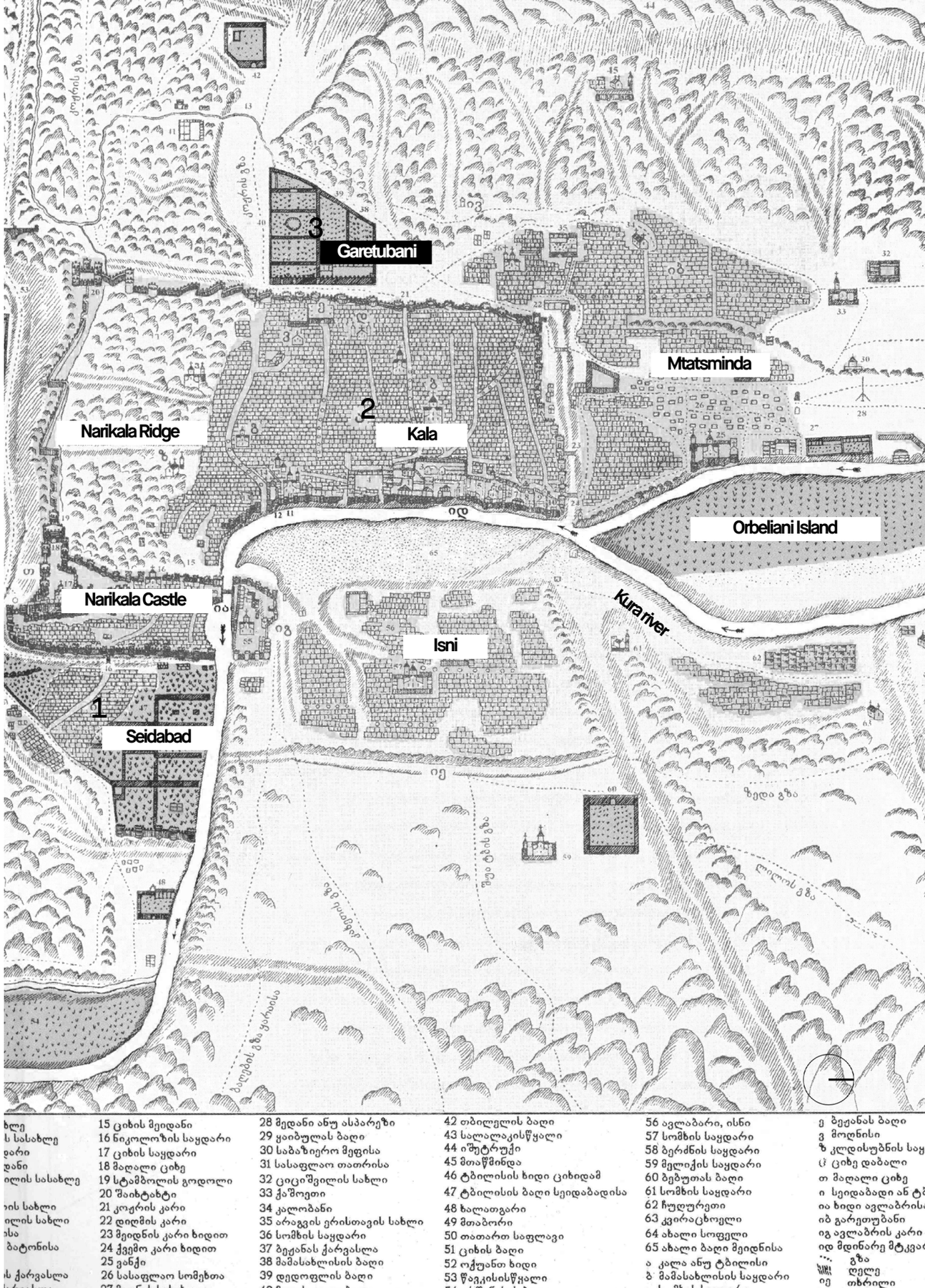
Spatial formation

During the 17th and 18th centuries, following repeated invasions and periods of decline, Tbilisi experienced prosperity and expansion, continuing a pattern that had characterized its history for centuries. To imagine the Tbilisi of that time, we can refer to the plans of Tbilisi of the 17th-18th centuries. In this regard, the 1735 first map of Tbilisi drawn up by Vakhushti Bagrationi serves as a valuable reference. It is clear on the map that the basic planning structure of the city has remained unchanged since the 7th century, thus In the 18th century, Tbilisi's urban core remained largely confined to its early medieval boundaries. According to the plan, Tbilisi had the outline of a typically feudal city, it was the city of a network of fortifications and walled gardens and consisted of three main parts. (Fig.1.1)

1

The first part is the territory of the old city, called Seidabadi also known as "Tbilisi proper" [11] (according to Vakhushti's own explanation, in this territory in the 17th century the Shah of Persia settled the Seyid tribe and

Figure 1.1
The map of Tbilisi by Prince Vakhusti Bagrationi,1735, The National library of Goeriga.



8.

The 10th century marked the consolidation of various Georgian crowns into a unified political entity under a centralized monarchy - the Kingdom of Georgia

9.

Kvirkvelia, Tengiz. Dzveli Tbilisi [Old Tbilisi]. Tbilisi: Soviet Georgia, 1984.

10.

Ibid

11 .

Chaniashvili, N. Nineteenth-Century Architecture of Tbilisi as a Reflection of Cultural and Social History of the City. FaRiG Report, 2007.

therefore this district was called “Seydabad” or the settlement of the Sayyids) a southern settlement of the slopes of Mount Tabor, (of which only Abanotubani (sulfur baths) remains today), since the 18th century till today this area is referred to as “Old Tbilisi”.

2

The second largest and most important part, the city center, was called Kala, the most densely populated district, that was located on the right side of the river Mtkvari (Kala was the name of the Tbilisi fortress of the 4th-5th centuries and in the 18th century this old name turned into the common name of the city center. (The southern wall of Kala started from the Citadel (today’s Narikala) - followed the Sololaki ridge (in the direction of today’s Sololaki Alley) and ended with the fortress.

3

The third part, which is located on the left bank of the Mtkvari River, was on the shore, called Isni (today’s Avlabari). Garetubani (outer neighbourhood) beyond the city walls to the north was also present and was mainly occupied by the King’s and Queen’s gardens, which became the main district of Tbilisi (Sololaki) several decades later. The plan also shows extensive settlements on both banks of the Mtkvari River.[12]

From fortified household to Imperial grids

The late 18th century was a particularly turbulent period in the history of Tbilisi. Georgia, back then the only Christian enclave in the predominantly Muslim region, that retained its independence, was caught between hostile powers — the Persian and Ottoman Empires and North Caucasian tribes. As a result of this frequent warfare Tbilisi shrunk both in population and economically. In 1783, Irakli II established a pact with the Russian Empire that was sharing the same Christian Orthodox religion. These circumstances failed to prevent a disastrous Persian invasion in 1795.[13] After nearly half a century of relative peace, the city was invaded and reduced to ruins by the Iranian Shah Agha Mohammad Khan. The population was either massacred or scattered, and the city was almost completely destroyed. This devastating invasion destroyed the country’s economy and caused significant disturbance to Tbilisi. The Kartli-Kakheti state[14] was no longer able to cope with the increasing forces and was heading for collapse. As a consequence of this destruction, neither feudal nor royal palaces have survived to the present day, and a significant portion of the city’s housing has disappeared. The Russian Army eventually intervened to rescue the Kingdom, although this intervention came at the cost of the complete abolition of Georgian sovereignty in 1801.[15]

The reconstruction of Tbilisi began in the 19th century, a period defined by profound social and economic transformations. Under the Russian empire, the city was effectively reconstituted—while it retained a distinct urban identity, it had a very different architectural character and spatial organization compared to Tbilisi before the 18th century. The development of Tbilisi till the beginning of the 19th century was the same as in previous ages; the pattern of the city’s growth itself, the city’s expansion pattern and the character of its development stayed consistent throughout the feudal period until the beginning of the 19th century and Georgia’s annexation to Russia.

Figure 1.2
Photo from a drawing (Old Tiflis. Grigory Gagarin. 1849), The National Library of Georgia

Domestic Architecture

In the eighteenth century, during the period of accumulation of substantial capital and the rise of revolutionary forces, classicism emerged in Western Europe and Russia. There does not appear to be any such analogy in Georgia at that time. Georgia did not have a bourgeoisie that was capable of overthrowing feudalism through revolution. The Georgian idea of spatial formations was completely different from the Russian and Western European ones. Even at the beginning of the 19th century, the artistic style prevailing in Georgia reflected a completely different aesthetic.[16]

Before the XIX century in the late medieval period Tbilisi was a city with stone and brick houses with wooden balconies and terraces “bani”.[17] Baniani or flat-roofed houses were covered not by flanks, but rather by flat roofs. The roof of one house served as a yard for another. They had a social function and It represented a resting and entertainment place where the parties were held, it provided a direct connection to the outside. They said “you could walk around the city from one terrace to another without even setting your foot on the ground(Fig.1.2)”[18]

12. Ibid

13. Salukvadze and Golubchikov, “City as a Geopolitics.”

14. Georgia was divided into the Kingdoms of Kartli, Kakheti, Imereti, and others after the 15th century due to foreign invasions and the decline of the unified Georgian Kingdom. After annexing Kartli-Kakheti in 1801, the Russian Empire expanded into Georgia in the 19th century, acquiring further areas.

15. Salukvadze and Golubchikov, “City as a Geopolitics.”

16. Tsintsadze, Tbilisi, Arkhitektura Starogo Goroda.

17. Mania, Maia. European Architects in Tbilisi. European Commission, 2006.

18. Chaniashvili, Nineteenth-Century Architecture of Tbilisi.

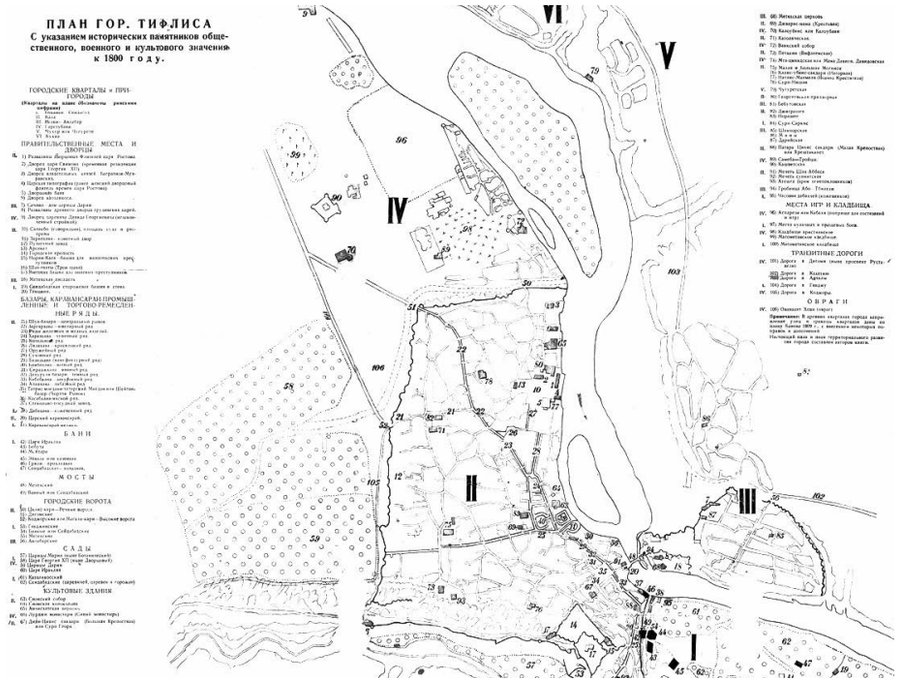


Figure 1.3:
Map of Tbilisi,The National Library of Georgia, 1800

Imperial Urbanism

Russian rule and the remapping of Tbilisi

In the context of the competing powers fighting for control over Georgia, Russia was perceived as a potential ally that could safeguard Georgia from the brutality of Iranian or Ottoman invasions, and was considered the only hope for preserving its independence. Consequently, In 1801 the Russian Empire annexed the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti and Tbilisi became the administrative and cultural center of the South Caucasus. From the very first years Tbilisi fell into a new political and historical turmoil. From the 1830's, Tsarist Russia completely and finally dominated Tbilisi. It is important that the people of Georgia and Transcaucasia entered a period of relative peace, the constant warfare has ended, people were no longer in danger of being displaced from the fortress walls and settling in the fields,which has allowed trade and farming to thrive in Tbilisi. As a result, the city has grown and developed quickly. [19]

Thus the renewal of Tbilisi started from the 19th century. The annexation of Georgia to the Russian Empire marked the beginning of a new era in Tbilisi's history. The city, which initially represented a feudal city in terms of both its governance system and appearance, now was transformed into an administrative center under Russian rule and it became the home to the highest representative of the Russian government in Georgia, solidifying its political significance. At that time the country was undergoing deep socio-cultural, political or economic changes and in these new conditions, a completely different city was born, a city that kept its own distinct appearance, but was fundamentally different from the old feudal city with many cracks in its overall structure and architecture. As in earlier periods, Tbilisi's development remained closely tied to broader political and economic shifts affecting Georgia, particularly in the Kartli-Kakheti region.[20] By 1840, Tbilisi had reestablished itself not only as a key administrative center but also as the political and economic hub of the entire Transcaucasian region. In 1846, the official residence of the Crown Prince of the Caucasus, further strengthening its position as a vital stronghold of imperial governance. From the very first years of the establishment of Russian power, new, previously unknown, administrative, judicial and other departmental institutions have appeared in Tbilisi, the number of which has been increasing every year. At the same time, the number of Russian residents was also increasing, and a new social layer was added to the city's population.[21]

From the first years of the 19th century, the economic life of Tbilisi, particularly its trade sector, which had been severely impacted by the Iranian invasion at the end of the 18th century, began to revive again. The development of trade was facilitated by the establishment of relative peace in the country, the elimination of feudal customs, the construction of new roads, which facilitated the movement of caravans and the transportation and unloading of goods. Until Russia finally strengthened itself in Transcaucasia, Tbilisi was dominated by goods imported through Iran and Turkey as well as having trade relations with distant countries: due its convenient location at the crossroads of East and Europe, it also served as an important transit and exchange point. Tbilisi has essentially become the trade center of the entire Transcaucasia. The main trade operations with Iran, Turkey, and Western European countries were carried out here. Since the middle of the 19th century, the number of large factories and firms has grown. These are the years of the collapse of the old feudal crafts and the establishment of the early stages of capitalism, as well as the era of rapid enrichment of the Tbilisi

19 .

Meskhia, Tbilisis istoria.

20 .

Kvirkvelia, Dzveli Tbilisi.

21 .

Beridze, V. Tbilisis Xurotmozgvreba 1801-1917 [The Architecture of Tbilisi, 1801-1917]. Tbilisi: V. I., 1960.

bourgeoisie. The population of Tbilisi grew from about 20,000 in 1803 to 67,000 in 1964. Therefore by 1803 the number of the Georgian population in Tbilisi amounted to 22.6%. This demographic characteristic was partly a consequence of the 1795 incursion of the Persians, which exterminated a huge number of Georgians and forced those who survived to abandon Tbilisi.

Along with this growth, the social face of the population changed and feudal Tbilisi gradually changed its foundation. In parallel with the process of transforming the feudal city into a bourgeois one, the process of Europeanization of the city's life and appearance was inexorably progressing. Innovations have become increasingly prevalent in the life of Tbilisi since the 1840s, as the country's economy has developed and strengthened. According to the press of that time, and especially since the time of Vorontsov,[22] foreign merchants and craftsmen have settled in Tbilisi, opening fashion stores, tailoring shops, and gastronomic shops. The cultural life of the city was revitalized by the founding of the Russian Theater, then the opening of the Italian Opera and the revival of the Georgian Theater.[23] During the years of rule of Mikhail Vorontsov, significant changes were brought in the life of the city, the first Viceroy's vigorous activity rapidly impacted on the development of Tbilisi. In 1846 the Public library was opened and by 1852 the library already contained 13051 volumes.[24] In 1846 the newspaper "Kavkaz" was founded and published, and a new observatory was opened. In 1848, Vorontsov eliminated the remains of the mediaeval city wall, and the town began to develop to the north and west. The former Garetubani became the central part of the city, the site of the viceroy's palace and elegant three-story houses for the nobles and rich merchants. Sololaki was designed as a European-style residential area for the wealthy, primarily Armenian bourgeois. On Vorontsov's initiative, the interior of the Sioni Cathedral was repaired, while Italian architect Jiovani Skudieri reconstructed the old Ottoman Mosque.

The fundamental changes in living conditions had a direct impact on the transformation of Tbilisi's residential architecture. Since the middle of the 19th century, new forms and stylistic trends have significantly influenced the city's architectural appearance, the spread of which was facilitated by the existing state construction legislation. Since the 1840s, two- and three-story residential buildings have been intensively built in both old and new districts, indicating the regular planning of the city. During this period, the capital of the local population was mostly concentrated in construction activities. Economically strong citizens were in long-term

22.

Mikhail Vorontsov was the first viceroy of the Russian Tsar in the Caucasus (1844-1854)

23.

Beridze, Tbilisis Xurotmozgvreba 1801–1917

24.

Ibid

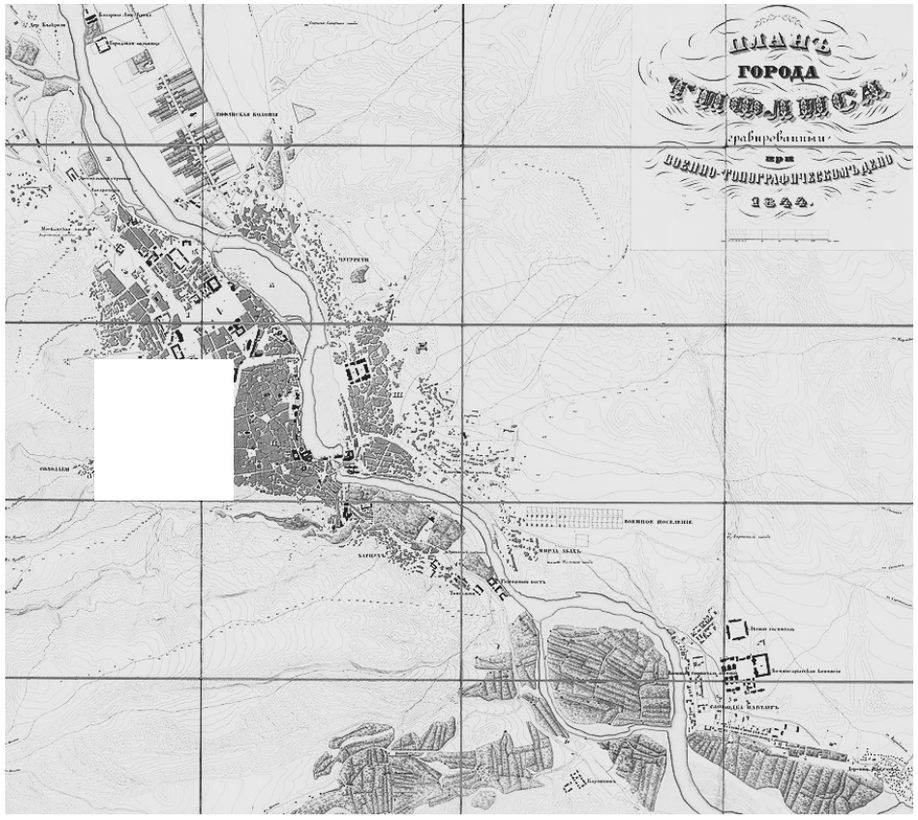


Figure 1.4:
Map of Tbilisi ,The National Library of Georgia, 1844

competition with each other in the decoration of new buildings, which became a form of indication of social significance and status. The changes became the most evident in the sixties when a new, rapid capitalistic development started in Tbilisi and the Caucasus under the Russian empire. [25]

Capitalist Transformations

Emergence of Sololaki neighborhood

Tbilisi's territorial expansion showed great potential on the threshold of the nineteenth century, with urban development following a historically established trajectory mostly aimed towards the northwest since its founding. The emergence of Garetubani (today's Sololaki neighbourhood) in the XVIII century confirms the ongoing persistence of this pattern of urban expansion. The free expansion of the city outside the old walls began only in the early 19th century. The growth of population and the construction of buildings for new government institutions required the development of new territory. The fort, which was destroyed by the Persians and rebuilt slowly and with difficulty, was not only no longer large enough, but also, with its outdated character, was not suitable for the city of the new era, which was in the process of acquiring newly designated functions .The city began to expand, and its population, once fragmented by the destructive Persian invasion,began to increase as well. At that time the chief administrator issued a decree about the unplanned and uncontrolled construction in Garetubani and from there the gradual formation of the city's new center began.

The growing city was directly adjacent to the Sololaki gardens, once a royal enclave, now repurposed to accommodate a new, planned residential district. From this point on, over the next two decades, gardens and alleys were ruthlessly cleared to make way for the regular network of Sololaki streets, which remained in an unaltered state till today. In 1832, in the Sololaki area, residential houses lined only one side of certain streets, while the opposite side was occupied by vineyards. Despite the significant economic revitalisation that resulted from the establishment of free trade with foreign nations in 1822, construction still progressed slowly. The turning point in construction was evident only from the end of thirties, that is, in the years of rapid development of bourgeois relations, when the bourgeois elements in the city's population grew, trade expanded significantly, new branches of production appeared and new cultural life began to revive. Since then Tbilisi started to grow rapidly and the population has been increasing inexorably.

25 .

Mikhail Vorontsov was the first viceroy of the Russian Tsar in the Caucasus (1844-1854)

Until the early 1860s, the city expanded by adding new territory on one side of the river, while on the other side, construction took place in existing districts that had been incorporated into the city but remained largely undeveloped. From that time on, housing construction was carried out much more intensively in all districts of Tbilisi. Sololaki Street was established,accompanied by the construction of a dedicated embankment and drainage ditch within the Sololaki ravine, while the former Sololaki gardens gave way to new bourgeois residential developments. The current Georgi Leonidze, Shalva Dadiani, Galaktion Tabidze, Mikheil Lermontovi and Lado Asatiani streets are marked here on the 1844 plan. While the number of houses increased, most of the area was still occupied by gardens. By 1850, the entire Sololaki was already lined with streets and the buildings greatly outnumbered the gardens. From this period onwards, Tbilisi's urban development progressed without interruption. The 1859 urban plan shows that during this decade, significant expansion of the city occurred mainly along the left bank of the Mtkvari, while the outer suburbs on the right bank were gradually filled with new structures.

Urban growth

When we look at the plan of Tbilisi from the 1840s(Figure 1.4) to the 1860s,(Figure 1.5) we immediately notice the difference between its old and new districts. The plan of Kala consists of a chaotic network of streets, alleys; there are almost no straight streets, not a single block with the slightest regular configuration. There are small, randomly shaped squares, a multitude of alleys, excessive fragmentation of blocks, and a large number of buildings. As much as there was a lot of vegetation around the city, Kala itself was devoid of greenery. Construction in Kala proceeded completely spontaneously. There was not even a preliminary plan or regulations. In this respect, Tbilisi did not differ from the majority of medieval cities.

Particularly in Sololaki and the surrounding suburbs of Kala (figure 1.4) , the plan's regularity stands out. The spaces between parallel and perpendicular streets clearly display the expansive quarters covered with greenery. There is a network of parallel streets on both sides of today's Rustaveli Avenue. In the new city, the streets are wider and the outline of a couple of new squares is more or less regular. It is important that the red lines are clearly defined and respected when constructing new quarters. Consequently, Tbilisi for the first time

Figure 1.5: Map of Tbilisi, The National Library of Georgia, 1867

experienced the emergence of a planned construction approach, which was characterised by mandatory rules and regulations that, to a certain extent, restricted further expansion. This is the primary distinction between the old and new Tbilisi. There is no doubt regarding the transformative importance of these developments.

they acted only as technical performers, not designers. The newly introduced architectural themes were alien to them, as were the forms adopted from the new Russia. During the twenties and thirties, construction legislation was already clearly formed, although construction progressed slowly. The 19th century gradually introduced new themes into the architecture of Tbilisi and thus posed new problems. After the establishment of Russian power, some themes such as residential houses, churches, caravansaries and shops-workshops, baths naturally continued to exist, but gradually all of them essentially changed their appearance, were filled with new content and took on a new form. On the other hand, many previously unknown themes also appeared: administrative buildings, barracks, schools, theaters, hospitals, observatories, factories, banks, and others. By the end of the century, Tbilisi had the entire range of city buildings that were characteristic of the cities of capitalist Europe of the 19th century.

Bourgeoise housing

Along with the beginning of the functional differentiation of districts, the social face of the city parts is also clearly visible: this was already visible in old, feudal Tbilisi: the aristocracy lived in the areas of King's Square and Sioni-Anchiskhati, on the outskirts, in the Abanoebi district, in Tsikhisubani - the lower classes settled. Citizens also settled in Kala - the merchant class. Individual aristocrats had residences in Garetubani. In the first decades of the 19th century, a kind of shift occurs, Garestubani becomes the residential center of the aristocracy, and Sololaki gradually becomes a more fashionable place to live for wealthy merchants and citizens. In the following decades, Sololaki became the main district of the city's bourgeoisie. The projects approved in the 40's and 50's allow us to imagine the rapid development of Sololaki's streets and the social composition of the population of this district. Social differentiation was clearly reflected in the new parts of the city as well. At least since the 1940s, when the pace of construction increased, land prices in the central districts rose. The center was inaccessible to the less able strata and the layout of these parts of the city corresponded to the social differentiation of these parts.

The task to transform the city was complicated for the Russian government since they found Tbilisi in the state of ruins. Given that the city was to serve as the administrative center of Russian authority in the Caucasus and key government institutions were to be established here, however, the city lacked purpose-built structures to house either these institutions or their personnel. Therefore, the government imposed a housing obligation: city residents, whose houses had been rebuilt to the point where life was more or less manageable, had to allocate part of their apartments to officials, military personnel, and institutions. It took quite a long time before the construction work improved again. In the first years, construction was hampered by great difficulties. The cleaning of the city and the arrangement of the streets continued for decades. Tbilisi no longer possessed the right specialists: there were only old masters brought up on artisanal-industrial soil, who functioned solely as technical executors rather than as designers for new construction projects .The newly introduced architectural styles, along with the new forms introduced by Russia, were unfamiliar and foreign to their practice and experience. During the twenties and thirties, construction legislation was already clearly formed, although construction progressed slowly.

The 19th century gradually introduced new themes into the architecture of Tbilisi and thus posed new problems. After the establishment of Russian power, some themes such as residential houses, churches, caravansaries and shops-workshops, baths naturally continued to exist, but gradually all of them fundamentally changed their appearance, they were filled with new content and took on a new form. On the other hand, many previously unknown themes also appeared: administrative buildings, barracks, schools, theaters,hospitals,observatories, factories, banks, and others. By the end of the century, Tbilisi had the entire range of city buildings that were characteristic of the cities of capitalist Europe of the 19th century.[26]

The capitalist development of the 1960s reached its peak at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Many industrial buildings were being built - a railway station, factories, old caravanserais were being renovated, and large commercial buildings. Large-scale industrial exhibitions were being organized. Scientific institutions were being established - an observatory, a botanical garden, various types of educational institutions - gymnasiums, institutes, lyceums, art societies. The Caucasian Museum was being formed, the Georgian traditional theater was flourishing. Gradually, cultural monuments from all over Georgia

26.

Beridze, Tbilisis Xurotmozgvreba 1801–1917

27 .

Mania, European Architects in Tbilisi.

Figure 1.6:
View of the fascade and the open courtyard of Tbilisi-style courtyard house, on Iashvili 1 str in Sololaki neighborhood. Source: Taken by the author 2025.

were gathering in Tbilisi. The novelty was simultaneously reflected in both the city's urban planning and its architecture. The architectural appearance of the entire city was undergoing big changes.[27] It is interesting to note that, in the Persian-wrecked city, development was done inside the ancient city using mostly old, destroyed structures starting in the early 19th century. If new plans were often created inside the quarters, their outer contours were strictly preserved, as a result, the layout and the convoluted, asymmetrical street system have been kept in the oldest areas of Tbilisi, including Kala, Isani, and Tbilisi proper. The new districts of Tbilisi were already planned and built differently with regular planning. The small-sized public buildings of Tbilisi itself (Seydabad)-Kala-Isani were replaced by large-scale official buildings and income-generating houses.[28]

Stylistic transformation

In terms of stylistic orientation, Tbilisi's 19th-century architecture is similar to that of European and Russian cities at the same era. Russian classicism has been established in Tbilisi since the early nineteenth century, with notable examples of this style. From the second half of the century, Tbilisi's architecture, following in the footsteps of Russian and European ones, has embarked on the path of stylistic diversity. Classicism gives way to the use of architectural styles of all known eras. In this style, Tbilisi equally combines classicist, Renaissance, and baroque forms. During the same period, we encounter Gothic or Islamic stylization, and at the turn of the century, signs of neo-romanticism and historicism appear. At the turn of the twentieth century, notable instances of the modernist style were built, and twenty years earlier, the first attempts to incorporate classic Georgian architectural decoration were already noticeable.

Despite the stylistic diversity, the architecture of 19th-century Tbilisi is characterized by the closeness and kinship of the buildings with each other. The same number of accents, the absence of a sharp dominant on the facades, the repetition of the even-scale rhythm of the order. The carved stones, garlands, representations of human heads, cartouches, and carved brackets on the facades, occasionally merged with carved, rough, or distinctly rusticated elements, a carved frieze, and a segmented cornice appear to hold equal significance.[29]

In the "stamped" repertoire of façade ornamentation seen on Tbilisi's official buildings, rental houses, and residential structures from the latter half of the nineteenth century, some

28. Ibid

29. Ibid

Figure 1.7:
Facade of a XIX century building in Sololaki neighborhood.Photo by the author.2025

Intside

Figure 1.8:
Coutyard of a XIX century building on Amaghleba str. 9 in Sololaki neighborhood. Photo by the author.2025

Figure 1.9:
Facade of a XIX century building in Sololaki neighborhood.Photo from memkvidreoba.gov.ge

Outside

Figure 1.10:
Facade of a XIX century building on Amaghleba str. 9, in Sololaki neighborhood.Photo by the author.2025

facades stand out like valuable gems—not made by stamping but crafted by individual mouldings or stone carvings. Still, the extensive usage of facades constructed by repeating features or motifs from a single design is a defining feature of the entire time from the mid-19th to the early twentieth centuries, and it has its own artistic significance.

Many foreign architects and engineers worked in Tbilisi during the nineteenth century, and their contributions to the city's architectural growth are crucial. The buildings built by European architects are scattered along the main avenues on both banks of the Mtkvari River - the right, Shota Rustaveli and the left, Davit Agmashnebeli avenues and in the adjacent quarters. European architects were significantly responsible for the scale and stylistic look of both of these districts, as well as the new construction of Sololaki, one of the most prominent residential areas in historic Tbilisi.

In the 19th century, European architects had a significant role in influencing the construction of new residential structures in Tbilisi, leaving a lasting impression on the city's evolving architectural landscape. Among them were Giuseppe Bernardacci, Otto Jacob Simonson, Albert Salzmann, Leopold Bolfeld, Victor Schroeter, Paul Ster, Alexander Rogosky, Ferdinand Lemkuhl, Nikolai Obolonsky, Johann Dietzmann, Stefan Krichinsky, and Giovanni Scudieri. In highlighting the participation of European experts in the evolution of Georgian architecture, it is essential to acknowledge the contributions of A. Andreoleti, a master of marble and mosaics, who worked in Tbilisi, alongside other Italian artisans in this workshop: Leonardo Lorenzetti, Angelo Nicolini, Enrico Comolli, and Baigio Moretti. They significantly contributed to thehigh technical quality of Tbilisi buildings. Additionally, it should be mentioned that A.O. Novak's ornamental sculpting workshop was primarily responsible for the quality and variety of architectural decoration found in Tbilisi's public and private structures at the start of the 20th century.[30]

30. Ibid

In the search of national identity

The end of Tsarist Georgia

A movement against Russification commenced in Georgia during the late 19th century. Academics and intelligentsia endeavoured to re-establish Georgian culture and national identity, which had been suppressed since the country was annexed by Russia. In 1879, the "Society for the Propagation of Literacy among Georgians" was established, which was responsible for the establishment of Georgian institutions and libraries. At the same time, the general population began actively participating in Georgian culture with the establishment of Georgian theatre performances, Georgian newspapers ("iveria") and the study of Georgian history and literature in schools. The progressive erosion of old traditions in Tbilisi was opposed by advocates of the Georgian language and culture. The past, particularly the agrarian tradition of Georgia, was idealised. This pursuit of national identity and self-determination was incorporated into the city's architecture.

Tbilisi's Art Nouveau houses best exemplify these sentiments, as the architects and craftspeople merged the European style with traditional Tbilisi domestic construction and spatial arrangements. Georgian craftsmen experimented with the style both materially and stylistically, as manifest in the distinctive wooden rear balconied courtyards, the exterior staircases detailed with intricate ironwork, and instances of facade ornamentation that refer to Georgian mythology, that make these Art Nouveau houses of Tbilisi unique style.

Georgians underwent a cultural revival that solidified their national identity, despite the constraints of Russification. Efforts to preserve the Georgian language, literature, and Orthodox Christian traditions were central to this resurgence. By emphasising the distinctiveness of Georgian culture, the intelligentsia fostered a sense of unity among the populace and distinguished it from Russian influences.

The outbreak of World War I and the subsequent Russian Revolution of 1917 left a power vacuum in the Caucasus region. Georgian politicians took advantage of this occasion to declare autonomy. On May 26, 1918, Georgia declared independence, establishing the Democratic Republic of Georgia. This newfound independence, however, was short-lived, as the Red Army invaded in 1921, after only 3 years of independence Georgia was incorporated into the Soviet Union.[31]

31. Ibid

Sovietization And Standardization

Development patterns and planning strategies

In the turbulent years preceding and following the 1917 Russian Revolution, Tbilisi was vital to the political fights that would determine the nation's trajectory. After the February Revolution in St. Petersburg, the Russian Provisional Government installed the special transcaucasian committee (Osobby Zakavkazskiy Komitet) to govern Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Tbilisi took the function of the de-facto seat of the Committee. On 24 February 1918, subsequent to the Bolshevik Revolution, the Transcaucasian Commissariat proclaimed the establishment of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic, with Tbilisi as its capital. The newly formed political entity did not last long due to conflicting geopolitical orientations among its members: the Georgians were seen as leaning toward Germany, the Armenians toward Britain, and the Azerbaijanis toward the Ottoman Empire. As a consequence, the federation fell apart, following the proclamation of an independent Georgian Democratic Republic on 26 May 1918. During the 3 years of independence, Tbilisi became a seat of important nation-building efforts, including the establishment of Tbilisi State University, the first university in the Caucasus.[32]

When the Bolsheviks took control of Georgia in 1921, the USSR maintained a solid hold on the country, and it remained an integral part of the union until 1991. Tbilisi became the regional capital once again. The new Bolshevik authorities attempted to cultivate broader Georgian support by positioning themselves not as an occupying force but as a liberating one. In promoting a specifically Georgian leadership and urban identity, the Soviet Union promised to transform Tbilisi into a socialist capital that retained a distinctly Georgian identity. Despite the fact that the city had no obvious ethnic majority at the time, this approach to nationality suddenly redefined the city's different local ethnic populations as foreign "minorities". The subsequent mass emigration, which was partly voluntary and partly forced, resulted in a long-term decline in the city's diversity and the gradual establishment of a homogeneously Georgian urban culture. The soviet union's principle - "national in form, socialist in content" supported the expression of national identity, though only within certain boundaries. Architecture became the most concrete and prominent medium of this process.[33]

32. Salukvadze and Golubchikov, "City as a Geopolitics."

33. Wheeler, Angela. Tbilisi: Architectural Guide. Berlin: DOM Publishers, 2023

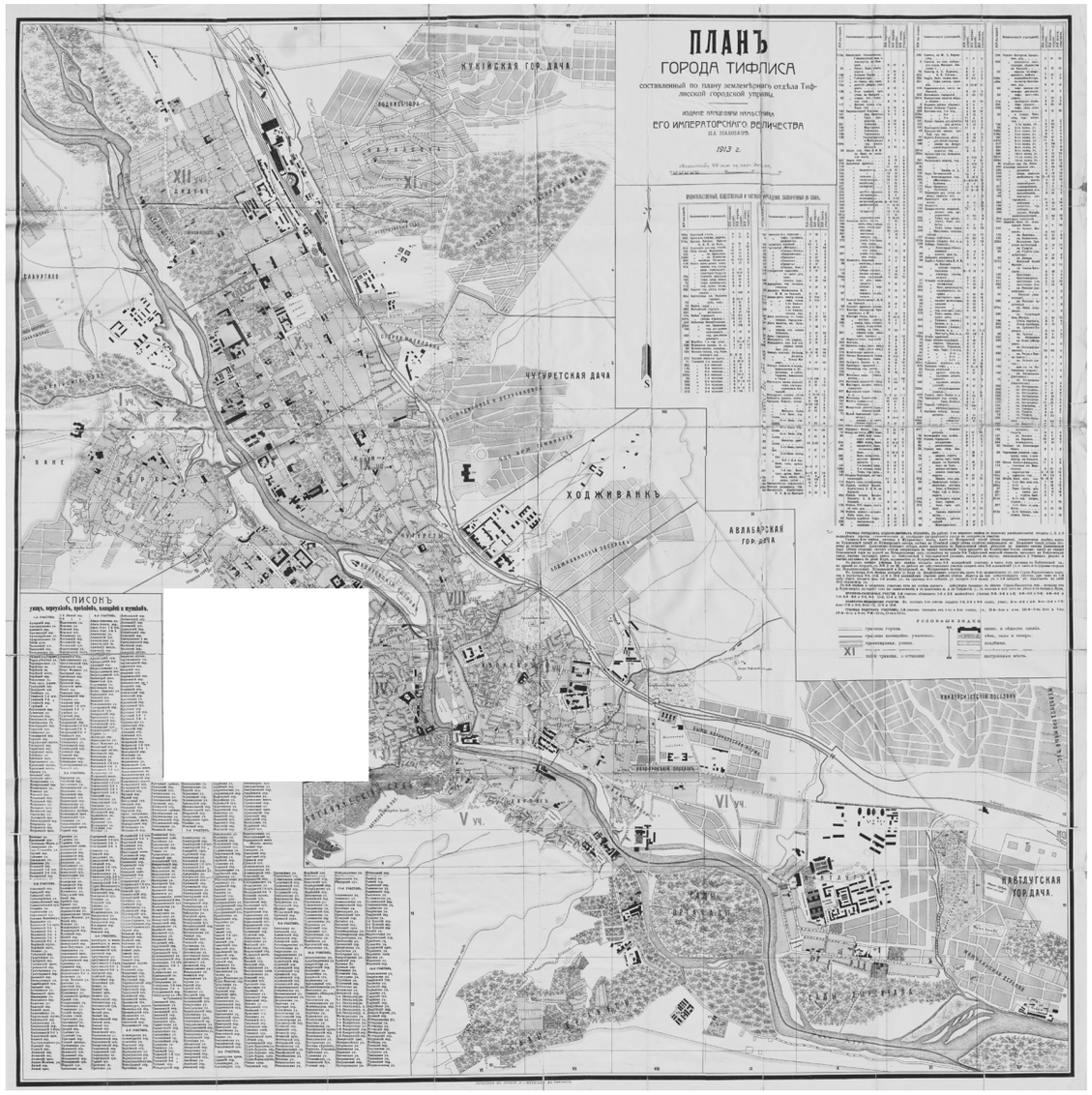


Figure 1.11:
Map of Tbilisi ,The National Library of Georgia, 1867.

Under Soviet administration, Tbilisi, a medium-sized and confined town, grew into a big industrial metropolis. From the 1930s to the 1950s, the fundamental driving force behind the economy was industrial growth. The city's territorial expansion was primarily driven by the adoption of Khrushchev's mass housing policy in the late 1950s, which resulted in a slowdown in industrial growth and a demand for a mass-produced, uniform, cost-efficient constructed environment.

In 1978, with a growing attention to heritage protection, a large-scale reconstruction of the old town began. Old Tbilisi had remained largely untouched in the soviet period and therefore preserved its historic unity and ambience. Although the reconstruction was criticized for its 'facadism', it had a favourable impact on the pre-Russian section of the city and boosted tourism. The project also enhanced the urban environment of Old Tbilisi and prolonged the lifespan of several buildings. [34] Tbilisi's contemporary urban form was significantly influenced by the Soviet period, despite its long-standing status as a central city. The city maintains unique characteristics and originality, derived from its specific micro-geographical context and historical layers, including mediaeval and 19th-century urban patterns, as well as its persistent traditional lifestyle. However, its physical and social fabric has predominantly been reshaped by Soviet socialist planning and policies.

Following the establishment of Soviet authority, Tbilisi evolved into a uniform urban development paradigm characterised by a rigid grid system prevalent across Soviet cities. This standardization was not merely technical; it reflected an ideological endeavour to reorganize urban life according to socialist values. Without recognising these foundational dynamics, any study of the changes that came after would be incomplete or obscured when it comes to the architectural and spatial transformations that happened during this time, especially with regard to the courtyard houses.

One of the most significant structural features of the Soviet urban framework was its extreme centralized management system and the State ownership of land, the only form of land ownership since the 1920s and still preserving its dominance over other forms in most post-Soviet cities. In theory, this system was considered advantageous, as a collective management body, which was not influenced by individual interests, could pursue more rational and equitable use of land based on social need rather than private profit. However, the practical outcomes deviated significantly from this theoretical ideal.

34.

Salukvadze and Golubchikov, "City as a Geopolitics."

Although the state's monopoly on land may have partially limited speculative development, it failed to overcome the challenge of the misuse of land. In numerous instances, the absence of market incentives resulted in widespread neglect and misallocation, rather than equitable planning. While such a structure may have offered some resistance to large-scale land speculation to some degree, it remained vulnerable to various issues of mismanagement. In fact, the structure frequently promoted a careless and indifferent attitude towards urban land and its surroundings, overlooking long-term social or environmental significance of these valuable spaces.[35]

35.

Gachechiladze, Revaz, and Joseph Salukvadze. Social Problems of Tbilisi and Its Metropolitan Region (TMR). Tbilisi: Department of Human Geography, Tbilisi State University, 2003.

36.

Salukvadze, Joseph. (2009). Market versus planning? Mechanisms of spatial change in post-Soviet Tbilisi. City Culture and City Planning in Tbilisi: Where Europe and Asia Meet.

37.

Ibid

Soviet city planning

Urban planning, state land ownership, and centralized government helped the communist state materialize its ideological, economic, and political objectives.[36] In large Soviet cities urban planning as an essential part of the planned economy was mostly implemented through master plans. It intended to change and reconstruct the urban fabric of previously bourgeois cities according to ideological, political, economic, and socio-cultural requirements of the Soviet state that aspired to serve the interests of the Soviet people. In the conditions of absence of private property and free land market, master plans established the principles and trends of spatial development, and city growth. These plans neglected economic appropriateness and market forces, frequently disregarding the competition between different land uses, which is a typical characteristic for western cities. Planning was the prerogative of the state, not of the citizens, functioning as a means for the government to organize and mobilize its own efforts. The Soviet state formulated rules and objectives, that was the essence of Soviet city planning. The master plan intended to serve as a binding framework to be strictly followed. Thus it was seen as the "constitution of a city", a supreme legal authority governing urban spatial development. Such perception and planning practice was sharply contrasted from the western practice, where planning generally is more restrictive and regulatory, rather than strictly prescriptive.[37]

Tbilisi obviously followed the basic Soviet pattern. Its territorial growth and the formation of its internal spatial structure progressed according to three master plans (Genplans), elaborated and adopted respectively in 1933, 1953, and 1970. The first general Plan of Tbilisi was approved in 1934 in the early Stalin period, which began a new stage in the

Figure 1.12: The Moody beauty of Soviet Tbilisi, Photogtaph by George Gogua, Adobe Express

urban development of Tbilisi; it continued the traditions of linear development in the city, which was planned along the Mtkvari River. In 1954, the city's second General Plan was approved, largely replicating the structure of the earlier plan but with diminished critical reflection and more superficial alterations. In the 1950s, the ideology of urban planning changed radically due to political changes. Mass construction of housing began with intensive development of territories, which was carried out by designing typical houses. In the 1970s the third general plan of Tbilisi was completed that was designed to last until 2000. The general plan was distinguished by scales of strategic directions and positive goals for economic and social development, a number of which were implemented unlike earlier general plans. Due to various circumstances none of these plans was completely implemented. Partial or complete failure of master plans often happened.

In the case of Tbilisi, like other cities, the plans had been carefully followed only during the first few years and occasionally some major changes were made to master plans. Nevertheless, the master plans determined the strategy, character and trends of spatial growth of Tbilisi until the 1990s. They assured the transformation of Tbilisi into a typical Soviet metropolis, while the city retained some peculiarities, derived from its unique historical legacy and topographic features. Since then the city never reverted to plan-based development, instead largely followed trends and imperatives of authorities within an otherwise unregulated land market, emerging with the adoption of private real estate ownership in the 1990s and expanded rapidly after 2000s.[38]

Spatial Expansion

Tbilisi underwent a profound transformation, both in terms of its physical footprint and the structure of its urban and social life and the scale and pace of change were unprecedented. The city expanded significantly beyond its historical boundaries, incorporating neighbouring areas and reorganising its physical layout to accommodate new industrial, administrative, and residential activities. By the second half of the twentieth century, Tbilisi, with a population of more than one million people had become one of the major urban centers in the Soviet Union. Along with this growth came a diversified economic foundation ranging from heavy industrial activities to cultural production. In many ways, the city's morphology, infrastructure, and everyday life became symbols of Soviet urban modernity. Morphology, infrastructure, and daily life in the city, all became emblematic of Soviet urban modernity, echoing the ideological imperatives of centrally planned development. From this standpoint, Tbilisi may be seen not only as a part but also as a product of Soviet urban planning.

38. Ibid

39. Evacuation of industrial enterprises from the European parts of USSR, and post-War industrialization years

40. Salukvadze, "Market versus Planning?

This rapid and extensive growth of Tbilisi was in accordance with the general requirements of the Soviet state and its overall policy, which encouraged the hyper-urbanization of the capitals of relatively smaller soviet republics, to ensure the so-called "agglomeration effect". These effects include the diversified job market and opportunities, economic advantages from centralised administration, and improved infrastructure in the capital and its nearby areas. The expanding city profited from a variety of public transport systems, including buses, trolleybuses, trams, and cable cars. Subsequently in 1965 Tbilisi became the fourth Soviet city that established an underground metro system. The large population expansion was primarily driven by migration from rural parts of Georgia, with a minor contribution from the immigrants from other Soviet republics especially before the 1960s. This demographic influx contributed to the subsequent spatial expansion of the city. The primary driving force between 1930s and 1950s,in the period of "industrialization" during WW II,[39] was an expansion of industrial activity. Since the 1960s, the expansion of industrial functions slowed down, and mass housing became the driver of territorial growth.

The spatial development of Soviet Tbilisi was marked by three key characteristics:

Extensive territorial growth

Firstly, Tbilisi underwent significant territorial growth,which was a result of Soviet planning principles. In the absence of a land market, land was allocated freely, facilitating this extensive growth. Both the developed urban areas and the territories within Tbilisi's officially designated administrative boundaries expanded significantly. Significantly, the legally designated city grew faster than the physically populated areas, leaving significant stretches of undeveloped land inside the city's administrative boundaries.

Urban sprawl

Secondly, shaped by the city's topography, Tbilisi's territorial expansion manifested as urban sprawl, with the built-up area extending linearly along the course of the Mtkvari (Kura) River.

Low spatial cohesion

Thirdly, the stretched linear form of the city,

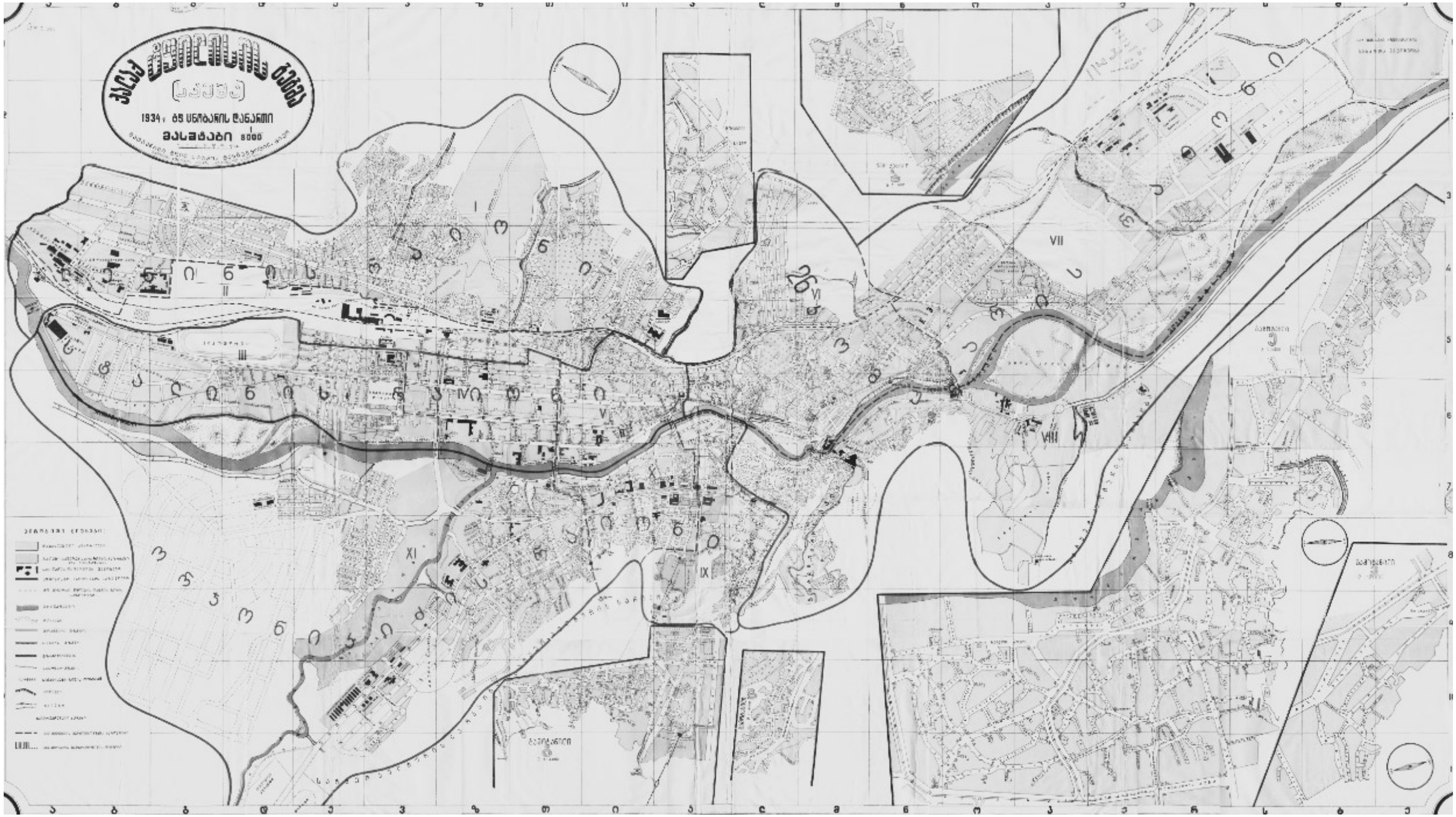


Figure 1.13: Map of Tbilisi ,The National Library of Georgia, 1867

combined with weak connectivity between various neighborhoods and functional zones, led to a fragmented and incoherent spatial structure.[40]

Transformation of Domestic Architecture

“ARCHITECTURE IS THE WILL OF AN EPOCH TRANSLATED INTO SPACE.”

_Mies van der Rohe

The architecture functioned as a medium for the propagation of the Soviet Union’s fundamental ideology and political ambitions. By designing monumental structures it intended to emphasize the strength and the resilience of the regime(Figrue1.12). From the early 1930s to the early 1950s, Stalinist architectural ideals played a crucial role in shaping Tbilisi’s urban environment. This period was characterized by monumental scale, neoclassical elements, and ornate detailing. Among the most iconic expressions of this ideological vision were the multi-family housing blocks that were constructed in this period and were commonly referred to as “ Stalinist style”, largely monumental structures made of pumice, concrete blocks, and bricks.[41]

During the early soviet era, there was a radical break with the pre-revolutionary city’s urban and architectural logic. Following the revolution when avant-garde movements like Rationalism and Constructivism attempted to redefine architecture as a means of social change, these early attempts to reorganize the domestic life around collective principles were articulated through communal housing (kommunalka), factory-kitchens and workers’clubs with the emphasis on mass production and practicality.

These Stalin period housing units typically feature large apartments, with high ceilings, are centrally located, and with historical value, and today they are commonly inhabited by middle or upper middle income households. While some of the units in this housing typology were initially planned for single-family occupation, their considerable size and a severe housing shortage led to widespread nationalization, thus many flats were converted into communal apartments between the 1920s and 1940s. Exceptions were made only for prominent Soviet officials, directors of major Soviet industrial enterprises, artists and members of the intelligentsia. Despite its age, this form of Soviet-era housing typically presents fewer issues in terms of infrastructure and space since it offers a comparatively spacious living area.[42] Simultaneously, Stalinist architecture was not purely about aesthetics. It was embedded in the broader Soviet governance framework and used to discipline everyday life. Housing was still intricately tied to the system of state distribution, where access was allocated based on a person’s position within the social hierarchy of the Soviet order. In this way, the architecture of the Soviet city did more than simply serve as a backdrop to political activity of the city. It intentionally reproduced the hierarchical logic of centralized state. The built environment mirrored this centralized structure of society itself, offered a privilege to those affiliated with the regime and by contrast marginalized others in peripheral quarters of the city.

However, from the late 1950s, Under Khrushchev’s signature mass housing reforms, the preference was given to mass-produced, cost-efficient and standardized built environments. Soviet-era prefabricated mass-produced apartment blocks became a common feature across almost all cities in Georgia. They were built by the state to address a severe housing shortage, to ensure each household has access to an individual apartment. They allowed millions of Soviet citizens to move from “kommunalkas”, barracks and dormitories of the Stalin era to single-family flats. Society perceived this transition as a substantial improvement over communal apartments, in which families shared common spaces with neighbors. These separate apartments provided more privacy in the domestic space, which the regime portrayed as a peak of modern city living and a harmonious structure of society.[43]

The first phase of this type of collective housing was the so-called ‘Khrushchevka’ blocks of flats, which typically were five floors tall. In the later years, Soviet pre-fabricated housing increased to 8 or 9 stories, and later up to 12, 14 and even 16 stories. The buildings were built out of prefabricated concrete panels, which was the least expensive and highest-speed construction technology available at the time. Khrushchevka residential

41.

Singh, Ashna, Joseph Salukvadze, and Max Budovitch. 2016. Georgia Urban Strategy - Housing.

42.

Ibid

43.

Fitzpatrick, Sheila. Everyday Life in Russia Past and Present. Edited by Choi Chatterjee, David L.Ransel, Mary Cavender, and Karen Petrone. Indiana University Press, 2015

44.

Singh et al., Georgia Urban Strategy - Housing

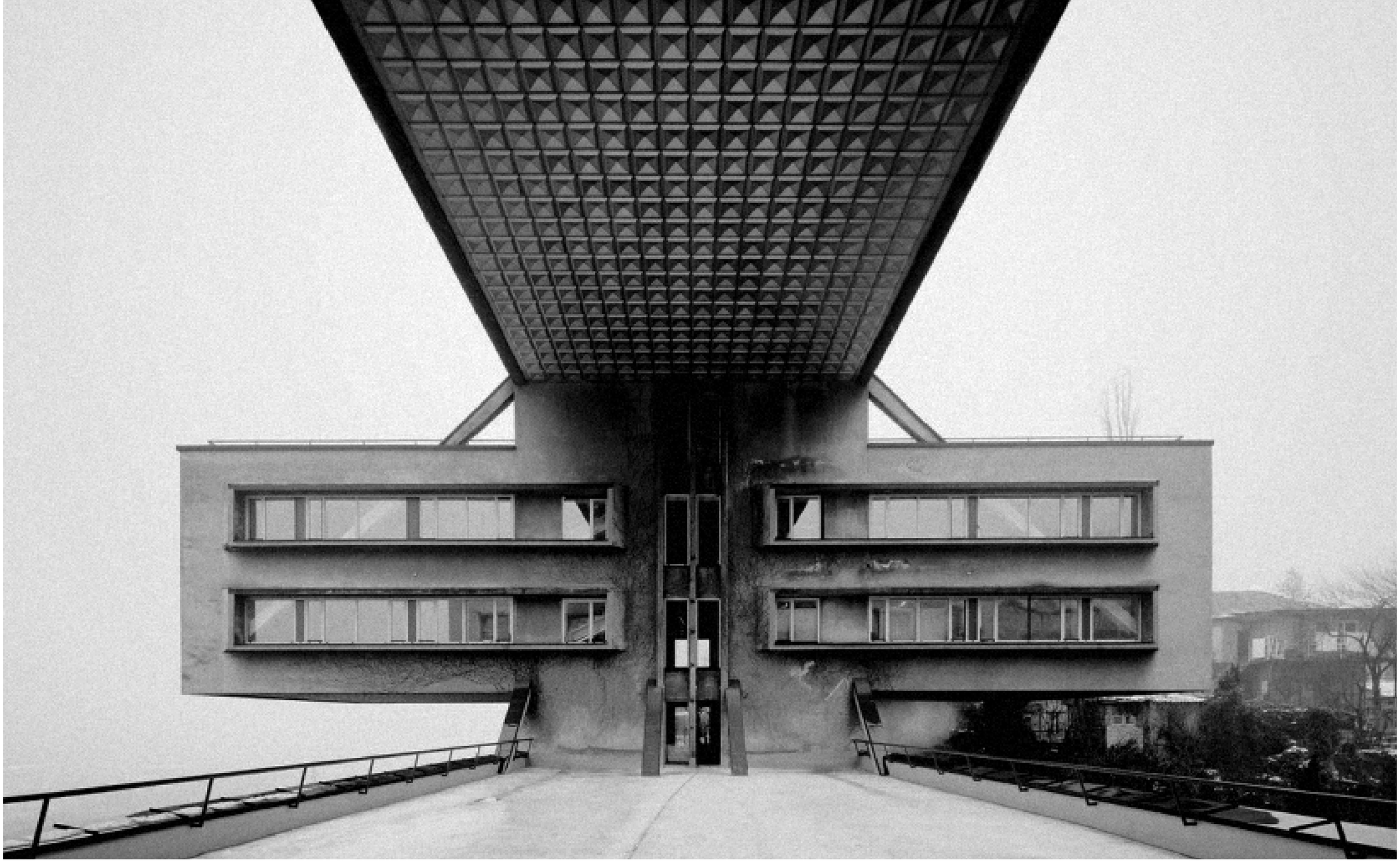


Figure 1.14:
Ministry of Highways and Transportation, 1979, Tbilisi, Georgia
Image credit: Simona Rota

buildings were built in clusters known as microrayons and provided with basic social services.(fig. 1.15) Each flat was equipped with an individual kitchen and bathroom. One of the key characteristics of the first generation Khrushchevka housing was “go-through” rooms. All blocks were built in conformity with the prevailing standards of the period. As in the Khrushchevkas, residents of some Stalin-style buildings have constructed lateral extensions or additions to the upper floors without any technical analysis of the underlying structure. [44]

In 1978, with a growing interest in heritage preservation, a large-scale reconstruction program for the old town was launched. Old Tbilisi’s historic identity and architectural cohesiveness remained mostly unaltered during the Soviet period. Although the renovation was criticized for its ‘facadism’, it nonetheless had a positive impact on the pre-Russian part of the city and stimulated tourism.[45]

Housing policies during USSR

Georgia’s housing sector has a peculiar history of development. It was - and to some extent, continues to be largely determined by Soviet central planning methods, and state-owned housing. During the Soviet era, housing policy served as one of the fundamental pillars of the official ideological framework of the Soviet Union. Immediately upon the annexation of Georgia by the Soviet Red Army in 1921 Land and real estate, including urban housing, were nationalized and taken over by the government. In the early years following the sovietization,the real estate was expropriated from “the enemies” of the proletariat, which included aristocracy, bourgeoisies, wealthy farmers, traders and businessmens, and it was redistributed among the working class. In order to accommodate the fast growing urban population, mostly resulting from rural-urban migration caused by a policy of socialist industrialization in the late 1920-1930s, the government adopted legislation and planning norms to assure minimal living standards for urban dwellers. In particular, they implemented “communalization”, establishment of communal apartments, within most of the existing housing stock,thereby providing citizens with a minimum individual residential living space, usually less (than 9m2per person) with common domestic facilities. The imposed public restrictions of living and personal space severely limited individuals’ rights to choose a residence, limited internal mobility, and complicated the access to housing resources.[46]

45.

Salukvadze and Golubchikov, “City as a Geopolitics.”

46.

Singh et al., Georgia Urban Strategy - Housing

47.

In the mid 70s during the economic crisis in all soviet states, the “years of stagnation” saw corruption, cronyism and black markets. This crisis slowed down construction processes and intensified metropolitan housing shortages. In 1986 Gorbachev’s new government aimed to quickly address the housing crisis. His housing program “housing 2000” promised all Soviet families a free apartment by the year 2000 with the subsequent extension of living space.

48.

Perestroika (“restructuring”) was initiated by Gorbachev upon his appointment as the leader of the Communist Party in 1985. Gorbachev seemed to believe that the U.S.S.R.’s economic system was strong and needed only slight modifications. Thus, he launched an economic program to boost growth and investment.

49.

Singh et al., Georgia Urban Strategy - Housing

The communalization of residential houses mitigated the effects of mass homelessness, however, it did not completely solve existing housing problems, since urban population grew at a faster pace. While a very limited number of good quality residential units were built throughout the Stalin period, they were rarely built outside Tbilisi.

The period after Stalin’s dictatorship is significant for the dramatic change of housing policy with the “Khrushcev law”. From the late 1950’s and especially from 1960’s, In order to address the housing shortage rapidly expanding. A housing campaign was established under the slogan “each family-separate apartment”: it aimed at providing all citizens independent flats with domestic facilities. These interventions led to a rapid proliferation of low-quality, standardized apartment blocks under the popularly applied name of “khrushchevka”.

The norm of defined standard living space of 8m^2 per person persisted unchanged for several decades since 1927 and was increasingly dissatisfying the population as time passed. Mass housing programs provided accommodations to a large number of citizens, although it lacked adequate comfort and sufficient living space. As a response to the fact that the authorities confessed that the living and working conditions of the people in the Soviet Union were frequently below expectations and disappointing, there were attempts made to soften the strict housing regulations. In particular, a large-scale state program, Housing—2000 (ЖИЛИЩЕ 2000)[47] was elaborated, aimed at providing every Soviet family with their own apartment, at the gradual increase of living space. In Georgia, the communist government tried to achieve those goals by issuing a decree and resolution allowing pristrojikas (extensions)[48] to buildings with up to nine floors. Under the decree design, construction and technical control was regulated, and some rules on extension sizes, sanitation conditions and agreements among neighbors. Pristrojika normally filled in balconies on backsides of buildings, or overlooking courtyards. [49]

From the 1970s started the delivery of more elaborate pre-fabricated multi-apartment residential units. However even this could not meet the demand of the growing urban populations. While multi-generational cohabitation in a single dwelling was not unusual, it started to become less acceptable. This occurred at the same time as the size of the household was declining in the big cities. Consequently, urban housing remained a significant social issue, as evidenced by long waiting lists for new flats in

Figure 1.15:
Aerial View of Soviet Era Apartment Blocks in Tbilisi. Source Unsplash

almost all urban centers. In larger cities it was common to wait for even more than decades.

From the policy perspective, general regulations regarding Soviet housing were defined in the "Brezhnev's" Constitution in 1977. According to the constitution the population's right to housing should be achieved through the Stake housing stock, by supporting cooperative and individual development, and ensuring fair distribution of housing among the population. Corresponding provisions were an integral part of constitutions of all Soviet republics, including Georgia. As a result, much of the housing stock remained under State ownership, represented by local governments and state enterprises and the inhabitants had the status of tenants. Considering that during the USSR housing cost was relatively low, provision of State housing could be perceived as an aim with a "social" function.

More precisely defined legal aspects of housing issues was adopted in 1983, as a "Housing Code of Georgian SSR". This housing code regulated the issues of housing tenure, responsibilities and obligations of tenants, flat fees and flat exchange system.

Acquisition of any housing unit may occur after the issuing of an "order" or a certificate granting the permission for the occupation of a designated residential unit. However, professional and other privileges also impacted the housing sector : while the "norm of living space" defined by Soviet legislation stayed <9m2 per person, several population groups like scholars with academic degrees, members of artists and writers' unions, had rights to additional space (10-20 m^2) or an extra room.

Nevertheless, despite all governmental efforts, housing remained an important socioeconomic problem for a large segment of the population in larger Soviet cities until the collapse of the USSR. In the years of 'Perestroika', there were several large-scale efforts to resolve the prevailing 'housing hunger' in the country including the 'Habitat-2000'. But as mentioned due to lack of economic resources the program was utopian. Given the limited public resources available, even partial realization of this program would have required substantial private sector investment. The last communist government in Georgia tried to achieve these goals within the confines of the existing housing stock. so called perestrojikas (перестройка in Rus). However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the state construction sector, and especially after privatization of apartments in the 1990s, this process became unregulated. Tens of thousands of households built perestrojikas of unauthorized

50. Danarti journal -"everything that is not forbidden is allowed"

dimensions and materials completely informally, and in unprescribed places, breaking all the standards of structural integrity or urban aesthetics. These unfortunate practices persisted through the 1990s and early 2000s, culminating in the physically deficient and visually unappealing housing landscape that characterizes the Georgian cities till today.[50]

"Better, cheaper, faster"

In 1988 peaceful mass protests emerged in the Baltic and Caucasian republic. There was a growing demand in Tbilisi for Georgian independence, which intensified the political tension in the Soviet Union. In 1989, Gorbachev proposed a new plan that would grant the Soviet Union unprecedented rights, in order to " develop the maximum potential of every nation, each of the Soviet peoples". Yet only a week later on April 9, 1989, Russian military violently crushed a peaceful protest in Tbilisi. Seeking to calm public anger, the Soviet administration of Georgia quickly issued a series of decrees. One of them was a May 18, 1989, already mentioned decree that permitted residents to use private fundings to build "recessed balconies,verandas, and other ancillary areas on the rear facades of state-owned and cooperative buildings with a maximum of nine stories". These additions could increase up to an area of the apartment up to 25 percent. State companies started to build steel base structures for the potential extensions that marked the spatial boundaries that were allowed for the expansion. Even though in the beginning the State oversaw the technical realization of these extensions and coordinated between neighbors, still by early 90s the amount of construction significantly outgrew the States capacity for supervision.

In accordance with Nikita Khrushchev's two principles of "Better,cheaper,faster" and "few square meters for everyone", most of the extensions were constructed on the standardized residential buildings. During this period SNIP (Soviet construction standards) defined the maximum area of the apartments to be 16 m^2 for a studio and 40 m^2 for a four-room flat. The standard specified various norms according to ceiling height, kitchen size, number of rooms and so on. By the 1990s the military conflicts,resulting in lax implementation of laws and regulations. Due to lack of state control people took the matters into their own hands and began modifying and upgrading their own domestic spaces resulting in highly unsafe structures. By the time the situation cooled down and the new construction went into effect in 1995, most of the extensions were already present. [51]

51. Ibid

Post-Independence Disruptions:
Fragmentation And Privatization

Post-Soviet Transition and the Fragmented City

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Tbilisi stepped into a disoriented and turbulent phase of post-socialist transition. The collapse of the USSR control led to the abandonment of the model of centralized planning and was replaced by the uncontrolled market dynamics and speculative real estate practices. It developed and grew spontaneously. This shift occurred alongside the extreme national instability, including civil war and the fall of political power of the Gamsakhurdia[52] government (1991-1992) and the intensive, ongoing instability under the Shevardnadze[53] government (1992-2003). This period of transition and process of spatial changes could be divided into several phases. FIrst phase of decline of urban structures in the first years of the twentieth century. Second phase, which occurred in the end of twentieth century, the phase of new construction strategies in restricted central areas and third phase characterized by the beginning of the more significant structural changes, that started in 2004.[54]

In winter of 1991-1992 a militarized conflict over state authority occurred in Tbilisi which ended in removal of Zviad Gamsakhurdia from power and intensified the instability and fragmentation of the city. Due to this ongoing political instability and collapse of the system, Georgia became one of the most severely affected former Soviet countries.[55] During this period right after the collapse of the USSR, the city was overtaken by the paramilitary force mkhedrioni, which was actively involved in the civil war and fell into extreme poverty and chaos. There was widespread electricity theft, bribery, kidnapping, violence and excessive drug use. By 1994 Industrial production stopped, public transport disappeared, electricity failure became a part of everyday life, and central heating became obsolete. In short the 90's left what is called the generational trauma, the psychological scar on the Georgian population, on the ones that lived through the normalized violence and questions of survival in their daily life. These events were undoubtedly significant disruptions of institutional continuity that left a lasting impact.[56] Paradoxically even if this period was the one of the most profoundly difficult and chaotic in Georgia's independence, till this day narratives of nostalgia persist among the generations that lived through this era. This form of contradictory collective nostalgia manifests across different aspects and historical periods in Tbilisi, and will be further discussed in relation to Tbilisi-style courtyards in the following chapters. It is possible that all of these nostalgic narratives, in part stem from a perceived loss of communality that appears to be eroded by rapid neoliberalization.

Given the generally poor context of the early 1990s The Georgian state began significant changes intended to liberalize the nation's political and economic systems. One of the core of these reforms was the privatization of property that had begun with Zviad Gamsakhurdia in 1991, with the registration of apartments by their residents. Firstly privatization of apartments started, followed by privatization of agricultural land, and finally in 1999 continued with the privatization of urban land. This process accelerated under Shevardnadze and Ioseliani with the consumption of several state assets. The Tbilisi government and city hall developed a framework for the transfer of public property to private entities, with the Ministry of Management of State Property overseeing privatization of real estate through insider sales or auctions.[57]Consequently, responsibilities and operations were not clearly defined by the policy guidelines, this gave great opportunity to officials and to some bureaucrats to behave according to their will and in favour of their personal interests. As a result, lots of civic infrastructure, public parks, industrial or academic buildings were rapidly privatized,with the consumption of several state assets, every valuable piece of civic infrastructure from public parks to. Everyone was trying to grab anything they could by all means necessary. A new set of demands emerged during this period of political turmoil, and the government lost official authority over Tbilisi's urban development.

Privatization of housing

Georgia has one of the highest rates of privatized housing globally, 95% of the housing stock is privatized. In September 1991, the first national government developed a draft document for reviewing regarding the " privatization of apartments", which tried to implement the privatization process in a comprehensive and reasonable manner. However the government change in 1992 halted that effort and gave way to another, more populist, and unjustified approach of privatization. In 1992 the Cabinet

52. The first president of Georgia (1991-1992),Zviad Gamsakhurdia is one of the most significant figures of contemporary Georgian history. With his leadership, the national movement resulted in freeing Georgia from the Soviet Regime and restoring its independence.

53. Eduard Shevardnadze was a Soviet and Georgian politician who governed Georgia for several non-consecutive periods from 1972 till 2003 until his resignation

54. Salukvadze, "Market versus Planning?,

55. Ibid

56. Ibid

57. Ibid

of Ministers adopted Decree No. 107, "On privatization of Dwellings in the Republic of Georgia", which transferred the ownership rights of apartments to their owners and setting tenants. This practically "free" transfer of houses or flats to prospective tenants was carried out at the municipal level.

However the Decree did not specify the legal status of the land plots on which this housing was built, nor the responsibilities of the new homeowners of multi-apartment blocks. The Decree anticipated that the Ministry of Urbanization and Construction would provide the rules and maintenance guidelines, however this did not occur, and there was no legal framework explaining the obligations for the homeowners. By 2001, approximately 90% of Georgia's housing stock was privatized and about 450,000 families lived in multi-story privatized housing. Even after receiving the information about all the responsibilities for building maintenance, still many new owners had no will to pay for maintenance, which later resulted in a rapid deterioration of almost all apartment buildings. [58]

Post-Soviet Urban Development Trajectories

The urban development of Tbilisi was significantly and permanently transformed by the collapse of the Soviet Union. The breakdown of Soviet infrastructure and resource networks made it challenging to execute ambitious urban projects. Emigration from Tbilisi has been increasingly resulting in the influx of rural populations displaced by the near-total collapse of agriculture during the post-Soviet decade. This period was characterized by the erosion of social, economic and intellectual resources. There was a rapid widespread of small-scale construction,caused by the rapid privatization of apartments, followed by the influx of developers. Georgia in the 90s appeared to be disintegrating as a functional state. Most of the development was widely informal and fragmented, with low construction quality, shady financial deals and quick-profit schemes. It is easy to imagine why significant urban development struggled to gain momentum in advancing within such an unstable environment, particularly development subjected to any form of regulation. Due to the severe lack of accessible capital for both builders and buyers, meant that mortgages were not a viable option. As a result, a significant portion of the development was supported by illegal capital and shadowy financial deals. Out of this fragmented and uncertain context, a new urban development pattern gradually began to take shape, which accelerated significantly following the 2003 Rose Revolution. This model is often referred to as "investor urbanism". [59] A central city land use plan was adopted in 2005, but still due to the absence of subdivision regulations, frequently resulted in substandard urban design and left a significant gap. After the troubled process, a new masterplan was adopted in 2009 that intensified the development in the city's popular neighborhoods. In addition transitional spaces between historic areas and new neighborhoods developed during the Soviet period have become the main target of investor-led development. Since the 2000 construction standard relatively improved in comparison to the 1990s, this relative stability discouraged speculative development. Since then historic Tbilisi has been under protection, but the relationship between old and new buildings is a subject of ongoing debate.[60]

After the Rose Revolution, Mikeil Saakashvili with the enthusiasm of the neo-liberal development put a lot of attention on Old Tbilisi and renovation and embellishment of the nineteenth century historical buildings became one of the biggest subjects of extreme commercialization. Government's subsidized construction practices have devalued heritage buildings, lots of them losing their aesthetic value due to inadequate conservation methods. This renovation catalyzed a gentrification phenomenon.

Under pro-western President Saakashvili, the state often underfunded politically motivated "preservation" initiatives that failed to preserve historic fabric or convey Georgian heritage. Tbilisi City Hall started a program aiming to establish historic centers like ones in western European capitals. In 2009 "New life for Old Tbilisi", developers would get City Hall-guaranteed loans from banks to execute projects then would negotiate with homeowners to "swap" properties, meaning that they would relocate them to newly-finished projects.However many historic buildings were removed and rebuilt, frequently with additional levels. In pursuit of a Western-ised appearance that conveys democracy and modernization, City hall has risen to top-down planning,characterized by an absence in transparency and consensus. [60]

58.

Singh et al., Georgia Urban Strategy - Housing

59.

Assche, Kristof, and Joseph Salukvadze. Tbilisi Reinvented: Planning, Development and the Unfinished Project of Democracy in Georgia. Planning Perspectives, 2012.

60.

Assche, Kristof, and Joseph Salukvadze. "Urban Transformation and Role Transformation in the Post-Soviet Metropolis." In Remaking Metropolis: Global Challenges of the Urban Landscape, 86–102. 2013.

60.

Wheeler, Angela. "New Look for Old Tbilisi: Preservation Planning in Tbilisi Historic District," 2016.

Informal adaptations_ The Kamika(D)ze loggia

There is an immense spectrum of informal adaptations and alterations emerged in Tbilisi, types are often dictated by the availability of materials and the creativity of inhabitants. The once uniform, sometimes monotonous facades are frequently disrupted through improvised adaptations and a variety of finishes. Alongside with the countless informal adaptations such as rooftop sheds, improvised staircases, makeshift additions, one of the most common and radical interventions are so called “Kamikaze loggias”.(Fig. 1.16)

“kamikaze loggia” is the phenomenon that describes the makeshift, informal addition (also called extended loggias) that were added to Soviet-era housing blocks to increase the space in each apartment. They are used as terraces, additional rooms, open-air refrigerators and many more.[61] They emerged out of the desire of apartment owners, who recently had just had their houses privatized and wanted to either incorporate and absorb their existing balcony into the inside of their home, or expand their existing house with a new projection for additional room. The end product is supplementary space that may be either partially covered or left open as a balcony or outdoor living area. These idiosyncratic, makeshift structures represent improvisational tactics that utilizes the infrastructural legacy of Soviet master plans. There loggias were built in the poor 1990s, Georgians often refer to as “Dark 90’s” [62] mainly due to extreme electricity shortage. They were constructed from plywood and scrap metal and represent a post-Soviet substitute for luxury.[63]

kamika(d)ze?

These loggias were allegedly named by a Russian Journalist, referring to the risky but romantic nature of these practices, drawing a comparison between Japanese suicidal mission and common Georigan ending of a surname-adze. (Fig 1.17)

In 1919, a new standard was adopted to control how living space would be allocated per capita. Initially a person was allowed 10m2, by 1923 people who had space beyond this minimum paid for extra square meters and by 1926 this minimum 10 square meter had decreed to 8 square meters. In the 1920s that permitted the displacement of former owners and their subsequent resettling for more efficient distribution of people. This led to the involuntary

61.

Goldstein, Andrew M. “Joanna Warsza.” Artforum, November 22, 2013. https://www.artforum.com/features/joanna-warsza-216113/.

62.

Chikovani, Nino. “The 90s: Beyond Ethnopolitical Conflicts.” Social Justice Center Georgia, September 29, 2023. https://socialjustice.org.ge/en/products/90-iani-tslebi-etnopolitikuri-konfliktebis-mighma.

63.

Goldstein, “Joanna Warsza.”

Figure 1.16: General views, Kamikaze Loggia, Georgian Pavilion, 2013.

coexistence of individuals that had no connection with each other residing in the same flat. sharing a kitchen and bathroom, that remained one of the most com-mon forms of housing before independence Started from the 1950s and during Khrushchev law, apartments were allocated by family instead of square meters per person. Subsequently in the 1980s there was a 20 years waiting period for a family to receive an apartment, and was only taken into consideration where, starting in the mid-1950s under Khrushchev, apartments were finally allocated by family instead of by square meters per person. Khrushchev’s mass-housing construction program did manage to curb the housing scarcity to a certain extent, but failed to fully eliminate it. In the mid-1980s, there was generally a 20-year waiting period to be allocated an apartment. In 1988, in Tbilisi 59,000 households, thus 19 percent of all households in the city were waiting to be allocated an apartment. [64]

By 1991, permits had already been issued for about 800 extensions, a strikingly high number, reflecting the collapse of regulatory control mechanisms. Residents seized the opportunity to enlarge their spaces and often pushed the boundaries of the actual necessity. This period marked the stage for proliferation of informal loggias and other improvised additions that ultimately reshaped Tbilisi’s residential landscape. A very large number of extensions were completed in this period and then stopped after 1992 due to overall economic instability and dramatic increase of inflation. Subsequently, in the 2000s, amid the economic recovery, the second wave kicked off, and its scale rose comparatively.
Besides kamikaze loggias, which are unique to Soviet-era apartment blocks, and various modifications are also present on buildings in the old areas of Tbilisi. Political negligence, and incapacity of governmental authorities to regulate, along with the idiosyncratic reasoning underlying each intervention disperses the power into the realm of everyday actors. Thereby constructed fabric can be perceived as a multifaceted assemblage: continual reconfiguration through accumulation of minor yet crucial appropriations.

64.

Danarti journal -”everything that is not forbidden is allowed”

Figure 1.17:
Still from the "Tbilisi Architecture Biennial 2018 teaser", YouTube. Uploaded by Tbilisi Architecture Biennial.2018. Accessed 2025

Chapter 02

Tbilisi-Style Courtyard Houses

History And Development

Tbilisi Courtyards

History and development

Introduction

Tbilisi's urban identity has been profoundly shaped by its complex and often contradictory political history, each empire's ideology left behind material and spatial traces on the urban grid, making it a readable palimpsest. Resulting in a cityscape defined by fragmentation, layering and improvisation. These layers coexist in tension where past and present are in constant flux. Tbilisi style courtyards are one of the most vivid examples of the result of political influences, these houses catallize the multilayered nature of Tbilisi itself shaped by imperial layouts and politics, transformed by Soviet collectivization and redefined in the post-socialist period through processes of informal adaptation and spatial appropriation. "Ezo houses" [66] or "Italian courtyards"[67], as we say in Georgia, represents the dynamic spatial configuration shaped by different forces and over time, a place where material structures, social practices, history and power intersect, adapt and transform continuously .
Fundamental to this conception is the recognition that space itself is actively produced and reproduced through everyday practices, institutional planning, and symbolic meanings. Courtyard houses function as places where routine movements, shared interactions and communal rituals unfold and materialize, consequently producing a spatial identity that exceeds mere physical delineation. Simultaneously, they are shaped by formal interventions that embody and reproduce dominant power, influences and ideological frameworks. Thus they function as assemblages[68], heterogeneous collectives composed of diverse elements that are continuously arranged, rearranged and reinterpreted. They embody the inherent tensions between tradition and transformation, between collective belonging and individual agency, between historic continuity and contemporary adaptation.

To fully comprehend the transformations and the complex, multilayered nature of courtyard buildings as dynamic assemblages, it is essential to trace their evolution through history, situated within broader socio-political and urban processes. In the previous chapter, the full historical timeline alongside the political and urban history of the city was introduced, providing a broad context for understanding its transformations. The following analysis will adopt the same historical timeline to examine how courtyard typologies have been continuously reconfigured, appropriated, and reinterpreted across these distinct periods, starting from Imperial Russian rule to Soviet collectivization and subsequently, post-independence developments. In other more conceptualized terms the periods of - Formation Standardization and Fragmentation

The aforementioned naming is not a strict academic classification nor fixed historical categories but rather a conceptual framework through which to understand shifting dynamics of transformations. Emphasizing their nature as a contingent, adaptable "assemblages" that undergoes processes of composition, recomposition and at some level decomposition in response to broader political, economic and cultural changes. They are the interpretation of heterogeneous elements that are always in motion, never fully stable and never fully complete.

66.

Ezo (ეზო) - Georgian word for courtyard,often serves as shorthand for the Tbilisi-style courtyard house typology.

67.

Italian yards (იტალიური ეზო) - widely used and established infromal term to refer to Tibili-style courtyards, not due to its Italian origin or aesthetic, but as a Cultural metaphor, generated by the society due to its resemblance to the vibrant and noisy community life depicted in Italian neorealist movies.

68.

DeLanda, Manuel. Assemblage Theory. Edinburgh University Press, 2016

Formation

The courtyard emerged in the XIX century under Imperial Russia, gathering diverse architectural traditions, and social customs into a relatively coherent spatial type. Here, the word "formation" reflects the way courtyards first took shape, got "assembled" via different ideologies and traditions and is understood as the stabilizing of multiple flows, establishment of a typology and an emergence of recognizable spatial form.

Communalization

Soviet interventions did not dissolve the courtyard but "re-assembled" it: existing structures were collectivized, reorganized, and inscribed with new ideological codes. Courtyards became sites, where earlier spatial logics were reworked under socialism. This did not erase their prior assemblage but layered new rules and uses upon it, producing a hybrid form of continuity and rupture.

Fragmentation

The collapse of Soviet infrastructures unleashed processes of privatization, fragmentation, informal practices, and shifting ownership dispersed the courtyard as a cohesive form. Thus the Fragmentation refers to the loss of stable spatial hold, producing fractured, contested, and pluralized spaces as a disassemblage of communal practices.

FORMATION

Formation

Assamblage of the Imperial Courtyards

Under the Russian empire when Tbilisi underwent administrative and infrastructural modernization and showed the early attempts of grid planning and Westernization, new building practices emerged. The need for accommodating a growing and diversifying population led to multi-household buildings, often organized around shared open spaces. These early forms laid the foundation for more communal courtyard living. The Art Nouveau façades of Tbilisi, built from the middle of the 19th-Century under the rule of The Russian Empire bears a strong resemblance to the buildings in St. Petersburg. However the façades of Tbilisi were built sheathing extensive internal loggias and balconies – totally unexpected from the exterior. Each courtyard is finished with unique wooden ornaments which are a synthesis of vernacular Georgian ornamental details.

This 19th century housing stock, the oldest in Georgia's big cities including Tbilisi, was built in the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. It was initially constructed either as residential units for families/ households predominantly for wealthy bourgeoisie, or rental and/ or guest housing (Доходные дома in Russian). This stock normally occupies central areas of the traditional cities and consists of 2-3-story buildings with an inner courtyard or 'atrium', enclosed with shared balconies or galleries.[69]

Within the context of the urban expansion that took place in Tbilisi In the 19th century, European architects were responsible for constructing numerous private residences in Tbilisi, including several notable high-rise examples of large-scale housing. The facades of the houses in Tbilisi that were constructed in the second half of 19th century have strong resemblance to the public buildings due to their aesthetic characteristics. Classicist, Baroque, and Renaissance forms, Islamic and Gothic stylization, modern style facades built using medieval Georgian architectural decor are all examples of architectural styles that coexist in the architecture of residential structures over the course of their construction.However, the most compelling architectural landscape was created by the residential buildings in Tbilisi were designed by European architects. A synthesis of several traditions occurs here, resulting in a very individual building that differentiates the work of European architects in Tbilisi and makes them unique.

In construction of public buildings in Tbilisi, Europeans architects draw on forms and prototypes developed over a long period of time, or use generally recognized and accepted building styles and adapt them to the local specifics. In the case of residential buildings, the Art Nouveau facades of Tbilisi, built from the middle of the 19th-Century as mentioned above closely resemble those in St. Petersburg. However due to the existence of a long-lasting and continuous tradition of building historic Tbilisi houses and, moreover, old Georgian housing in general, European creativity in Tbilisi is enriched with local architectural forms and acquires an amazing originality. It makes them an integral component of the spatial organization and urban fabric of the entire city.

The need for merging with the old city and its integration with it, lies in the distinctive spatial organization of Tbilisi; this characterized the residential districts of late medieval Tbilisi and became fully revealed in the 19th century.[70]

Residential buildings by European architects were built according to the Tbilisi tradition, and include internal courtyards. The courtyard is often encircled by extensive wooden balconies, furnished with straight or spiral staircases constructed from wood or carved into the wooden ceiling of the balcony, occasionally with the passages. Sometimes a wooden overhanging balcony appears on the classicist, baroque or Renaissance building facades facing the streets. These wooden balconies were significantly characteristic of Tbilisi of the late feudal era and the 19th century. In this context, the city's natural conditions played a crucial role, elevating the balcony as an essential and inseparable element of the urban fabric and shaped the overall appearance of 19th-century Tbilisi.

All foreign architects working in Tbilisi adopted the distinctive spatial organization characteristic of the city's residential architecture. Sometimes the houses they built even featured so-called open courtyards, aligning with

"(...)Behind the European facade facing the street, a Tbilisi courtyard is hidden, with a whole system of wooden balconies and stairs, with its entire inner life and almost self-contained micro-cosmos."

69. Singh, Salukvadze, and Budovitch, Georgia Urban Strategy - Housing.

70. Mania, European Architects in Tbilisi.

the traditional Tbilisi residential typology that largely determined the sharp individuality of the city's urban structure.

Beside the European architects, Tbilisi craftsmen made a great contribution to the creation of Tbilisi residential houses and especially the Tbilisi style architectural elements such as balconies that have survived to this day, passageways, spiral or straight staircases and various details of interior decoration. However, restriction of the activities of local craftsmen, imposed under the new political and economic order of the Russian Empire, had a detrimental influence on the development of authentic wooden structures, on top of that the spread of industrially produced materials, such cast iron, offered cheaper and more modern alternatives that aligned with imperial modernization ideas and aesthetic preferences, thus in the second half of 19th century, wooden balconies gradually started to disappear and were replaced by iron ones. Yet, despite this transformation on the facade the tradition of constructing wooden balconies oriented towards inner courtyards persisted., that demonstrated the resilience of local practices while adapting to the broader modernization processes.

The early specifics of these districts, the construction traditions of Tbilisi left an indelible mark on the European houses built in the new districts of the city. It is precisely the harmonious cooperation of European architects and Tbilisi craftsmen that has resulted in the numerous high-rise buildings that have survived in the historical districts of Tbilisi today.[71]

The architecture of Tbilisi courtyard homes foster a significant sense of communality, generating emotional connections and collective memory through its design. Its key elements: flat roofs, overhanging balconies, and courtyards, highlight the blending of private and communal life. It symbolizes an open society balancing individuality and collectivity. These communal spaces were present in medieval Georgian architecture. In 1828 flat-roofed or baniani houses served as semi-public entertainment and gathering space but were banned by Russian decree of 1828. obscured the distinctions between private and public spaces, fostering neighbourly interaction, communal household

"On a Sunday afternoon the balconies of Tiflis present an animated scene. The fair Georgians, partially concealed by their long white mantillas, assemble there in groups, to see and to be seen.(...)"[72]

71.

Ibid

72.

The British capitan Richard Wilbrahm, quoted in Chaniashvili, N. Nineteenth-Century Architecture of Tbilisi as a Reflection of Cultural and Social History of the City. FaRiG Report, 2007.

73.

Chaniashvili, Nineteenth-Century Architecture of Tbilisi.

Figure 2.1:
View of a courtyard entrance on Barnovi street in Vera district, by author. 2024

Figure 2.2:
Courtyard house on Asatiani street in Sololaki neighborhood. by author.2024

COMMUNALIZATION

Communalization

Reasseblage the common, Soviet ideology and standardization

Following the Soviet nationalization policies, Tbilisi Ezo houses, once reflecting a lifestyle rooted in extended family dynamics, neighborhood familiarity and a delicate balance between public and private life underwent a radical transformation, especially beginning in the 1920s which accelerated through the 1930s. These housing, primarily built for one or two affluent bourgeois families, were reconfigured into “kommunalkas”: collective living spaces that redefined the social, spatial and ideological framework of urban domestic life.

The inequitable distribution of living space exacerbated the general housing crisis. Families with children waited for apartment availability, while retired people without children benefited from the considerable living space. Theoretically, they might have preferred to relocate to the countryside, but they were compelled to remain in the city due to the uncertainty of securing a flat elsewhere on their low pensions and the chronic deficiency of practically all types of goods and services outside the capital. Consequently, the provision of free living space from the city council rendered the population relatively immobile. The same applies even to residents of the central districts of Tbilisi, who predominantly lived in these courtyard houses, with common balconies, common toilets, and quite often without bathrooms. These courtyard houses were typical of Tbilisi in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries.[74]

The process of “communalization” resulted in dramatic densification of the existing urban housing stock. The transformation was not merely architectural but deeply political. Private property was confiscated by the Soviet State and was redistributed in the name of class equality, which represented a significant shift from previous social strata and urban hierarchy In Tbilisi. Large single-family homes, often built by merchants, professionals, and aristocrats during the late Russian Imperial period,were among the first to be targeted. These dwellings today and Tbilisi-style courtyards or informally “Italian yards”, were considered excessive and bourgeois due to their spacious interiors and multiple rooms. Under the Soviet logic of collectivization, such excesses were to be corrected by subdividing existing living space to accommodate the housing needs of the proletariat.The wealthy merchants,predominantly Armenian, thanks to whom we have these buildings, were evicted from their residential quarters. Houses were nationalized and turned into communal spaces. Residential houses were divided by rooms and multiple families were forced to live in separate rooms of the same apartment, sharing a common kitchen and lavatory, located inside or sometimes outside the main structure. Over time, relatively affluent families left those buildings and relocated into newer, multi-family apartments, in contrast relatively low-income groups stayed in old buildings and were joined by recent in-migrants from rural areas.[75]

As a result, “Ezo” houses evolved into socially heterogeneous environments, where people with different ethnicity, social class and religion started living together as one family. Depending on the size of the house, the Soviet government created different apartments and gave them away to citizens of various ethnic, religious, professional and social statuses. Therefore these yards over time became a melting pot of multicultural Tbilisi, where Georgians, Armenians, Azeris, Russians, Jews, Greeks and many more lived more or less harmoniously. While ”communalization” at some degree addressed immediate housing crises, it significantly transformed the everyday rhythms and spatial practices of the inhabitants of these houses. In the past, the courtyard was a semi-private space for socialization, recreation, and leisure; however, it became increasingly congested and utilitarian . Over time, these transformations resulted in a multi-layered architectural palimpsest, the one of social reorganization, visible even today in their hybrid, patchworked state.

The very characteristics that once defined the Tbilisi courtyard as a site of familiar cohesion was redefined as an obstacle and liability under socialism and its ideology of collective living. Wooden balconies were enclosed to create additional rooms, kitchens were partitioned and shared among multiple families, and internal courtyards were overcrowded with communal facilities. The shared space of the communal apartment mirrored the collective ethos of the Soviet state: privacy was sacrificed for the sake of equality, and individuality was compromised for the collective benefit. This process marked the emergence of the kommunalka as both a pragmatic and ideological solution to urban housing shortages and as a mechanism of social control In neighborhoods like Sololaki, this transformation was especially pronounced. Once home to Tbilisi’s elite, the district’s eclectic architecture and ornate balconies were absorbed into the new socialist order. They became the remnants of bourgeois domesticity, the

74. Gachechiladze and Salukvadze, Social Problems of Tbilisi.

75. Singh, Salukvadze, and Budovitch, Georgia Urban Strategy - Housing.

raw material for collectivization marked by the fragmentation and constant negotiation among neighbors.

These conventions of Tbilisi courtyard houses narrate a history of adaptation, survival, and ideological imposition; it emerges as a manifestation of a wider social and ideological recalibration under Soviet governance. Currently, these buildings persist, even though in very fragile state, and acts as an encapsulated moment of time, as a tangible reminder of a multifaceted history that continues to resonate in the city's developing character.

"Italian Courtyard"

The term "Italian courtyard" is a widely used local expression to describe these city's characteristic courtyard houses. Even today these typologies are mainly refereed as Italian courtyards and are deeply embedded in everyday language and cultural memory, the name is not historically accurate nor it reflects any direct architectural influence from Italy. The origin of the term is largely romantic and metaphorical.

The Italian courtyard is a socio-cultural space characteristic of the city of Tbilisi, which arose in courtyards of specific architecture, although according to culturologist Tsira Elisashvili:

"(...) IN REALITY THERE IS NO ITALIAN COURTYARD, BUT RATHER A TBILISI COURTYARD, WHICH WAS ESTABLISHED IN TBILISI BY THE COEXISTENCE OF FAMILIES REPRESENTING DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS. ACCORDING TO HER, THE TERM "ITALIAN COURTYARD" APPEARED DURING THE COMMUNIST REGIME, WHEN SEVERAL FAMILIES STARTED LIVING IN ONE HOUSE AND THE COURTYARDS BECAME NOISY AND LIVELY. THIS NOISE WAS ASSOCIATED WITH ITALY. ITALIAN CINEMATOGRAPHY OF THE NEOREALISM PERIOD HAD A CERTAIN INFLUENCE ON THIS, AND TBILISI COURTYARDS WERE THUS CALLED ITALIAN COURTYARDS."[76]

76.

Artareatv, Tbilisis turi [Tour of Tbilsi]-Tsira Elisashvili,YouTube video,posted November 13, 2015

Figure 2.3: courtyard on 49 Mikheili Tsinamdzghvrishvili St. Photo by the author.2024

FRAGMENTATION

Fragmentation

Disassambalge of collective and yards of contemporary Tbilisi

Tbilisi-style courtyards occupy a deeply contradictory position in the city's social and cultural image. Most of these houses are officially recognized as cultural heritage, are located in the historic neighborhoods and represent the oldest layer of the city housing stock. Moreover it has deep nostalgic narratives cherished in the collective memory of Tbilisi people and are frequently romanticized as a symbol of communal way of life. However, their current state is clearly fragile and in significant deterioration. Due to prolonged political neglect, continuous lack of maintenance, inevitable effect of age and chaotic informal adaptations, most of their structural safety is questionable. Some are almost entirely demolished and hence abandoned, while others are substantially damaged but still inhabited, posing a threat to their occupants. However, all of them are in urgent need of restoration. Due to the restructuring policies of the late Soviet period, many residents of courtyard houses started to reorganize their living space on their own, with the aim to attain a higher comfort level. This often entails rearranging the previously shared facilities such as kitchens and bathrooms for private use by the household, sometimes even outside the apartment. Another common practice not only in courtyard houses but overall in post-Socialist Georgia was extensions and consolidation or enlargement of spaces. As mentioned above in the late Soviet period, tenants of this housing stock usually belonged to the lower socioeconomic strata. This was due to the fact that some residents who had progressively become relatively affluent and were able to improve their living conditions were subsequently relocated, and they were replaced by in-migrants from rural regions and ethnic minorities.[77]

Informal adaptations in courtyards

Informal adaptations in Tbilisi courtyards makes this architectural typology unique and further reflect shifting political regimes, economic pressures, and everyday practices of their residents. The stratified adaptations of these houses and the ongoing transformational processes render them animated, with that life deriving specifically from the absence of resolution or completion in the structure. These alterations obscured the distinction between private and social life, integrating the courtyard into the patterns of common urban life. These informal adaptations similar to "Kamikaze loggias" are almost always improvised works without the professional knowledge, fully dependent on the intuitions and the will of apartment owners, and most of them are produced similarly due to the limits in material availability. Here, everything is possible and anything imaginable, the strong will towards the expansion goes beyond imagination. The space can be changed and added in various most unpredictable ways.

The absence of a rigorous Western-style housing market fostered creativity in fundamental living arrangements. Staircases, balcony partitions, and walls were often constructed from various materials circulated inside the city—a part of the roof cover used as a partition, as well as abandoned doors.(figure 2.4) The most common adaptation is the closure of the windows with the masonry wall, polycarbonate sheets covering the balconies, walls painted in different color, different texture, electrical cables stretch all over the yard creating a net. While many of the additions can be reasonably explained by purely functional necessity despite their aesthetic value or structural integrity, some are so absurd that their purpose is almost incomprehensible.

Moreover, due to these informal additions there are lots of arguments between neighbors, which turns the case of "living like a family" into living with the enemy. According to indigo magazine in Asatiani 21 two residents live next door to each other on the second floor, in a common corridor and they haven't spoken to each other for years and are fighting in court over a 7-square-meter space. According to the same article, one resident says :

"You can't fit in our houses in width, but it's good that you can fit in height." Alama put the kitchen, living room, and bedroom in one room, and at the end of the hallway, She officially registered one of the shared toilets in her name [78]

" There was an entrance in our building, but now they don't use it, so they closed it. ...There were beautiful paintings of the 19th century on the walls. One fine day, the local executive committee just painted everything with white paint. My father, an architect, was furious. But nothing could be changed. So these paintings are buried under a layer of paint." [79]

77.

Gachechiladze, Revaz, and Joseph Salukvadze. Social Problems of Tbilisi and Its Metropolitan Region (TMR). Tbilisi: Department of Human Geography, Tbilisi State University, 2003.

78.

Indigo, "Sololaki: 10 წლის შემდეგ," [sololaki: After 10 years] Transmedias, accessed August 2025, https://indigo.com.ge/transmedias/a/sololaki-10-wlis-semdeg

79.

Levan, Interview by Bashir Kitachaev. Tbilisi's 'Italian' courtyards: yesterday and today. A photo story. JAM News, February 2, 2022. https://jam-news.net/tbilisis-italian-courtyards-yesterday-and-today-a-photo-story/.

According to “Indigo” magazine :

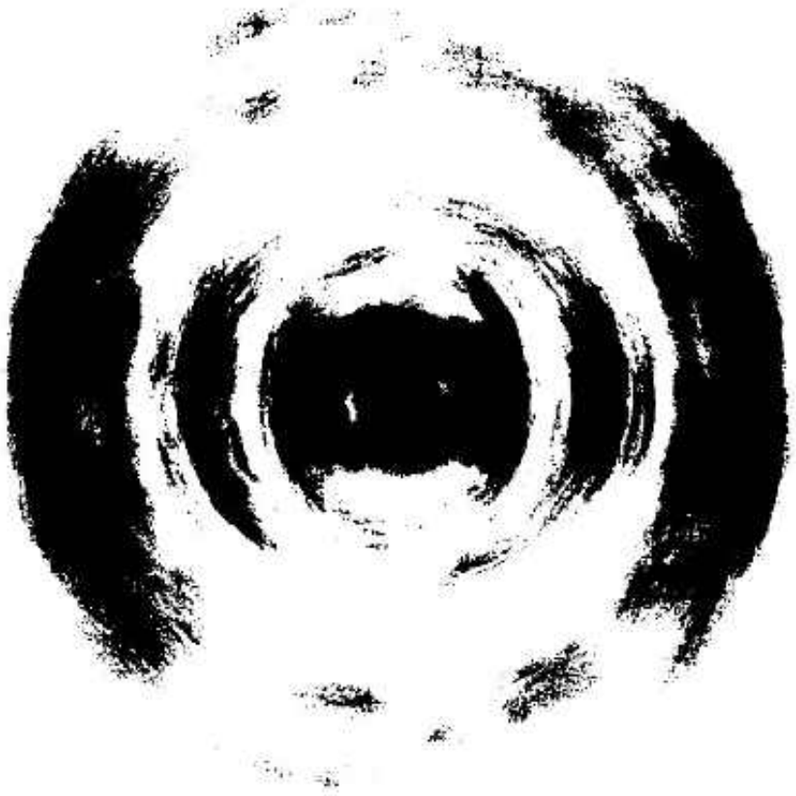
“(...) since the 1990s, ad hoc construction has damaged the supporting walls of buildings, and groundwater has also contributed to the damage and gradual collapse of houses. In the past four years, 61 dilapidated buildings in the Mtatsminda district have been completely reinforced. Despite this, 286 houses are still dilapidated. 80 of them are in Sololaki. ... Despite intensive commercialization, living conditions in Sololaki apartments are still not improving, and some of them are still in dilapidated houses.”

Figure 2.4:
Courtyard on Vasil Barnovi str. 2 in Vera district. Photo by the Author.2025

Figure 2.5:
Courtyard on Asatiani street
in Sololaki district,Photo by
author.2025

Figure 2.6:
Courtyard on 21 Tamar
Chovelidze St in Vera district.
by author 2025

Chapter 03



Courtyards In Focus

Archival,Photographic And Case-Based Research

Exploration and Traces

Preface and methodology

The research of Tbilisi-style courtyards in the Sololaki neighborhood emerged as a gradual and situated process of trial and error. “Ezo” houses are scattered across several neighborhoods in Tbilisi, however their presence is inconsistent, with some areas featuring dense clusters and diversity, while others host just isolated examples. They are located in the neighborhoods of : Kala (Old Tbilisi), Chughureti, Avlabari, Sololaki and a few examples in Vera. Initially, the scope of my research was absurdly broad, in order to begin my research in the street, first I had to establish a basis for documenting the buildings. Consequently, my investigation started not from the streets of Tbilisi but from archives, books and visual records where courtyard houses had already been given significance. Through the images and descriptions found in architectural history, heritage documents, and cultural publications, I became familiar with the images that tended to focus on courtyard houses that had already been singled out for their architectural significance, aesthetic qualities, historical associations, or social significance. In this regard, my initial comprehension of courtyard houses was influenced by existing literature or media sources that showcased the courtyards that had been considered worthy of documentation through several research perspectives.

Sololaki was selected for the investigation due to its density and diversity of “Ezo” houses (fig. 3.2), which were in contrast with those in other neighborhoods that were more dispersed. Sololaki is one of the first neighborhoods in Tbilisi to be developed with a coherent urban plan, and have a regular street grid fit to the hillside terrain, it was developed and planned with the aim to create a “modern” bourgeois district and in fact it became the prime location for merchants and wealthy families to build their European-style residential houses. Due to its layered character and extensive transformations through time- initially a place of bourgeois residential houses, later converted into Soviet communal housing, and subsequently post-socialist transitions- it has become a microcosm of Tbilisi’s broader urban palimpsest. Moreover, the relatively high number of courtyard houses in Sololaki enabled a more systemic survey and facilitated comparative analysis.

The study began with the analysis of residential buildings officially recognized as cultural heritage in Sololaki, with the help of the digital platform of cultural heritage database.[79] Following the documenting and mapping all the residential buildings under the cultural heritage status in the chosen neighborhood, the focus of my research transitioned from archival sources to direct engagement with the streets. It is important that there is no single, standardized classification or database of Tbilisi-style courtyard houses that exist in official heritage registers. Although certain characteristics are common in many buildings, such as internal yards, galleries, and shared circulation spaces that define Tbilisi style courtyards, there is no established typological framework nor strict categorization or a pre-existing scheme to follow. Based on the fragmented research done on Tbilisi style courtyards, including heritage documentation, in architectural history and individual research projects, I have started my fieldwork in the street of Sololaki

The survey was shaped by methodological intentions as well as practicalities such as access, availability and the rhythms of everyday life in Sololaki. Rather than starting with a predetermined set of buildings, I positioned myself into the street and engaged in direct field observation. I tried to apply the same approach of street-based fieldwork, walking and “reading the city with one’s feet”.[80] The reality of urban space , specifically “Ezo” houses, revealed itself to be more complex and contingent as I imagined. Here, the reality of this situation transcended the primarily found examples. Some of the buildings I encountered were absent from published accounts, severely altered and neglected, almost all of them in a very poor state. It was through this shift, from mediated to firsthand encounters, that I began to see the courtyard not just as a historical artifact, but as a lived and evolving space in a constant flux. As a result, rather than beginning with a predetermined set of buildings, I allowed the fieldwork to guide the scope and focus.

Consequently I have visited more than 80 buildings over the month and documented and photographed 40 courtyard houses in Sololaki. As mentioned this number was not fixed in advance but shaped by the firsthand experiences and most importantly practical realities of fieldwork. Most notably the availability of access and the availability of the information and sources. The surveyed buildings were documented through photographs, sketches, field notes and identified on

79.

https://memkvidreoba.gov.ge/ - Official online registry of Georgia’s cultural heritage monuments, managed by the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation.

80.

Hidenobu Jinnai, Tokyo: A Spatial Anthropology (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995)

My survey started from Leondize street. I only had a couple of addresses found in the books or on social media but on my way to them I decided to open a gate through which I could enter the yard. I tried to use the bottom-up approach and immerse myself in the urban fabric through extensive walking and unplanned direction. Armed with a Sketchbook I have been quickly and roughly marking the houses that seemed interesting to me. Sololaki revealed itself in fragments and surprises. I paused often, talking to residents or street vendors sitting in the entrance of the yard who were curious about my sketching and photo documentation, sometimes asking what was so interesting in those yards.The way people inhabited these houses the way they moved though the balconies, staircases and passageways were as informative as any archival source.

I have started movies on the Leonidze street going up on the hill towards Iashvili, some yards were directly exposed to the street some needs to be discovered by entering the house or the tunnel passageways to reach the yard.You can't set a prior direction in Sololaki; its terrain is complex and is noted for its dense network of lanes. By moving slowly and entering each yard I could trace the patterns of communal life, adaptations that formal plans and documents never fully capture. The common practices and objects. Besides the walk in the Sololaki district I allowed myself to enter the staircases through the yards that guided me towards the shared balconies and entrances. Most of the doors are open, even though the informal adaptations driven from the extensive will of privacy, here the sense of belonging is partially blurred and the inside and the outside does not show the explicit differentiation.

81.

Connerton, How Societies Remember

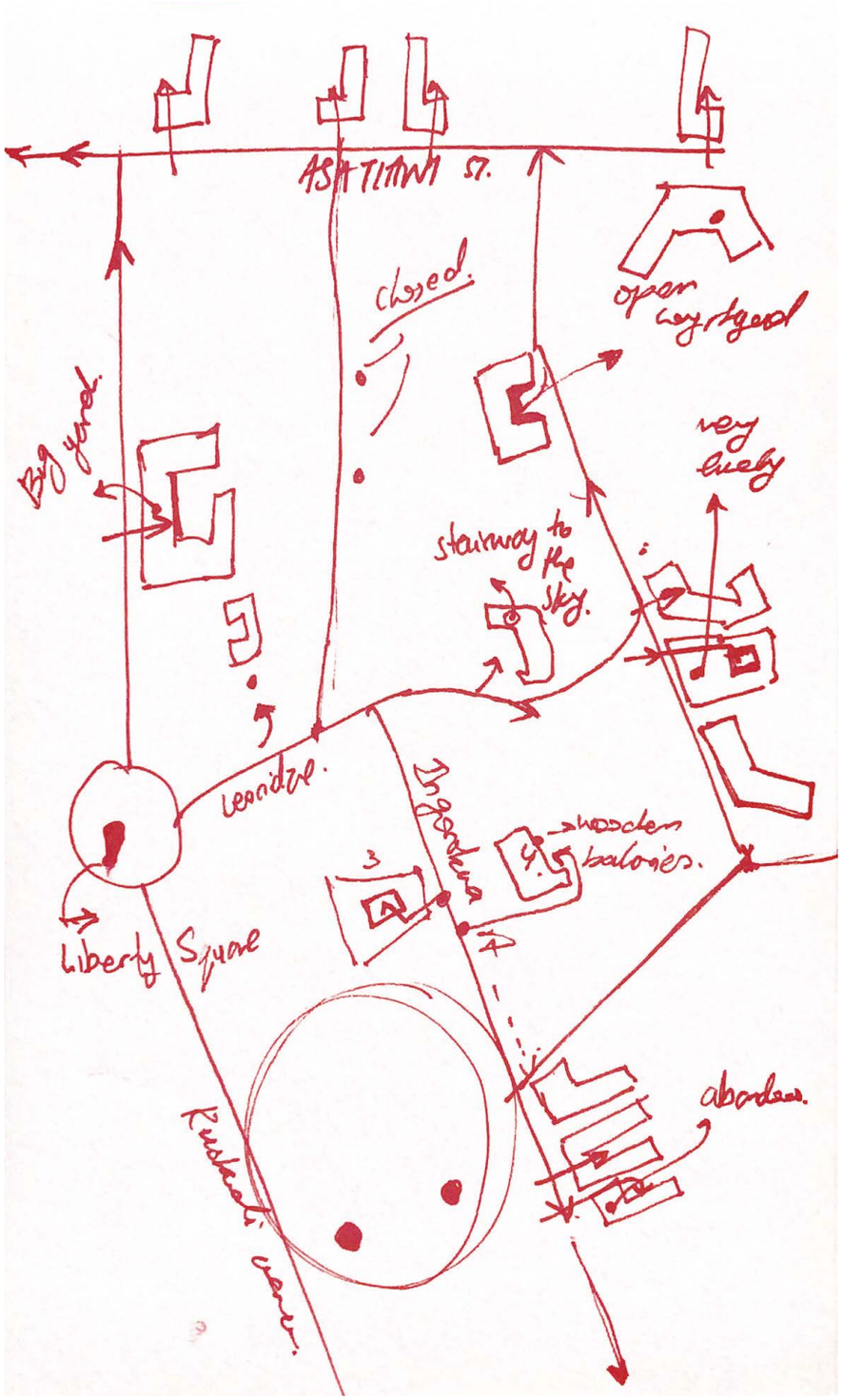


Figure 3.1:
Sketch of a mindmap done in Sololaki during the survey,sketch by the author,August 2024

Deciphering these spaces proved to be most effective by walking, observing. The spatial logic was apprehended through the body this has further inspired my research to focus on everyday practices and narrations.

Trhoughth the month of August 2024 I have visited more than 80 buildings in Sololaki and, could not enter all of them due to various reason, some are always closed and only residents can enter, some are abandoned due to their deriorated state thus are closed. Upon concluding the fieldwork, I catalogued all the houses from the official online registry. However, as I began to refine my research for further narrowed down analysis, I revisited my mind map created during the preliminary phase of my reserach, whichpartially influenced my selection decisions, drawing from my daily experiences documentedin my initial notes.

As stated, I have visited more than 80 buildings over the month and documented and photographed 40 courtyard houses in Sololaki. As mentioned this number was not fixed in advance but shaped by the firsthand experiences and most importantly practical realities of fieldwork. Most notably the availability of access and the availability of the information and sources. The surveyed buildings were documented through photographs, sketches, field notes and identified on the map, with attention paid to both physical characteristics and traces of historical transformation, as well as everyday practices of inhabitants that further animates these yards and makes them the dynamic collection of different habitual practices and collective rituals. [81] But each place evokes a distinctive atmosphere nurtured over a long history, this makes Tbilisi courtyards what they are today.

After the initial stage, I moved into a process of narrowing down the sample. The narrowed case-studies of 40 buildings were further examined in relation to historic and political transformations, particularly their conversion into kommunalkas during the Soviet period. Out of the selected buildings a smaller set was chosen for closer analysis, focusing on those which stood out and appeared the most interesting for their architectural features, informal adaptations and everyday social activities or the particular stories and legends about the buildings, which is quite common in Tbilisi. However, research was redirected again, the reduction could not be guided solely by the aforementioned framework, but rather by the limitations of available sources and sometimes scarcity of information. In other words, obtaining complete data on any single building became a significant challenge.

Having obtained archival documents and plans for certain buildings, present-day plans for others, and historical data or oral narratives for the some, surveyed buildings were categorized and grouped based on the available sources. Subsequently, continuous investigation of the sources and materials eventually resulted in the one complete story of a single building, which allowed me to construct a comprehensive analysis that integrated all diverse sources employed earlier. In this chapter, buildings will be classified and presented according to the following categories: through archival documentation and plans, through present day plans, and through the living narratives.

Consequently, the focus was applied to six courtyard houses that differed in typology, scale, degree of damage, variety of stories, number of informational additions and most importantly—the availability of various sources differnt sources tell differnet story and gives us differnet informations thus it does not allow complete understanding of neither current state not the transfromations of the each bulding, however it contributes to the understading of the broader narrative of transformations. Thereafter A single house was chosen for final analysis, where both archival and current plans were accessible, allowing for a comparative examination of alterations inside the courtyard.

The study of Tbilisi's courtyards and research methodology evolved over time turned out to be as "fragmented" as the essence of contemporary courtyards themselves. The "fragmented" character and the patchwork of the sources, together with their gaps and overlaps, reflects the courtyard's own fragmented evolution today. Shaped by repeated informal additions, partial or no preservation, and paradoxical nostalgic narratives, Courtyard houses resist to be a singular complete image or typology, much like the research too resisted totality. Instead it is offering a mosaic that encapsulates their complexity. Enriched by a kaleidoscopic analysis and the testimony of many stratifications.

Figure 3.2:
Map of Sololaki district, with heritage buildings and selected case studies. By the author

01 Leonidze St 8
Period : Late 19th cent.

02 Leonidze St 20
Period : Late 19th cent.

03 Kikodze St 9
Period : 19th cent.

04 Iashvili St 1
Period : Late 19th cent.

05 Iashvili St 5
Period : Late 19th cent.

06 Iashvili St 8
Period : Late 19th cent.

07 Iashvili St 9
Period : Late 19th cent.

08 Iashvili St 11
Period : Late 19th cent.

09 Iashvili St 12
Period : 19th cent.

10 Iashvili St 13
Period : Late 19th cent.

11 Iashvili St 15
Period : Late 19th cent.

12 Iashvili St 20
Period : Late 19th cent.

13 Iashvili St 25
Period : Late 19th cent.

14 Asatiani St 41
Period : Late 19th cent.

15 Asatiani St 39
Period : Late 19th cent.

16 Asatiani St 58
Period : Late 19th cent.

17 Asatiani St 42a
Period : Late 19th cent.

18 Asatiani St 38
Period : Late 19th cent.

19 Asatiani St 30
Period : 19th cent.

20 Tabidze St 3/5
Period : 20th cent.

21 Dadiani St 13
Period : Late 19th cent.

22 Sulkhan-Saba St 5
Period : 20th cent.

23 Ingorokva St 3
Period : Late 19th cent.

24 Ingorokva St 4
Period : Late 19th cent.

25 Ingorokva St 6
Period : Late 19th cent.

26 Ingorokva St 12
Period : 19th cent.

27 Ingorokva St 14
Period : Late 19th cent.

28 Ingorokva St 16
Period : Late 19th cent.

29 Ingorokva St 18
Period : Late 19th cent.

30 Ingorokva St 20
Period : 20th cent.

31 Ingorokva St 22
Period : 19th cent.

32 Zubalashvili St 2
Period : 20th cent.

33 Chaikovski St 2
Period : Late 19th cent.

34 Chaikovski St 16
Period : Late 19th cent.

35 Chonkadze St 5
Period : 19th cent.

36 Amaghleba St 8
Period : 19th cent.

37 Amaghleba St 9
Period : Late 19th cent.

38 Amaghleba St 12
Period : Late 19th cent.

39 Amaghleba St 21
Period : Late 19th cent.

40 Vachnadze St 5
Period : Late 19th cent.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01

Address: Leonidze st 8
Period: Late XIX Century

02

Address: Leonidze st 20
Period: Late XIX Century

03

Address: Kikodze st 9
Period: XIX Century

04

Address: Iashvili st 1
Period: Late XIX Century

05

Address: Iashvili st 5
Period: XIX Century

06

Address: Iashvili st 8
Period: XIX Century

07

Address: Iashvili st 9
Period: 1899

08

Address: Iashvili st 11
Period: Late XIX Century

09

Address: Iashvili st 12
Period: XIX Century

10

Address: Iashvili st 13
Period: Late XIX Century

11

Address: Iashvili st 15
Period: Late XIX Century

12

Address: Iashvili st 20
Period: Late XIX Century

13

Address: Iashvili st 25
Period: Late XIX Century

14

Address: Asatiani st 41
Period: Late XIX Century

15

Address: Asatiani st 39
Period: Late XIX Century

16

Address:Asatiani st 58
Period: Late XIX Century

17

Address: Asatiani st 42a
Period: Late XIX Century

18

Address: Asatiani st 38
Period: Late XIX Century

19

Address: Asatiani st 30
Period: XIX Century

20

Address:Tabidze st 3/5
Period: XX Century

21

Address: Dadiani st 13
Period: Late XIX Century

22

Address: Sulkhan-Saba st 5
Period: XX Century

23

Address: Ingorkva st 3
Period: Late XIX Century

24

Address: Igorokva st 4
Period: Late XIX Century

25

Address: Ingorokva st 6
Period: Late XIX Century

26

Address: Ingorokva st 12
Period: XIX Century

27

Address: Ingorokva st 14
Period: Late XIX Century

28

Address: Ingorkva st 16
Period: Late XIX Century

29

Address: Ingorokva st 18
Period: Late XIX Century

30

Address: Ingorokva st 20
Period: XX Century

31

Address: Ingorokva st 22
Period: XIX Century

32

Address: Zubalashvili st 2
Period: XX Century

33

Address: Chaikovski st 2
Period: Late XIX Century

34

Address: Chaikovski st 16
Period: Late XIX Century

35

Address: Chonkadze st 5
Period: XIX Century

36

Address: Amaghleba st 8
Period: XIX Century

37

Address: Amaghleba st 9
Period: Late XIX Century

38

Address: Amaghleba st 12
Period: Late XIX Century

39

Address: Amaghleba st 21
Period: XIX Century

40

Address: Vachnadze st 5
Period: XIX Century

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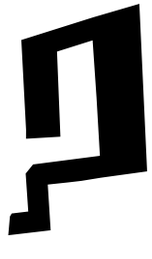

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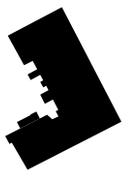

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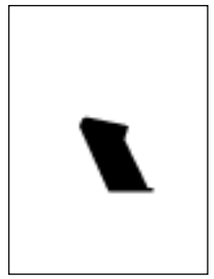
House 02

Address: Leonidze st 20,

Sololaki,Tbilisi.

41.69233096716019,
44.797214315423766



Archival Plans and the projection of Space

02

Case study 1

Address: Leonidze st 20,Sololaki,Tbilisi.

41.69233096716019,
44.797214315423766

The residential house in Leonidze st 20 is a sample of a secular building from the 19th century. From the urban planning view it plays a significant role in the formation of the historical and architectural character of the Sololaki district and has a high architectural and artistic value. The building is 2-storey, however, due to the difference in ground levels between the streets the facade facing Leonidze street is 3-story. Morphologically, it has a linear shape with rounded corners at the intersection of the streets and the planning structure is an enfilade configuration. It has an open courtyard from the Leonidze street side. Brick served as the building's structural materials. The timber-pitched attic roof is covered with metal sheets. Access to the roof is possible via stairs. The facade of the building exhibits architectural characteristics of classicism. The facade is plastered and painted, and all levels include ornamental rustications. A notable feature is the corner-beveled balcony, characterised by a metal openwork railing and ornate column capitals.

The house has three entrances, only two of which were accessible. The inner courtyard facade is designed with wooden gallery-style balconies and open loggias, with some being integrated or glazed. From the entrances it is possible to reach the wooden gallery-like balconies on the courtyard side at the second floor level. The courtyard of the house is paved, and it is possible to enter it from the street side through a metal gate set in a plastered brick wall. Thus the courtyard is fully exposed and open facing Leonidze street. [82]

The current condition of the Building is quite poor, from the street you can see the half demolished part of the metal spiral stairs that leads to the sky. The facade facing the yard is severely altered showing the informal modifications done by the residents and is partially demolished at the end of the courtyard.

82.

Tsuladze, Irine. Registration Card of an Immovable Object/Monument of Cultural Heritage N4456. Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia, 2015. Accessed August 27, 2025. https://memkvidreoba.gov.ge/

Figure 3.3
Picture of Courtyard house in Sololaki neighborhood, Leonidze street 20, Photo by the author,2024

This section of the buildings is currently in a half-demolished state, howver it remains still partially inhabited [Figure3.6]

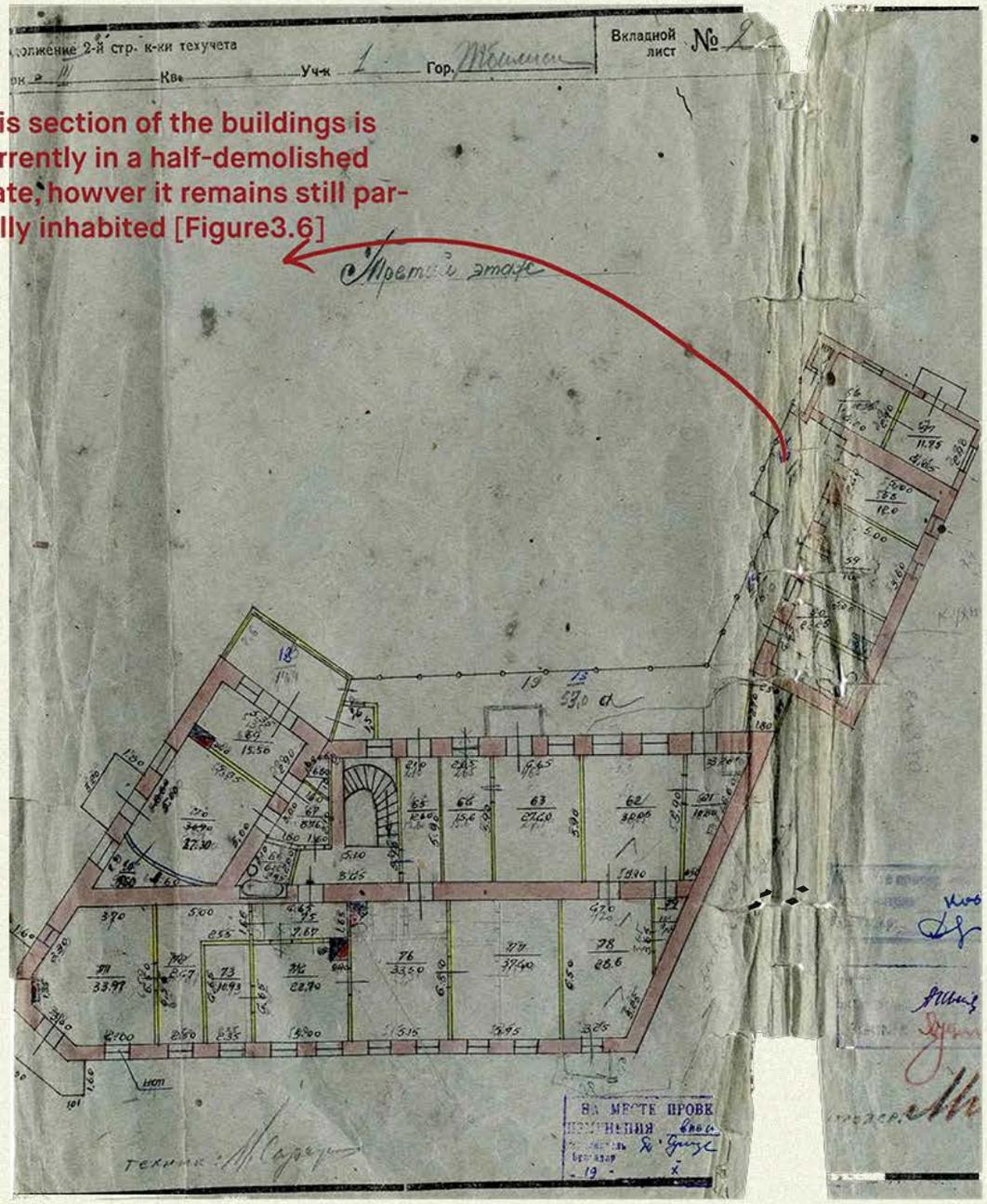
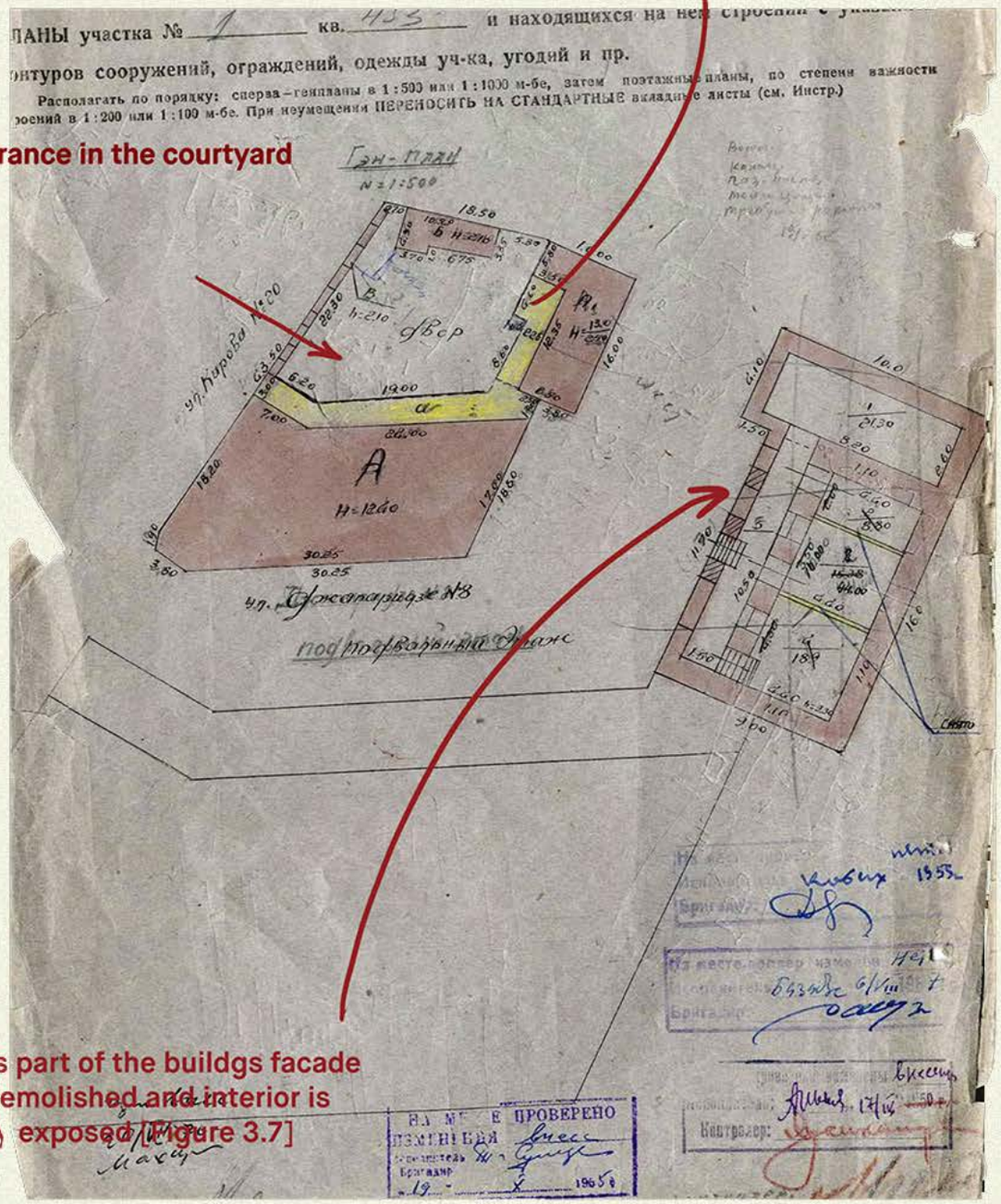


Figure 3.4
FIrst floor plan of the building on Leonidze str. 20,Tbilisi. National Archive of Georgia

Figure 3.7 is the view of the abandoned and partially ruined section of the buildings, standing next to the main residetinal block

Entrance in the courtyard



This part of the buildgs facade is demolished and interior is fully exposed [Figure 3.7]

Figure 3.5
Schematic plan of the building on Leonidze str. 20,Tbilisi. National Archive of Georgia

Figure 3.8
Courtyard house on leonidze street in Sololaki district. Photo by author.2025

Figure 3.6
Courtyard house on leonidze street in Sololaki district. Photo by author.2025

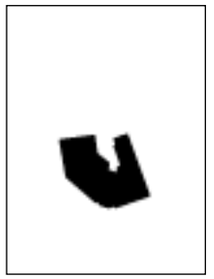
Figure 3.7
Courtyard house on leonidze street in Sololaki district. Photo by author.2025

Building 37

Address: Leonidze st 20,

Sololaki,Tbilisi.

41.69233096716019,
44.797214315423766



Case study 2

Address: Amaghleba st. 9 / Gergeti st. 12,Sololaki,Tbilisi.

41.69015440060731,
44.795438100087

The residential buildings on Amaghleba St 12 in Sololaki, represents a 19th century secular edifice and plays a pivotal role in establishing the historical and architectural characteristic of Sololaki. Located at the intersections of two streets, Amaghleba St. and Gergeti St, its substantial size renders it a prominent feature in the urban landscape with the significant architectural value. The building is 4-storey and has an enfilade layout according to the planning structure. Due to the difference in levels between the streets, the house from the Gergeti Street side is 3-storey. Morphologically, it has an asymmetrical Russian P-shaped shape with facades facing the street, with a two-level inner courtyard. Like in other buildings here as well, brick was used as the construction material and the roof is covered with tin sheets and can be accessed through the stairs. The building's façade exhibits stylistic characteristics of romanticism and modernism. The building itself is finished with a metal railing parapet, which has inserts with plastered brick balustrades and glazed tiles. The house has plain metal balconies. The walls are coated with plaster and paint, yet in several areas the plaster has deteriorated, revealing the underlying brickwork.

The building has two additional entries from the courtyard, equipped with wooden steps and railings. The façade of the residential building's inner courtyard has wooden gallery-style glass panels and open balconies. The balconies are supported by plastered brick columns. The inner courtyard is accessible by an arched passage integrated into the building's exterior. The courtyard has a metal staircase leading to the second, lower level paved with stone slabs. It is from here that the entrances to the basement are arranged. The basement itself is built of unplastered brick walls and its ceiling height is approximately 3 m.[83]

82.

Tsuladze, Irine. Registration Card of an Immovable Object/Monument of Cultural Heritage N4883. Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia, 2015. Accessed August 27, 2025. https://memkvidreoba.gov.ge/

Figure 3.9
Picture of a Courtyard house in Sololaki neighborhood, Amaghleba St 9, Photo by the author,2024

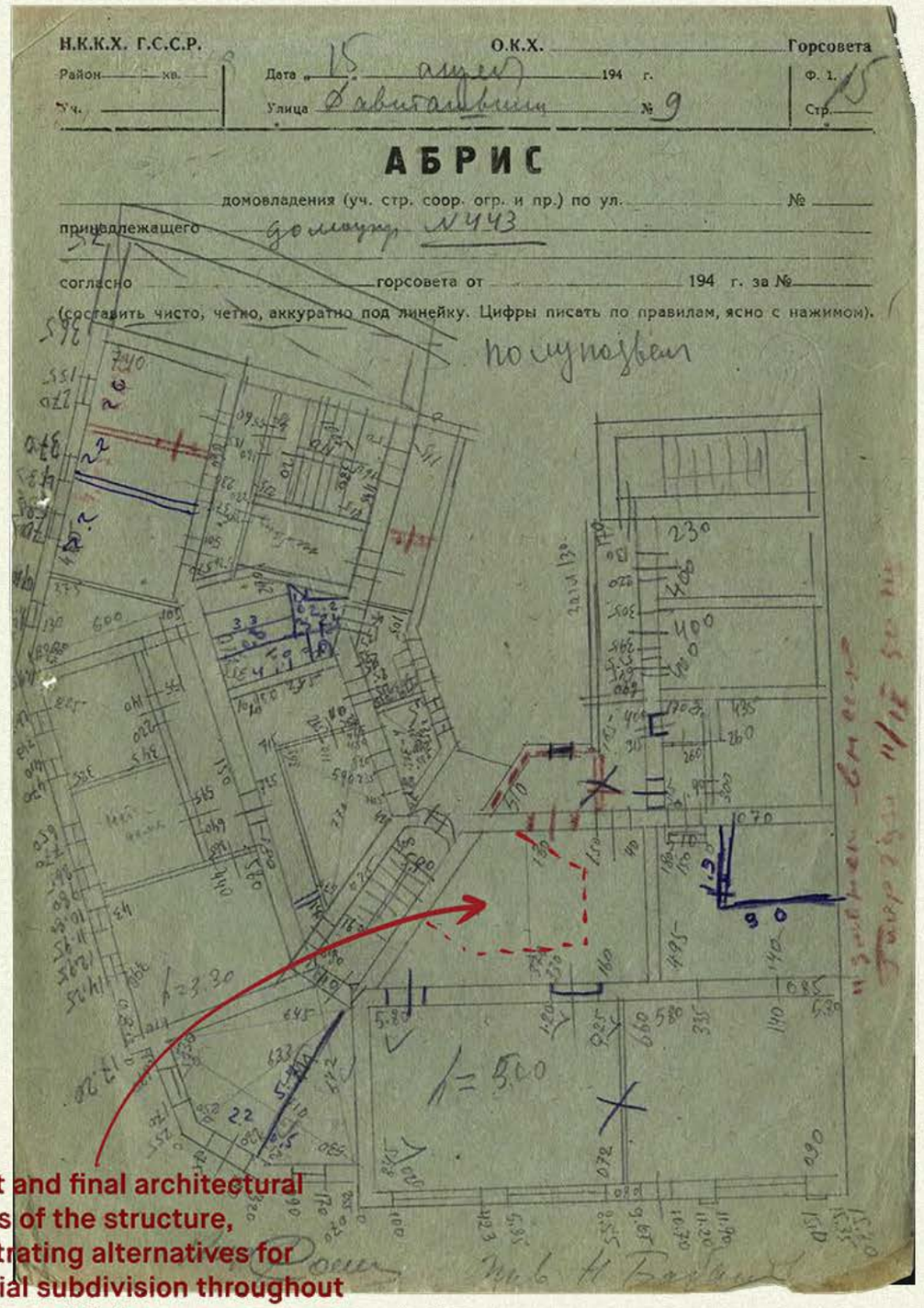


Figure 3.10
Schematic plan of the building on Amaghleba str. 9,Tbilisi. National Archive of Georgia

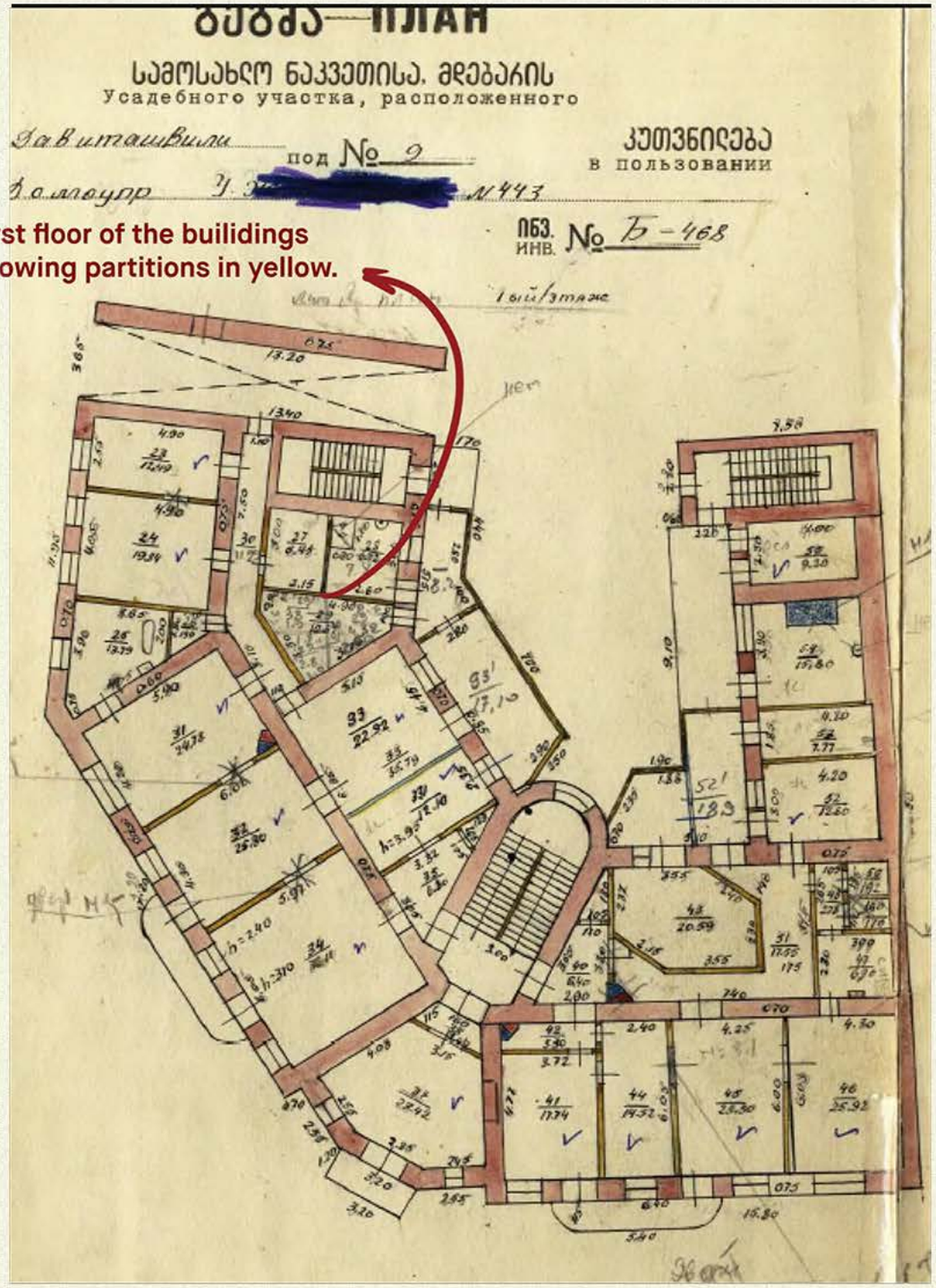


Figure 3.11
Floor plan of the building on Amaghleba str. 9,Tbilisi. National Archive of Georgia

Figure 3.12
Courtyard house on Amaghleba street in Sololaki district. Photo by Mariam Kupreishvili.2025

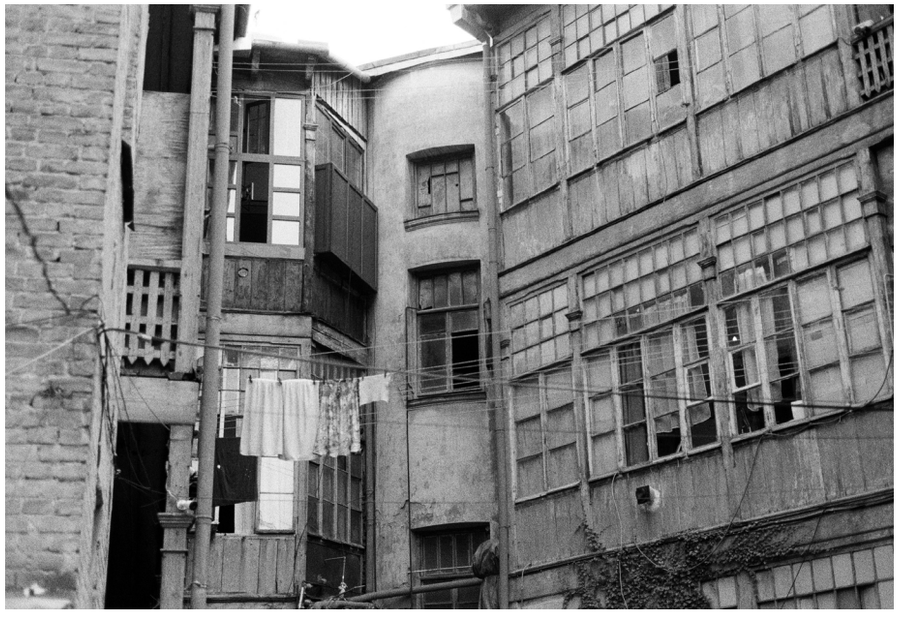


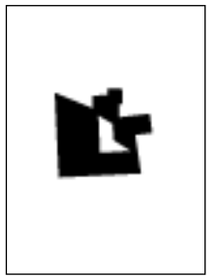
Figure 3.13
Courtyard house on Amaghleba street in Sololaki district. Photo by author.2025

Building 12

Address: Leonidze st 20,

Sololaki,Tbilisi.

41.69233096716019,
44.797214315423766



Case study 3

Address: Iashvili St.20,Sololaki,Tbilisi.

41.690061192079156,
44.79751270038554

The residential buildings on Iashvili 20 in Sololaki, represents a 19th century secular edifice and plays a pivotal role in establishing the historical and architectural characteristic of Sololaki. The building has 4 stories, and has an angular morphology with the street facing the street and courtyard inside, thus the yard is completely hidden. Similarly to the other buildings the main material for the structure is still brick and the roof is covered with tin sheets and can be accessed through the stairs. The facade of the building bears the stylistic characteristics of Baroque architecture and inside traditionally Tbilisi style wooden balconies. The facade is symmetrically composed, and is divided by interfloor cornices, rusticated pilasters and balconies with metal grilles. On top of the crowning cornice of the third floor, the fourth floor is built around the entire perimeter of the building. It is harmoniously integrated into the building's overall proportions, replicates the arrangement of the openings and balconies of the main facade, and is characterized by its simple decoration. The wooden doors of the entrances are noteworthy, with metal carved grilles and baroque decor. The facades of the inner courtyard of the residential building are presented with wooden gallery-like glass panels and open balconies. The balconies rest on plastered brick columns. The inner courtyard can be accessed through an arched passage built into the wall of the building and covered with asphalt. The semi-basement of the home has unglazed brick walls, with a height of roughly 3 to 3.5 meters, accessible from the yard.[83]

The courtyard is specially distinctive for its dynamic social life inside and evident habitual practices-hanging laundry, children playing, neighbors chatting across balconies - that further animates the yard.

83.

Tsuladze, Irine. Registration Card of an Immovable Object/Monument of Cultural Heritage N4163. Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia, 2015. Accessed August 27, 2025. https://memkvidreoba.gov.ge/

Figure 3.14
Picture of a Courtyard house in Sololaki neighborhood, Iashvili st 20, Photo by the author,August 2024

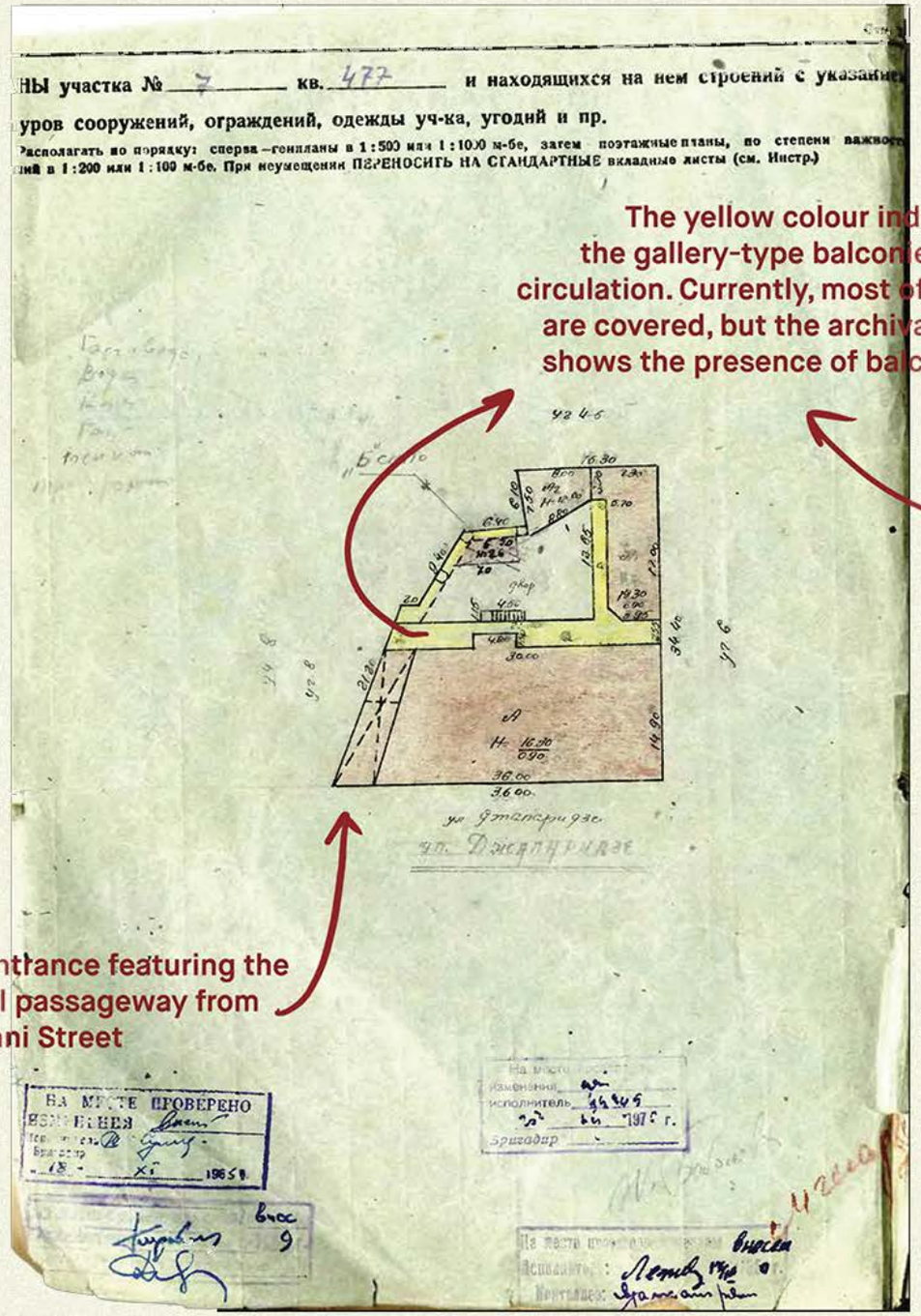


Figure 3.15
Schematic plan of the building on Iashvili str. 20,Tbilisi. National Archive of Georgia

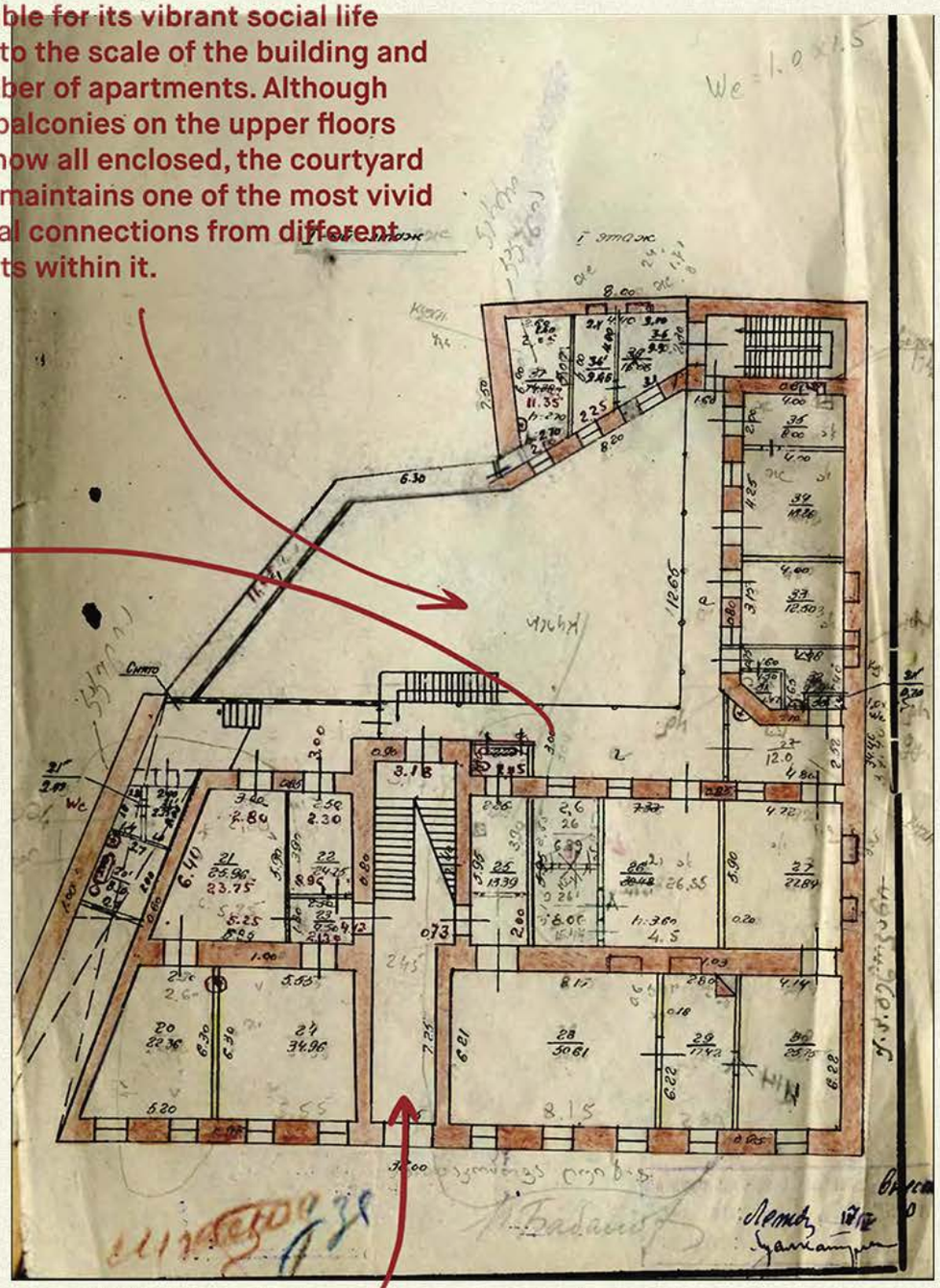


Figure 3.16
Floor plan of the building on Iashvili str.20,Tbilisi. National Archive of Georgia

Figure 3.17
Picture of a coutyard on Iashvili 20,photo by the author,2024

Figure 3.18
Picture of a coutyard on Iashvili 20,photo by the author,2024

Figure 3.19
Picture of a coutyard on Iashvili 20,photo by the author,2024

Figure 3.20
Picture of a coutyard on Iashvili 20,photo by the author,2024

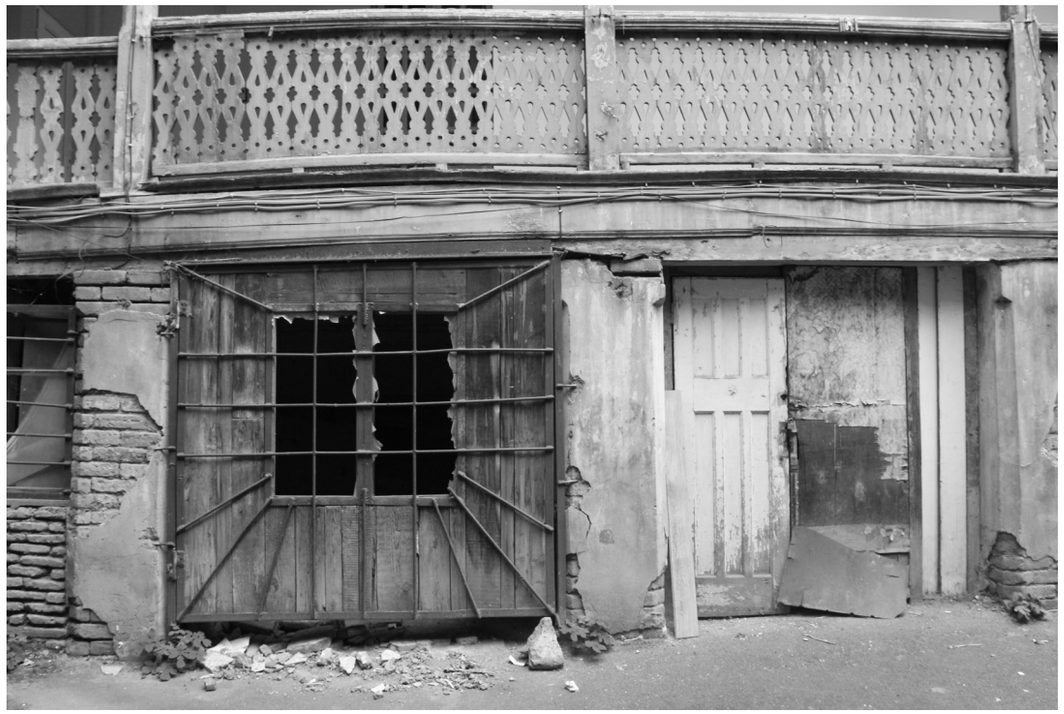


Figure 3.21
Picture of a coutyard on Iashvili 20,photo by the author,2024

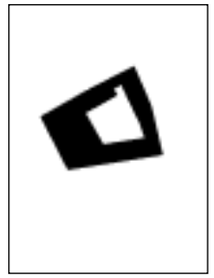
Building 23

Address: Ingorokva ,

Sololaki,Tbilisi.

41.69233096716019,
44.797214315423766



Existing Plans and Records of Change

Case study 4

Address: Ingorokva st.3,Sololaki,Tbilisi.

41.692966016680195,
44.798243501753966

The residential buildings on Ingorkova in Sololaki, were built in the beginning of 20th century. Its facade is asymmetrical, on the left edge, there is an arched aperture serving as the gate entry to the courtyard, with the iron double-barreled grille door. Adjacent to the gate is a wooden entry with high lintel decorated with the same flowers. Upon entering the tunnel from the gate to the left of the facade, we arrive at the courtyard, encircled by balconies. The balcony railings have wooden intercrossed posts (figure 3.17) This side of the balconies is heavily modified and has several informal additions. The building is characterized to be modernist in style and is an important example of Tbilisi's architectural heritage.[85]

It is important that the informal addition of the building is present even in the small tunnel and becomes visible immediately upon entering the gate and passing through toward the yard (figure 3.19), meaning that such interventions are not only limited to interior or internal facade but also intrude into circulation spaces that serve as shared thresholds between public and private space.

According to the existing plan (figure 3.18) the building currently is divided into 12 separate apartments. The fragmentation of the Soviet period resulted in a stratification of several temporalities, whereby the original architecture coexists with imposed divisions and subsequent informal alterations. It is apparent from the plan that the original columns, which were located on the internal facade, are now situated inside the interior due to the extensions made by the inhabitants.

85.

Gagoshidze, Sopio. Registration Card of an Immovable Object/Monument of Cultural Heritage N4010. Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia, 2015. Accessed August 27, 2025. https://memkvidreoba.gov.ge/

Figure 3.22
Picture of Courtyard house in Sololaki neighborhood, Ingorokva st.3, Photo by Mariam Kupreishvili,2025

Figure 3.23
Author's adaptation of the ground floor plan from the Tbilisi Development Fund.2025

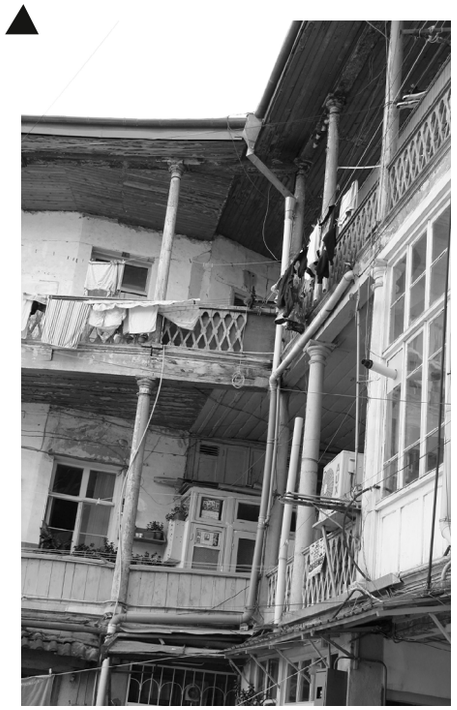


Figure 3.25
Picture of the courtyard on Ingorokva st. 3 in Sololaki district. Photo by the author.2025

Figure 3.26
Picture of the passageway from the courtyard with informal addition on top. Photo by the author.2025

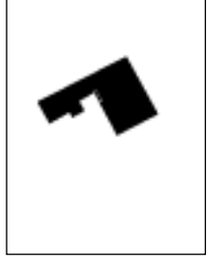
Figure 3.24
Picture of the entrance of the building on Ingorokva st. 3. Informal addition in the passageway. Photo by the author 2025.

Building 28

Address: Ingorokva st 16,

Sololaki,Tbilisi.

41.69478833001901,
44.796351964619696



Case study 5

Address: Ingorokva st.4, Sololaki,Tbilisi.

41.69275939738876,
44.79796379184473

The house, located on Ingorokva street 4, is a three-story brick-plastered building, with symmetrical facade composition. According to the official heritage description. On the second floor there is a row of low-arched windows, which are separated by decorative lintels. As for the windows on the third floor, their arches form a semicircle, and the lateral horizontal folds join the neighboring window. The three central windows on both floors are separated from the common plane, which is further emphasized by the large, covered balcony with openwork lattices resting on ornamental brackets on the third floor.[86] It represents a half closed yard with the entrance through the gate of an open passageway leading to the courtyard.

Behind the building is a courtyard with wooden balconies, the railings consist of crossed wooden posts and openwork arches on one side, and of rickety arches on the other. The building plays an important role in the surrounding development. According to the registration card, the building is in a severely damaged condition, marked by large cracks. [87]

The building carries the weight of long neglect and is critically deteriorated and its partially holding together. According to the exisiting plan of the building and the division their division by the owners this builsing is the most segmented among others. Here we can see the uneven distribution of space and on the ground floor of the builsings most of the spaces have commertial use or are non-residential.

Figure 3.27
Picture of Courtyard house on Ingorokva st.4 in Sololaki, photo by Mariam Kupreishvili.2025

86.

SCANTbilisi. “Pavle Ingorokva Streeet.” Accessed August 27, 2025. https://scantbilisi.ge/ka/objects/266/pavle-ingoroyvas-quCa.

87.

Gagoshidze, Sopio. Registration Card of an Immovable Object/Monument of Cultural Heritage N4234. Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia, 2015. Accessed August 27, 2025. https://memkvidreoba.gov.ge/

Figure 3.28
Author's adaptation of the base plan from the Tbilisi Development Fund.

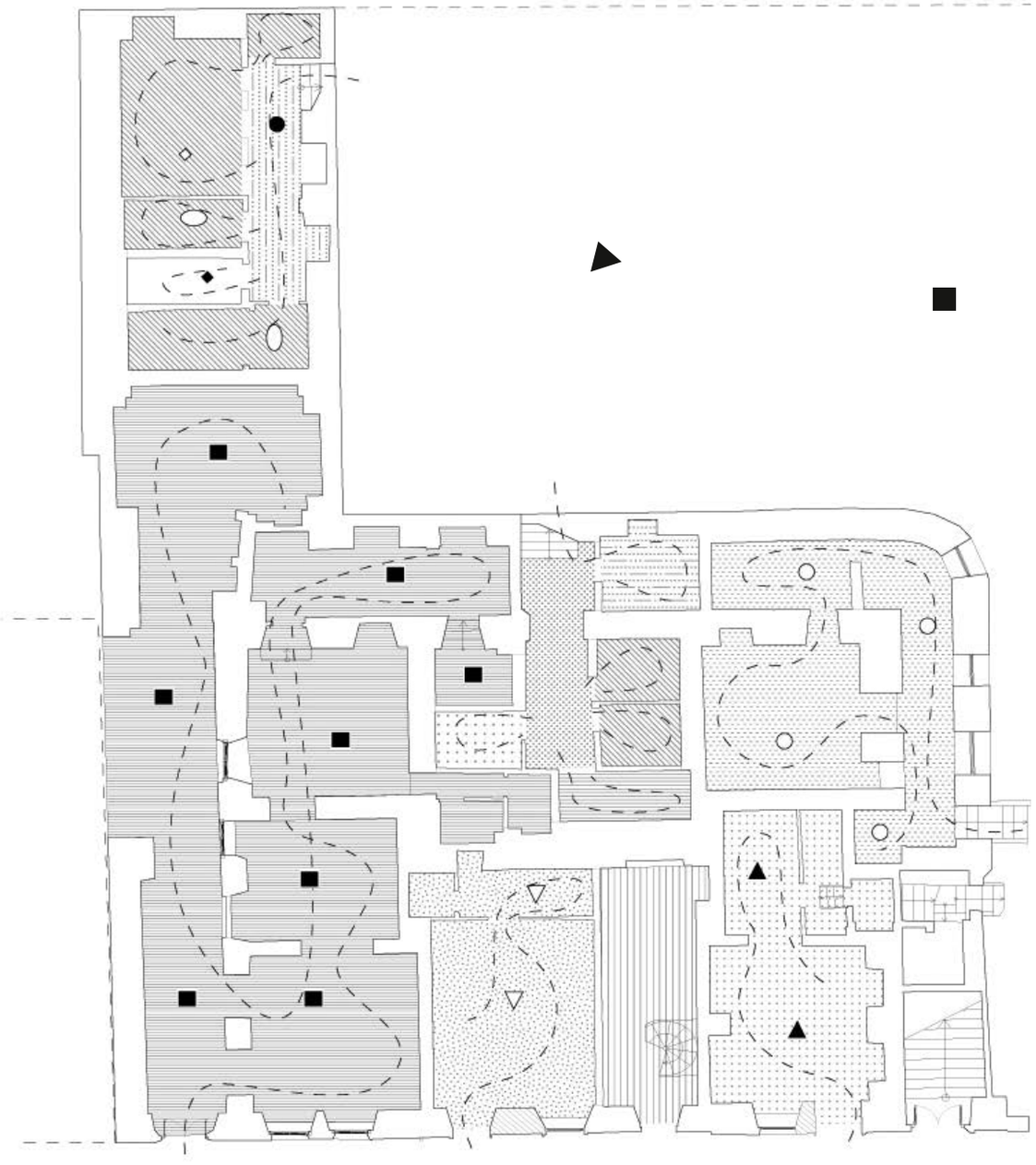


Figure 3.29
Picture of Courtyard house on Ingorokva st.4 in Sololaki, photo by Mariam Kupreishvili.2025

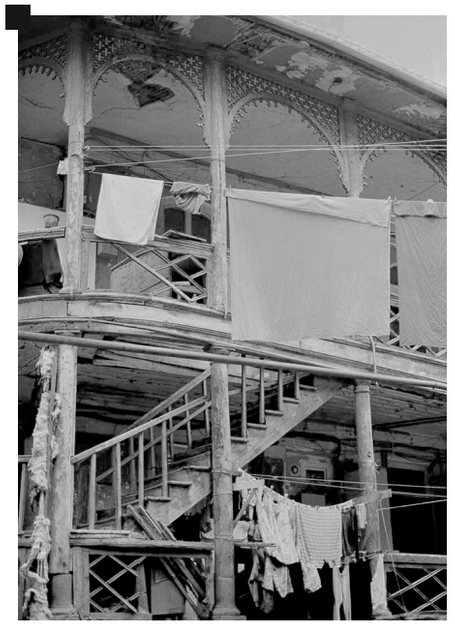


Figure 3.30
Picture of Courtyard house on Ingorokva st.4 in Sololaki, photo by Mariam Kupreishvili.2025

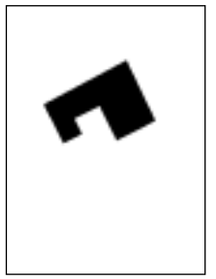
Figure 3.31
PIcture of the Courtyard staricase wall with the script "apartmets" directing towards the first floor. Photo by author.2025

Building 30

Address: Ingorokva st 20,

Sololaki,Tbilisi.

41.69529101038816,
44.79619595344115



A Single Building in Context

Case study 6

Address: Ingorokva st.20,Sololaki,Tbilisi.

41.69529101038816,
44.79619595344115

Figure 3.32
Picture of Courtyard house in Sololaki neighborhood, Ingorokva st.20, Photo by Mariam Kupreishvili,2025

The house on Igorokva street 20 belonged to Zakaria Eristavi, a Georgian nobleman, businessman and aristocrat, in the second half of the 19th century, which he built in the 1880s. In 1912, a plot of land with the house was purchased by Ambartsum Melikov, a rich businessman of the First Guild from Baku, owning an oil business.[88] In 1914, the old building was reconstructed according to the project of Tbilisi architect Mikhail Neprintsev, as a result of which the facade was arranged in the modernist style. In 1921, after Ambartsum Melikov emigrated, the house was nationalized. According to the residents, the businessman built the house for his beloved woman. The prominent Georgian microbiologist, Giorgi Eliava, lived in this house and was arrested and later sentenced to death in 1937, And the victim of the repressions of 1937, the Georgian Bolshevik Shalva Eliava.

According to the official descriptions the house if built in n The composition of the main facade of the two-story modern massive house is symmetrical. The first floor is a row of six rectangular plain windows, in the middle of which a decorated door opening is inserted. The building's large and parade entrance is noteworthy. The vestibule is decorated with elements of the classical order and rustication, the ceiling is decorated with coffered ceilings and colored ornaments. The staircase and its balustrade are made of marble. The described modernist-style building fits well into the surrounding development and is an important example of Tbilisi architecture[90]

Even though this building does not display the iconic wooden balconies or stairs on the facade it is a very interesting case to understand informal adaptations in the courtyard and on the facade facing the yard. Comparing the archival plans and the existing plans of the buildings the modifications are the most evident in the courtyard side, despite the changes in the interior spaces are extended, individual entrances were designed and due to this modifications it is difficult to see the old facade.

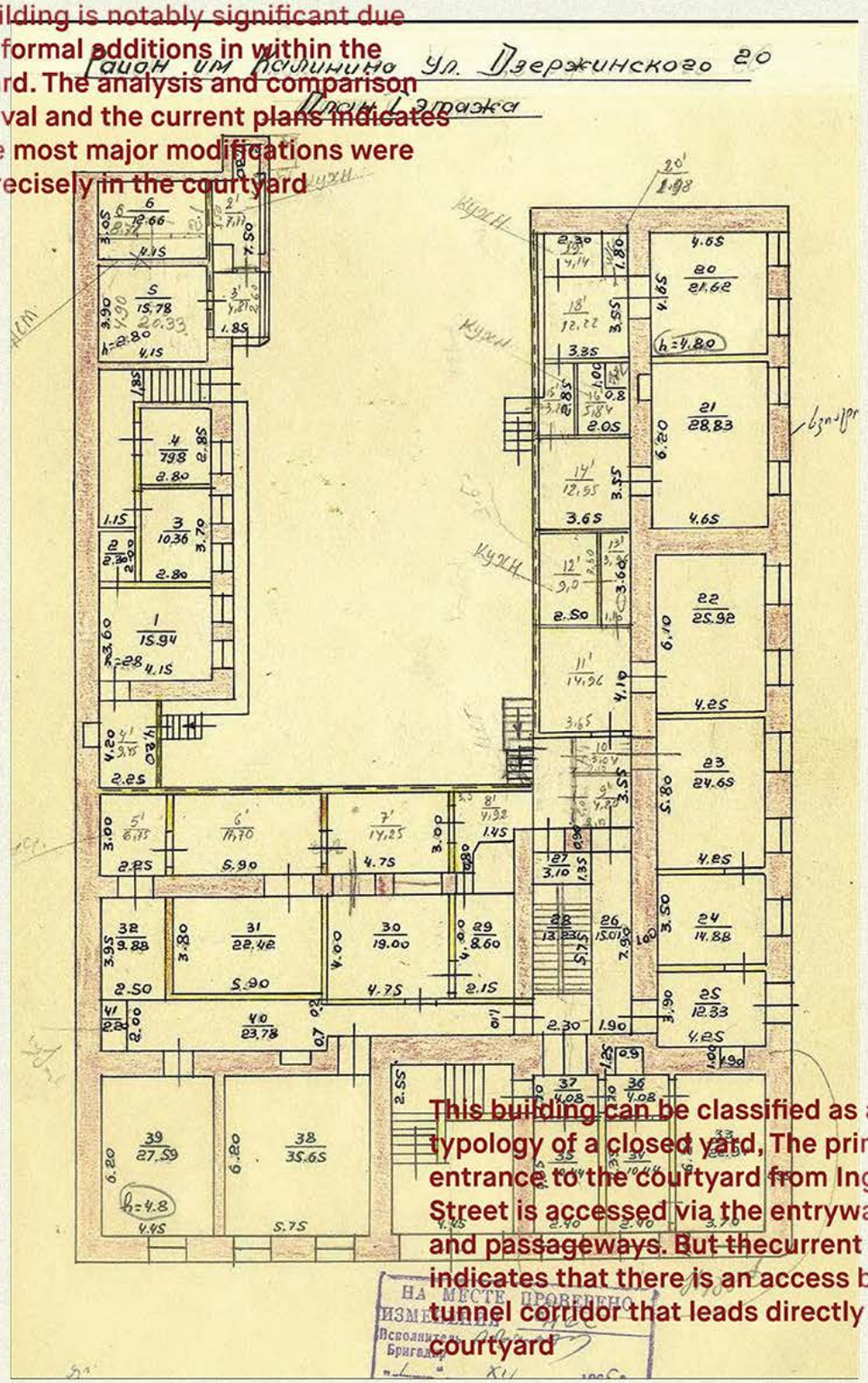
89.

Gagoshidze, Sopio. Registration Card of an Immovable Object/Monument of Cultural Heritage N4250. Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia, 2015. Accessed August 27, 2025. https://memkvidreoba.gov.ge/

89.

SCANTbilisi. "Pavle Ingorokva Street." Accessed August 27, 2025. https://scantbilisi.ge/ka/objects/266/pavle-ingoroyvas-quCa.

This building is notably significant due to its informal additions in within the courtyard. The analysis and comparison of archival and the current plans indicates that the most major modifications were done precisely in the courtyard



This building can be classified as a typology of a closed yard, The primary entrance to the courtyard from Ingorokva Street is accessed via the entryway and passageways. But thecurrent plan indicates that there is an access by a tunnel corridor that leads directly to the courtyard

Figure 3.33
Schematic plan of the courtyard house on Ingorokva 20,Tbilisi.National Archive of Georgia.

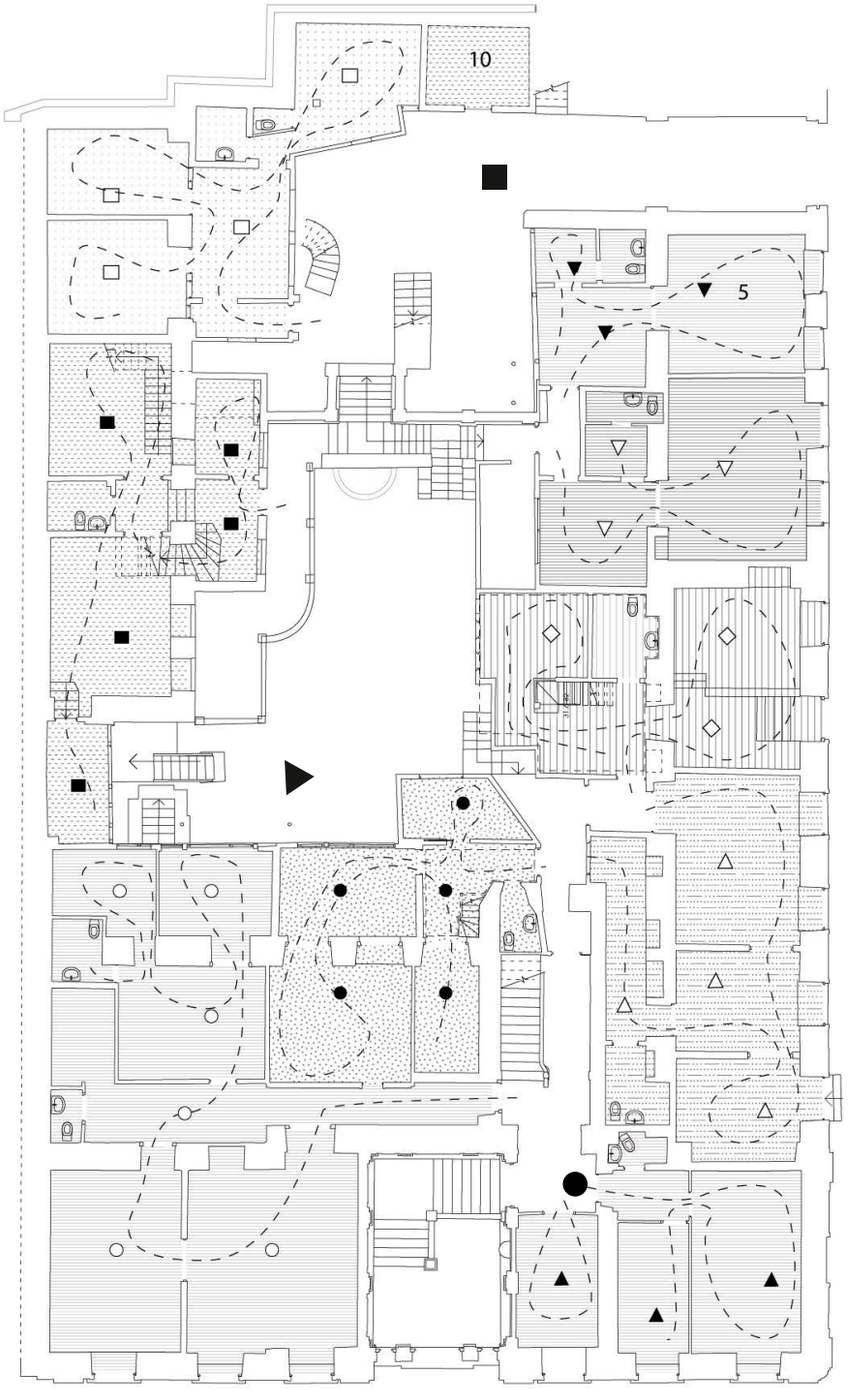


Figure 3.34
Author's adaptation of the base plan from the Tbilisi Development Fund.

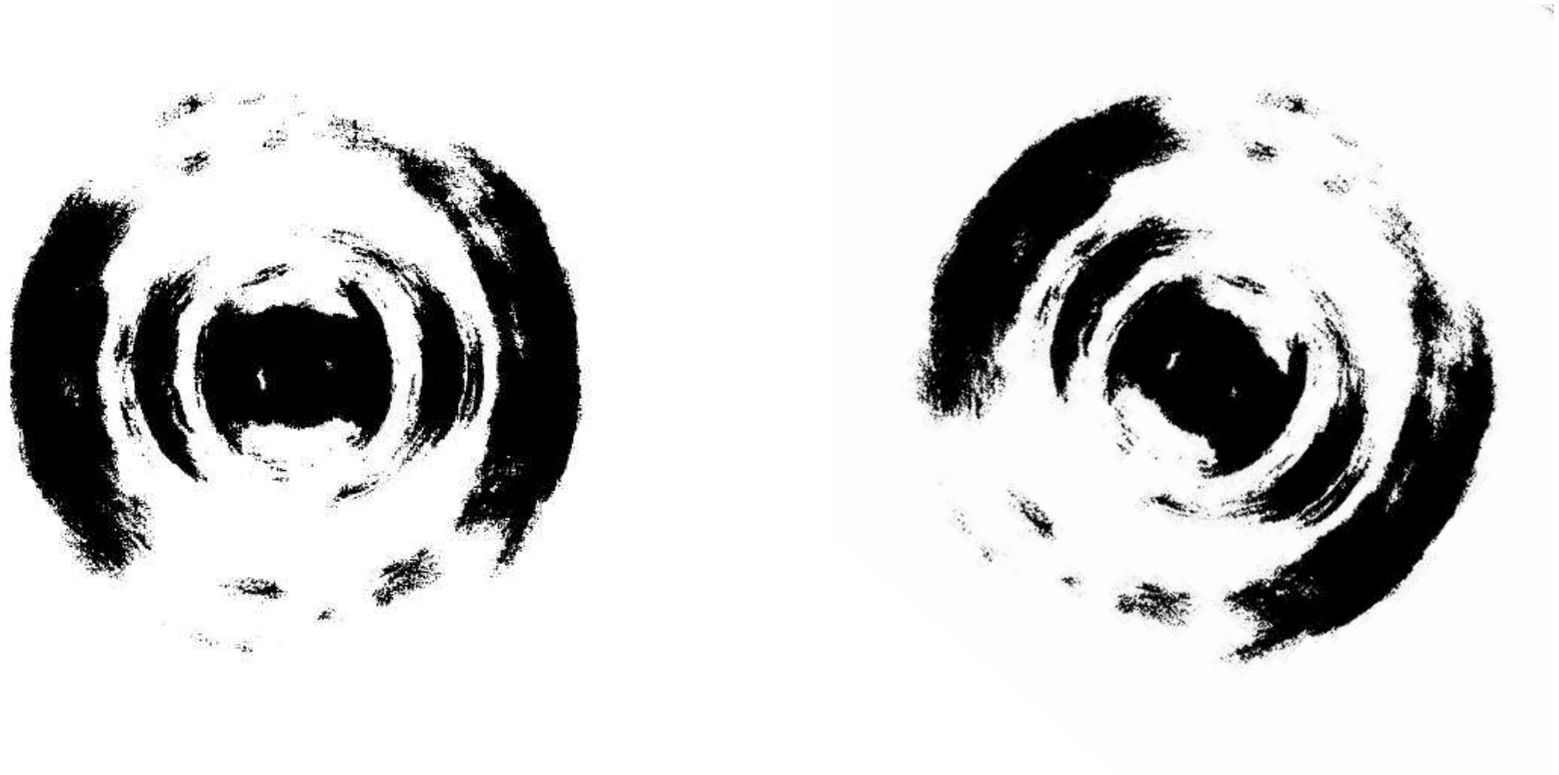
Figure 3.35
Picture of a coutyard on Ingorokva st.20, Sololaki,photo by the author,2025

Figure 3.36
Picture of a coutyard on Ingorokva st.20, Sololaki,photo by the author,2025

Figure 3.37
Picture of a coutyard on Ingorokva st.20, Sololaki,photo by the author,2025

Figure 3.38
Picture of a coutyard on Ingorokva st.20, Sololaki,photo by the author,2025

Figure 3.39
Picture of an apartment in the courtyard house on Ingorokva 20,photo by the author,2025



“...To See and To be Seen “

Observations

"...To See and To be Seen "

Inside/ Outside

"Ezo" has long been more than just an architectural form in Tbilisi. The tales and nostalgic narratives have never been rooted in its architectural legacy or in its significance as a cultural heritage, but rather its non-material heritage: the collective life and the infatuation with living as one extended family, the way it is at the intersection of domesticity and memory. It is a symbol of unique neighbouring life said to be unreplicable in any other type of dwelling. This legacy derived from the way the "Ezo" blurs the distinction between public and private and it unsettles the neat boundaries between inside and outside. Being exposed to the street or extending the activities on the balconies or terraces has historically been emblematic of Tbilisi's urban life. Starting from the °Bani° of medieval architecture continuing the balconies of Tbilisi. They have always been the place of gathering, talking, observing and ".. to see and to be seen".[91]

In the case of courtyard houses where balconies face the yard, are sometimes open with open stairs, bridges and passageways, these places turn into a stage, the places of conversations, circulation, eating, studying, playing. The activities that elsewhere might remain behind and private, here are instead half-exposed half concealed. Observing the yards for 2 summers along two years blurred thresholds of private and public, it was becoming more and more evident how it shapes the everyday life of its residents.

In most of the courtyards gates were almost always left fully open or at least never locked, as if they were welcoming the passerby to step inside the yard. Once entering from the noisy street, filled with traffic, going through sometimes not so pleasant dark passageways you are exposed to a complete atmospheric shift, it is like to slip away from the street and water is the self-sustainic microcosm. The ground is uneven, laundry always exposed, so many objects scattered around that it's hard to look at everything all at once, grapevines stretch overhead offering dappled shade on the ground. Even when the space is empty and nobody is in the yard you will have objects around appear as if just set aside, as if life itself has just momentarily stepped out. Even without the presence directly in the yard, you can still feel the social dynamics on the facade, the way people move and manipulate the space, all the windows open in the summer, voices draft from balconies, sound of piano, A cat balances along the railing, neighbors call across the air. It is a space of constant visibility where you can see everyone and everyone can see you.

Thus To observe here is not to measure or classify or try to find the typological elements of architecture but to attune yourself to rhythms, improvisations and textures. Experience the activities, observe the movements and habits.

90.

The phrase "to seee and to be seen" is taken taken from The British capitan a Richard Wilbrahm, quoted in Chaniashvili, N. Nineteenth-Century Architecture of Tbilisi as a Reflection of Cultural and Social History of the City. FaRiG Report, 2007.

Setting a scene

A woman hanging her laundry on a line stretches across the courtyard, a gesture I have seen so many times during the observations it resists being counted, yet each time it is unfolding as a small public performance of domestic life. A child reading a book on the balcony, the rest of the kids play with the ball in the yard, while talking about their vacations, while neighbors pass below, glancing up. Men play backgammon under the shade on the vine arbor. None of these acts are fully private but neither are they fully public- they reside in a distinctive liminal realm unique to these spaces. It seems like the courtyard is neither a square nor a living room but something in between.

Residents speak of the courtyard as place where:

"Nothing goes unnoticed... everyone knows everything about each other's families"

It allows life to flow across the threshold. Each time I first enter the courtyard it feels like none truly notices me even though I have a sensation I entered someone's home. They are used to the visitors, tourists who know about the hidden gems of Tbilisi. They may pause and ask questions if you are sketching or taking pictures but they never restrict you or themselves from the activities they have been doing. Just one question and they go back to not

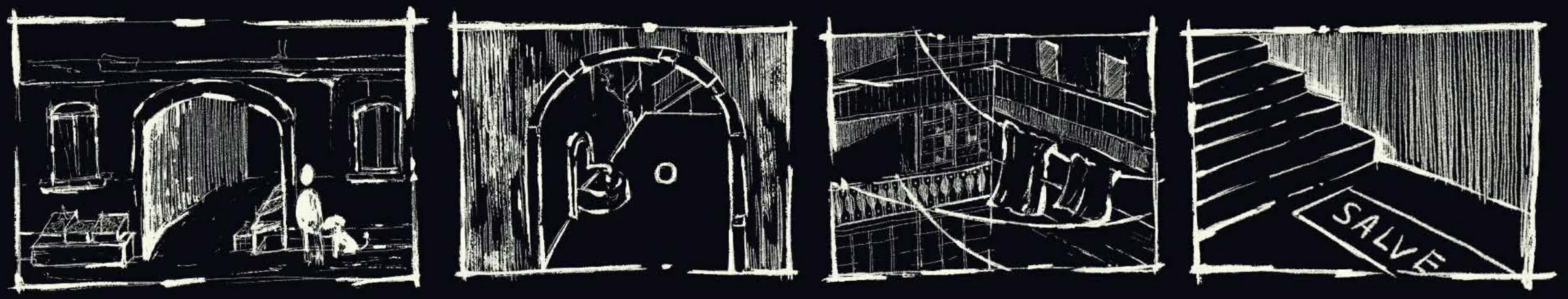


Figure 3.40
Storyboard of a courtyard on Leonidze street 8.Sketch by the author done during the survey . August 2024

noticing your presence, never change their activity or mode of being, it feels like they are used to seeing and to be seen in their everyday activities.

Michaeil De Certeu argues that the practice of everyday life are tactical ways of inhabiting space. People do not simply follow the script or always act consciously, they improvise, adapt in a fluid sometimes unconscious way, they "make do"[91], this concept especially applies to "Ezo" since besides the practices and movement physical alteration of the buildings done by the residents are also the result of improvisation, extremely random and informal rooted in adaptation of the imminent needs. Besides the big structures like room addition or balcony enclosure, residents spill their domestic life into semi-private courtyards. Potted plants,cleaning tools, makeshift shelves, furniture, toys, glasses you can see almost everything here. These scattered objects further blur the boundary of private and public and more importantly it blurs the boundary of the use of the spaces inside and outside.

Collective Memory and Nostalgic narratives

Tbilisi courtyard houses are often described as an architectural legacy and the heritage to be preserved. But it is more often described as a cultural heritage. As stated they are intricate systems constantly reassembling itself. They are not a relic but a process. Once one enters inside they are provided with the opportunity to see the delicate and mundane and expose how societies inhabit spaces and moreover how they remember spaces in a way that escape the official narrative or contradict the current state. It represents the encapsulated entanglement of time, collective memory and habits in its most intimate urban environment.

Paul Connerton argues that memory is not only preserved in texts or archives but It is sustained by bodies, through habit, performance, and rituals. [92] To comprehend how a society retains memory and generates nostalgic narratives, one must look to the quotidian behaviours and practices that bind the past to the present . When observed closely, Tbilisi yards precisely reveal as such a space, where remembrance and collective memory is reflected through the body, the gesture, the habit. Even though today these practices are rare and in fact were very few during the fieldwork, There are still rituals that reflect the same spirit: Sitting together on balconies in the courtyard in the evenings, exchanging greetings and ossip, Over time, these everyday performances encoded ways of being together in space

91.
Certeau, Michel de. The Practice of Everyday Life. Translated by Steven F. Rendall. 3rd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

92.
Connerton, Paul. How Societies Remember. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

93.
Ronald Topchishvili, interviewed by Lali patsatsia, Allnews.ge, October 31, 2021, https://www.allnews.ge/kultura/166600-rogor-cxovrobdnen-zvelad-tbilisur-ezoebshi-da-ratom-gacivda-mezobluri-urtiertobebi/

94.
Sparsbrod, Joseph. "There Was Communality: Narrating Transformations in Old Tbilisi." 2018

95.
Sparsbrod, Joseph. "There Was Communality: Narrating Transformations in Old Tbilisi." 2018

"This place was one big family with its communal basement, lavatory and water tap. The product was washed on a common tap, and various utensils were used - so everyone knew whose family was preparing what for dinner. The laundry was also washed in the yard and hung on a rope tied there ...

..Every yard had its own traditions. If a new resident joined there, he or she had to live according to the established tradition. Those living in the same yard interacted with each other like relatives, supported each other..."[93]

The communal living and the very reason of nostalgia is preciecly evident in the two Georigian movies. In the film "The last day, The first day" is very evident the concept of "memory of habit"[95] and the way in which people enliven the space. It showcases the characteristic wooden spiral staircase in the Vera district and illustrated the embodied notion of visual connectivity between different point within the yard.

In the film "Sun of Autumn"(released in 1976), the idealization of communal living and Tbilisi style courtyards is most evident. Here we see the comparison between the life in Soviet standardized apartments and historic Yards. In the film the wife of an artit exchanges their flat in courtyard house. The artist gets inpired by the spirit of hisotric neighborhood and becomes very productive. These films were produced during the Soviet era and are broadcast on TV to this day.Obviosuly this is not a precice representaiton of Tbilisi yards but an idealiazed image that emphasized the specific Georigan form of Soviet communal living [94]

the film “დღე უკანასკნელი, დღე პირველი” - the last day,first day (1959)

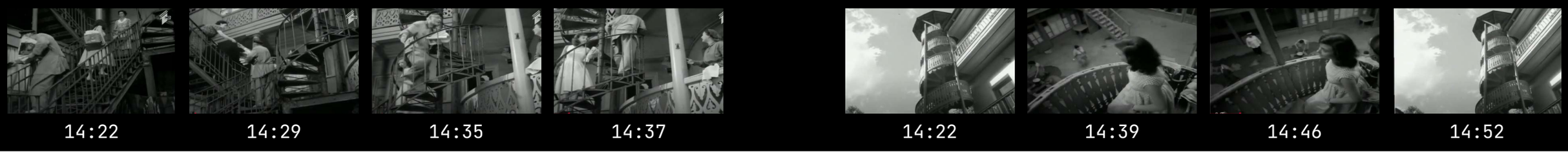


Figure 3.41
The Last Day, the First Day, 1959, film directed by Siko Dolidze.

the film “მზე შემოდგომისა” - the sun of autumn (1973)

Figure 3.42
The Sun of Autumn, 1973. film directed by Temur Palavandishvili

Everyday Objects Mapping

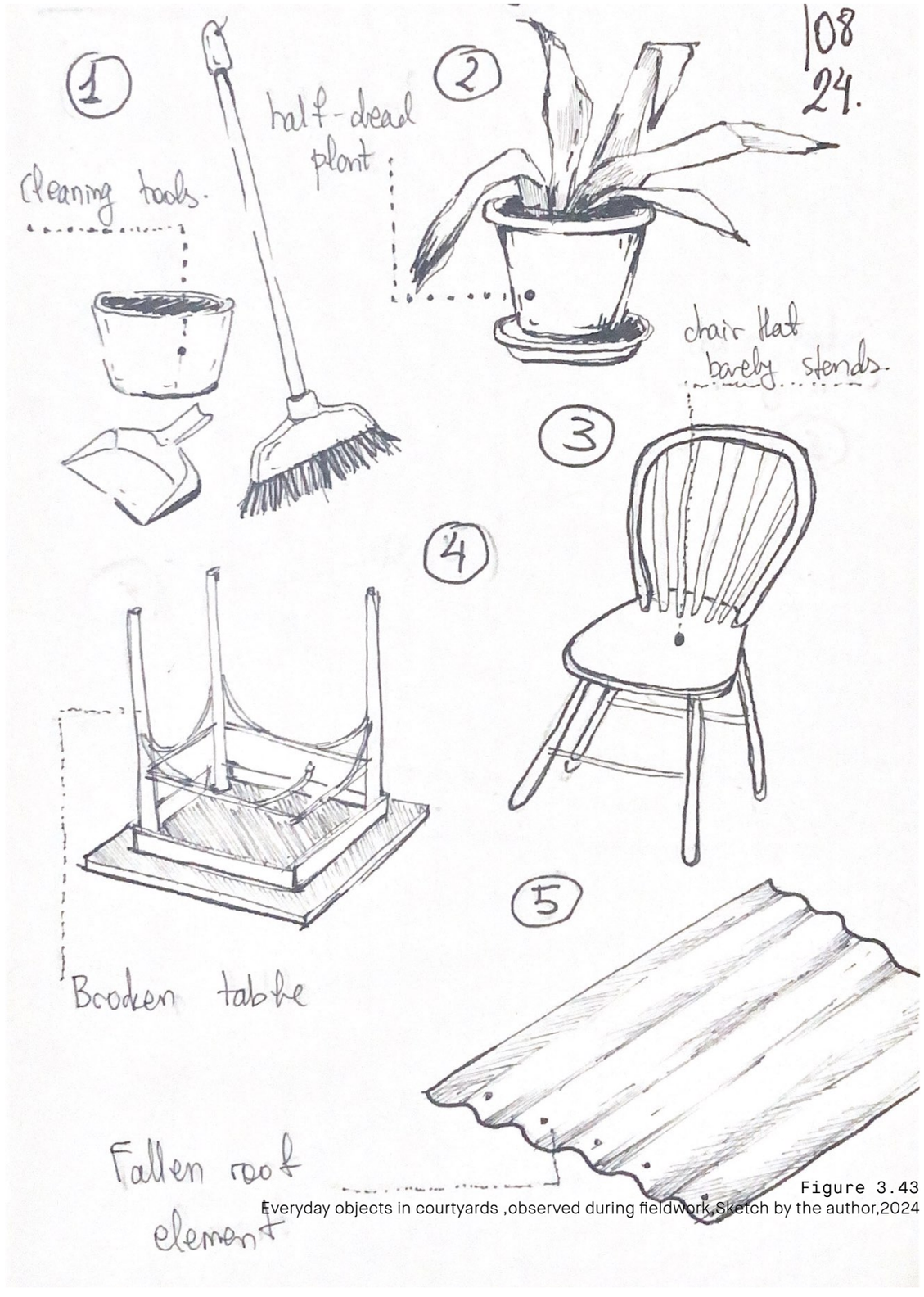


Figure 3.43
Everyday objects in courtyards ,observed during fieldwork.Sketch by the author,2024

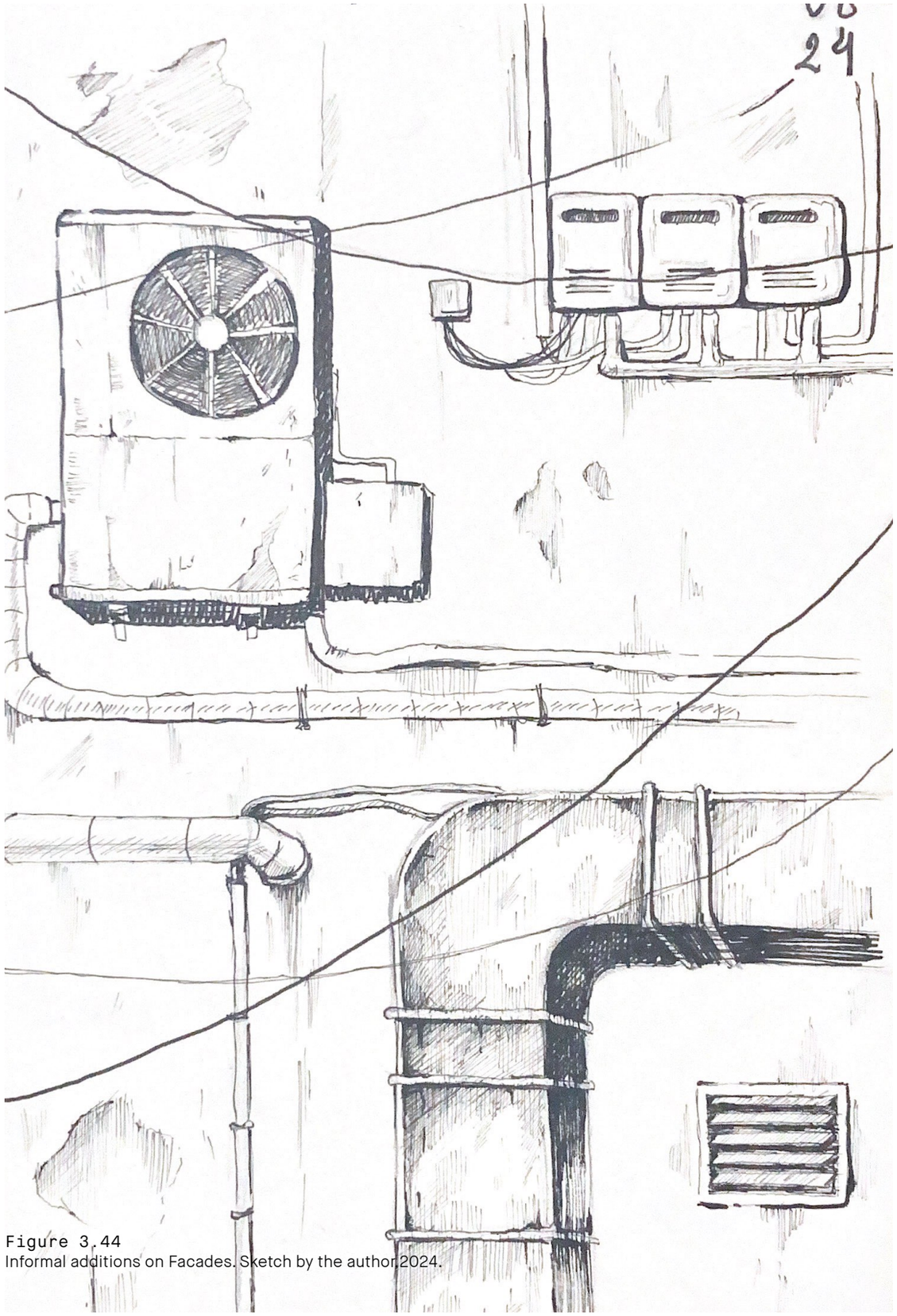


Figure 3.44
Informal additions on Facades. Sketch by the author,2024.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined Tbilisi-style courtyards not as static relics of the past but rather as dynamic repositories of city's development and the spaces of entanglement of different influences and political ideologies. They have undergone the multilayered metamorphosis and remain in a state of formation. Due to governmental negligence staying in an imminent need of protection, their future remains unclear. Tbilisi courtyards are nests of nostalgia and encapsulate the gestures of everyday life that have preserved memory through the city's most pivotal historical turmoil. The research analyzed and uncovered in what ways has politics shaped the spatial and social configuration of Tbilisi courtyards, reflecting the broader urban and political history of the city and how does it continue to determine its current trajectory.

Constant presence of idealized narratives around communal living, which initially piqued my interest in studying these buildings, became paradoxical thought fieldwork and the observational research. Courtyards remembered and romanticized as for their shared life, communal rituals and the unique essence of neighborhood reveled contradictions in today's reality. By contracting nostalgic narratives with contemporary reality, the study posed the question of how nostalgic narratives around courtyards, shape, obscure or conflict with contemporary socio-political realities. Even as these tales first seemed overly romanticized and overstated the fundamental spirit of the idealized communal living became more and more evident thought the research. As Sololaki and courtyard houses shifted from elite residences to Soviet Kommunalkas and then to fragmented privatization and resident-driven adaptation, Residents continued to adapt and tactically reinterpret that fundamental essence and sustain the forms of conviviality and resilience. Post-Socialist privatization fragmented these collectivities, provoking new individualistic way of living, introducing new enclosure, conflicts and silences. However, left the traces of common customs and shared rituals among its inhabitants, and no matter the contradictory narratives the life here remains distinctive and unequivocally communal, that repeats nowhere else in Tbilisi. By unfolding these narratives and documenting the buildings after understanding their historical relevance, research highlights their significance as cultural phenomenon, capturing the everyday social life they sustain, that are at risk of disappearing.

The thesis indicated that the future of these houses remains uncertain, despite the pressing need for intervention. Although recognized as cultural heritage, numerous sites are partially deteriorated and in serious need of conservation. however, restoration does not fully determine its fate and future social dynamics, especially since conservation efforts in Tbilisi often prioritize commercialization over the preservation of their social and cultural significance and gentrification disrupt the intricate network of communal practices.

The timing of this research proved to be especially relevant. Conducted prior to the new conservation initiatives in Sololaki, it captures the courtyards in a fragile in-between state: still inhabited, still marked by traces of communal life, yet already on the edge of commercialization. It would serve as a baseline record of what these places once were in a specific temporal context. Tbilisi itself remains in actives process of formation and the courtyards as well, are awaiting –uncertain of their fate, suspended between memory and reinvention.

The comprehensive fieldwork and observational research revealed the fragmented and incremental characteristics of these yards. Thus the speculative illustration serves as a mirror of personal perceptions. Translating lived experience, and embodied memory into visual form, revealing both the vibrancy and fragility. Much like assemblage theory,[97] courtyard here is portrayed as an evolving, heterogeneous collection of fragments, resident's interventions and everyday life. The process of sketching mirrors the very dynamic it seeks to capture. Randomness and exaggeration of the informal additions illustrates how courtyards changed through countless small acts of appropriation, adaptation and negotiation. (fig.3.45)

96.

Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze announced at a meeting of the capital's government in May 2025 The Tbilisi Development Fund is launching rehabilitation works on Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani and Ingorokva streets. the project will be implemented in two stages and will include both the improvement of underground communications and road infrastructure, as well as the restoration and rehabilitation of buildings. (Shengelia, Akaki. "სულხან-საბა ორბელიანისა და ინგოროყვას ქუჩების რეაბილიტაცია იწყება" ["Rehabilitation of Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani and Ingoroqva Streets Begins"]. 1TV.ge, May 28, 2025.)

97.

Sparsbrod, Joseph. "There Was Communality: Narrating Transformations in Old Tbilisi." 2018

Conclusion

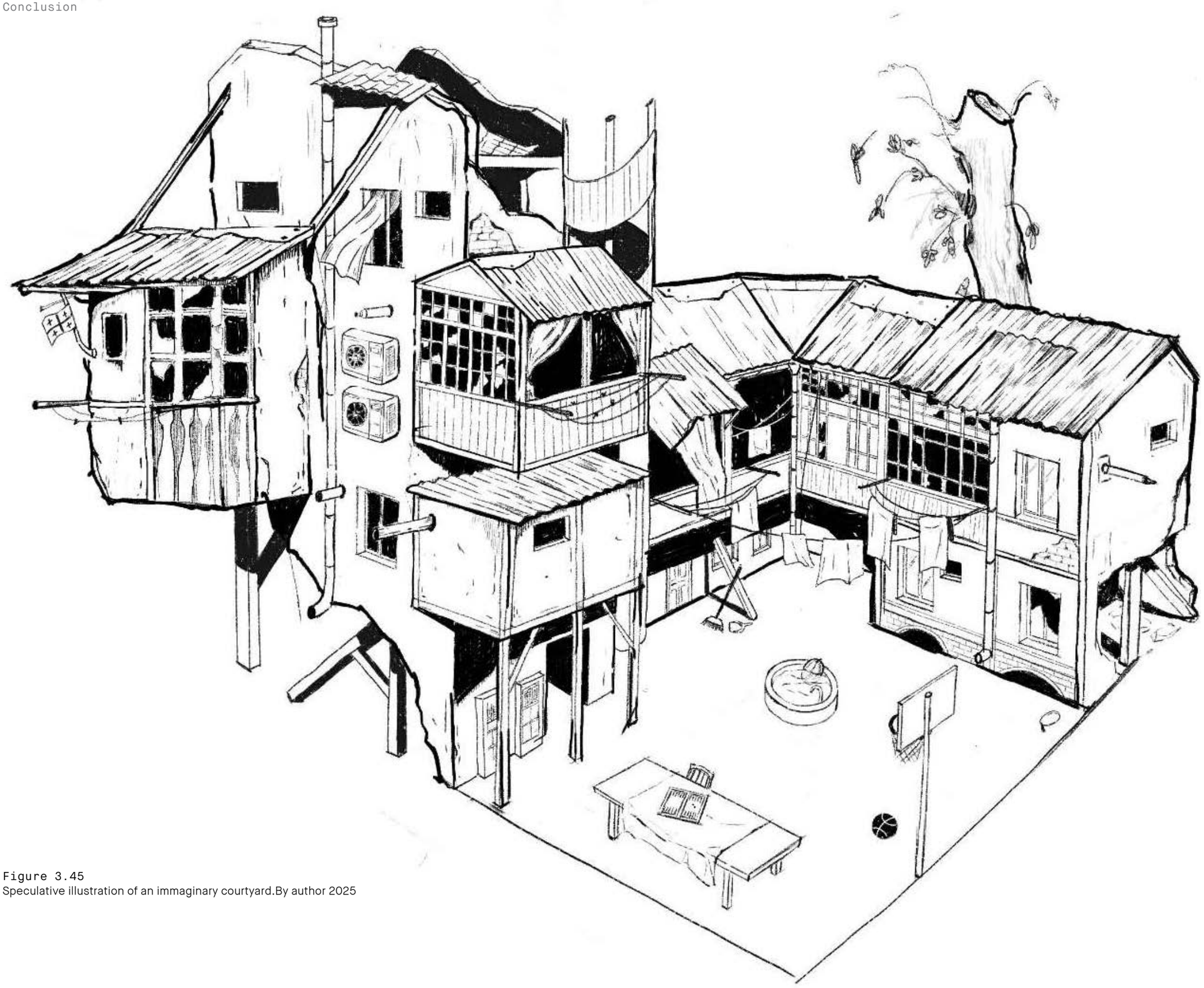


Figure 3.45
Speculative illustration of an immaginary courtyard.By author 2025

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List of Figures