

SOME ASPECTS OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT OF BATUMI

MAIA TCHITCHILEISHVILI

PhD in Art History and Theory, Senior Researcher

At Niko Berdzenishvili Institute of Batumi Shota

Rustaveli State University; Professor at

Batumi Art State University

E-mail: maia.chichileishvili@bsu.edu.ge

ORCID: 0009-0002-2030-9948

Abstract: The remains of the most ancient settlement on Batumi's territory have been preserved by the ruins of „Batumi Fortress“ located north of the modern city. The origin of Batumi's new, urban-type development is connected to the process of relocating the seaport northwest – toward the bay – beginning in the 19th century. From this same period, Batumi's urban development, taking into account its geographical location, proceeded according to the principle of regular planning. Batumi's development was not based on pre-prepared plans; it was determined not by a unified, comprehensive artistic-architectural development idea, but rather by the regulations and norms characteristic of the empire's cities in general. Batumi's old neighborhoods were formed as urban fabric developed on a perimeter zone with an organized block structure. The city's planned reconstruction and development processes are connected to the Soviet period. The plan projects compiled in 1927, 1933, 1956, and 1986 represented the main guiding documents for the city's development and improvement.

From 2008, Batumi has been developing rapidly, with architecture becoming part of tourism policy, though the „concept“ of cultural heritage rehabilitation and new development came into conflict with Batumi's traditional principles of regulated planning, order, moderate scale, intimate space, and harmony with the environment.

In recent years, the main directions of Batumi's economic development have emerged – port-transit function and the tourism sector, in which the city's historical part maintains the significance of a tourist attraction center and requires special attention in terms of rehabilitation and maintenance. For contemporary modernized development, it is important to introduce regulations limiting local plans, scales, heights, and density. The city still faces the most complex task of proposing a strategic vision for spatial development, preserving the historical core, protecting regular planning, and creating a balanced, artistically expressive contemporary architectural environment.

Keywords: Batumi, architecture, development plan, challenges.

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Introduction: The ruins of the so-called „Tamari Fortress,“ located north of contemporary Batumi at the confluence of the Korolistavi River with the sea, have preserved the most ancient cultural layers of settlement. Life flourished here from the beginning of the 1st millennium, and in antiquity there was already an urban settlement. The fortress-castle's location facilitated control of sea and land routes, which is why the fortification structure functioned during the Middle Ages as well. The remains of Batumi's „Tamari Fortress,“ according to information from Procopius of Caesarea (6th century), are identified with the fortress of Losorion built by Emperor Justinian in Lazica, which was located on the Black Sea coast between the fortresses of Apsaros and Petra. This fortress was supposed to block the road leading from Lazica toward the southern Black Sea coast (Lekvinadze, 1967: 505-510; Lekvinadze 1973:169-186). Based on the analysis of scarce historical information and archaeological findings, the archaeological-architectural monument – „Batumi Fortress“ – reveals connections with the most ancient

period Colchian settlement, Roman-Byzantine and medieval Georgian fortification-fortress systems. Despite multiple reconstructions, the characteristics typical of Roman and early Byzantine fortresses are evident – rectangular planning, wall construction with alternating stone and brick masonry, and the system of semicircular buttresses used for reinforcing late medieval walls (Inaishvili, 2009:153-156). According to the works of 19th-century researcher-travelers (A. Dupré, D. Bakradze, A. Frenkel, J. Mourier and others), Batumi fortress no longer had fortification function at this time (Bakradze, 1987:23; Frenkel, 2012:78-79,225).

The city of the early 19th century was a rural-type settlement lacking compactness, with a main commercial center – the bazaar. The origin of Batumi's new, urban-type development is connected to the process of relocating the seaport northwest – toward the bay.

Methods: The research methods of this work are based on the analysis of historical sources – press, photographic materials, scientific literature, archival documents, and the results of comparing the authentic part of the city with graphical data.

Discussion: In the first half of the 19th century, projects implemented by Turkey for colonization purposes were directed toward developing territories adjacent to Batumi Bay. At the beginning of the century, canals had been dug to drain swamps, through which water flowed into the sea. By the end of 1861, construction of a wooden harbor had begun in the city of Batumi (Yildiztaş, 2021: 289). According to the Sultan's firman of 1863, the construction of a new city was planned northwest of the harbor, which envisioned cutting streets 12 arshins wide (8.5 m), with a mosque in the center and fortress-castles in the coastal zone. Master builder Haji Dimitri was sent to construct urban buildings, the mosque, and prison. During Ottoman rule, in the newly established neighborhoods of the 1860s-70s – „Azizie“ and „Nurie“ – the outline of regular planning emerged (Liluashvili, 2019:158-160).

From 1878, Adjara became part of the Russian Empire. According to the plan of the same year, the boundaries of the city of Batumi encompassed the territory between present-day N. Baratashvili, I. Chavchavadze, and I. Gogebashvili streets and the coastal strip. The spaces located west of Baratashvili Street were fragmentarily populated. In 1888, after granting city status to Batumi, engineer N. Dakishevich compiled the city's general plan (1887-1889), which envisioned the expansion of streets and the tendency of territorial growth in the southwest direction (on territories between present-day S. Khimshiashvili, A. Pushkin, P. Melikishvili, G. Brtskinvale, A. Griboedov, and I. Chavchavadze streets). The new development was designed as relatively larger rectangular blocks, which, in turn, confirmed that despite not being approved, some aspects of N. Dakishevich's plan were nevertheless considered in the future (Komakhidze, 2000:127-130).

In 1889, G. Rcheulishvili, on the assignment of the Governor-General of Kutaisi, developed two more development plans for Batumi, which, in addition to the coastal and mountain zones, included territories between the Qorolistavi and Mejinistsqali rivers. In this plan of the city and suburbs, certain changes were introduced at the indication of architect Vladimir Simonson, which essentially meant the extension of several streets, connecting streets to each other, or their expansion. Despite the work carried out, this city plan was not approved. Similarly, due to a number of inaccuracies, the plan compiled in 1895 by architect A. Kandinov was not accepted, which covered territories between the Black Sea coast, the Bartskhana River, the military road, and the Angisa River (Komakhidze, 2000:132-134). Subsequently, plans compiled by surveyor Piotr Lipinski in 1897-1900 and by M. Riteli in 1905 were also invalidated (Liluashvili, 2019: 186).

These facts confirm that Batumi's development was not based on pre-compiled plans. The principle of urban development in Batumi was determined not by a unified, comprehensive artistic-architectural development idea, but generally by the regulations and norms characteristic of imperial cities. According to the regulatory rules of this period, the only guiding principle for city planning was the creation of regular blocks. The spatial environment – neighborhood or district – determined by functional and

social factors consisted of urban elements of more or less equal architectural significance, among which dominant importance was assigned to religious buildings. The network of blocks and the uniform rhythmic arrangement of development created favorable conditions for unnoticed movement from one street to another and for strolling. The formation of the city's architectural image, along with the above-mentioned principles, was determined by the regulatory rules and instructions established for Batumi (*Сборник действующих в гор. Батуми...*), according to which the main requirement for development was compliance with street red lines, building facade arrangements, heights, and other regulations. Consequently, Batumi's old neighborhoods were formed with an orderly block structure and buildings of moderate scale placed adjacent to each other along the perimeter zone (Chichileishvili, 2013:262-268). The regulatory rules were observed not only in the architecture of Batumi at the turn of the 19th-20th centuries but also in the Soviet period, especially in the first half of the 20th century when constructing new buildings integrated into historical developments.

From 1921, the issues of planned reconstruction of cities and related new planning were raised. In 1925, new boundaries of the city of Batumi were established, which included territories between the Black Sea coastal zone in the north, the Skurkuba River in the east, and the Zhilini Canal in the south. From this same period, the redistribution of new and old quarters, rational resettlement of the population, transportation, oil-processing industry, local industry, residential construction, improvement of the city's sanitary-technical conditions, and zoning of industrial and residential districts were considered (Janberidze, 1971:33-34; Komakhidze, 2000:147). In 1927, under the leadership of engineer D. Svishevski, a detailed development plan of the city was created, according to which many issues were resolved rationally, which implied convenient development of the city in the southwest direction, rejecting the identified tendency of building railways and oil enterprises close to the sea. However, this opinion was rejected and new factories were still built in the designated territory, whereby the city lost good resort areas, while nearby residential districts were polluted by harmful emissions from oil-processing processes. Despite this, the aforementioned new plan represented a significant event in Georgian Soviet urban planning of that time. According to this plan, territorial division was implemented, new streets were laid out, and the construction of residential quarters for Batumi's oil-processing plant was designated on coastal territory, close to the factory. The neighborhood development envisioned residential houses and primary service facilities built among green plantings. According to this plan, the regular planning structure characteristic of Batumi and the principle of through street layout were considered in both old and new neighborhoods. The growth of green spaces was planned, and the arrangement of wide squares at the intersection of main arteries. Also, the lakes existing in the coastal zone should have been preserved, which had great importance for setting up drainage canalization (Komakhidze, 2000:150-155). At the beginning of the 1930s, the low density of the city was caused by low percentage indicators of development. In 1933, a Batumi planning scheme was again developed under the leadership of well-known architects B. Lortkipanidze and L. Sumbadze, with the participation of R. Agababyan, N. Peremuzova, M. Tsetskhladze, and R. Izashvili. The plan envisioned the allocation of new sites for enterprises in the southwest, around the Stefanovka River, the laying out of Mtsidziri and Bagrationi arterial streets and the arrangement of passenger and freight railway stations there, the development of new residential districts in the southwest direction, the enlargement of arteries and quarters, the growth of green squares, although the approval of this plan could not be achieved due to the outbreak of World War II (Komakhidze, 2000:158)¹. In 1956, work on compiling the city's general plan was renewed with the participation of

¹ In the years 1902-1907, D. Svishevsky held the position of works manager of the Batumi Military Department and engineer of the city administration. He actively worked on creating a plan for the reconstruction and development of Batumi. D. Svishevsky compiled a project for sewage and fecal canal drainage system, and studied the causes of erosion and destruction of the Adjara seashore. He was the author of unrealized projects for the Batumi tramway line, and the Batumi-Kars and Batumi-Tabriz railway lines. D. Svishevsky's idea was to relocate the railway station entering the city center to Mtsidziri Street, which would be connected to the city's main hub points by major thoroughfares.

A. Nikolaishvili, L. Sumbadze, N. Fermuzova, and K. Javakhishvili. On the agenda was: the idea of relocating the railway passenger station from the central part of the city; reconstruction of the seaport, construction of a sea quay, reconstruction-greening of I. Gogebashvili Street, unification of small blocks with pedestrian-adapted walkways and internal passages; according to this same plan, the expansion of I. Chavchavadze, Tbilisi, and N. Baratashvili streets with so-called „boulevard developments“ was envisioned. In the historical part of the city, on territories freed at the expense of dilapidated buildings, the arrangement of residential development with inner-block green courtyards was planned. It should be noted that until the 1970s, this project represented the main guiding document for the city's development and improvement. It took into account Batumi's old part's architectural structure and the factor of the sea as a leading element, whose coastal zone was dedicated to green massifs (Komakhidze, 2000:158-160; Batumi Land Use Plan, 2008:43-44). In 1986, a new project of Batumi's general plan was compiled, which considered issues of railway station relocation, port expansion, Batumi airport, Batumi cable road construction, landfill location, and sea shore reinforcement, although this plan was not approved due to deficiencies around these issues (Komakhidze 2000:161).

In the second half of the 20th century, the southwestern part of the city (territories adjacent to Z. Gorgiladze Street) was built up with unsightly, typical projects – so-called „Khrushchyovkas.“ Later, from the 1960s, the coastal neighborhood called „Sasroleti“ (territory between Iv. Javakhishvili, Tb. Abuseridze, I. Kobaladze streets and the sea coast) was added to the city. The development turned its back to the sea because enterprises were mainly located in the resort coastal and residential zones. The development of these new neighborhoods, due to unplanned development, is characterized by an irregular network structure of streets and a somewhat unsystematic arrangement of multi-story buildings and household facilities (Komakhidze, 2000:164-167). From the mid-20th century, the so-called „Chaobi“ settlement was also formed in the form of small and irregular blocks. In the 1960s-80s, both in the center and peripheral zones, integrated buildings and newly built neighborhoods (territories adjacent to Sh. Khimshiashvili and D. Aghmashenebeli streets) proved incompatible with both historical and contemporary Batumi's appearance due to contrasting scales and unsightly architecture. The development of these processes was represented by unsystematic and chaotic reconstructions in the 1990s – addition-construction processes, which significantly deteriorated the already unsightly appearance of Soviet Batumi. In the Soviet period, the idea of reconstructing the city's old, densely populated neighborhoods and amortized houses remained unrealized, which, in turn, preserved the historical urban fabric with artistically distinguished and modest-looking background buildings.

In 2008, a new general plan of Batumi was compiled by K. Amirejibi, V. Prangishvili, and V. Vardosanidze, which envisioned strategic proposals for the city's spatial-functional development. Among the city's new challenges were issues of oil-processing facilities location and infrastructure, a new vision of functional zoning, and tasks of preserving the historical part. According to the plan, the first stage urban planning measures for Batumi's urban development included: expansion of the city's administrative boundaries (incorporation of Angisia and Khelvachauri territories, extension of the beach and boulevard, Sh. Khimshiashvili Street, expansion of I. Chavchavadze and Tbel Abuseridze streets); arrangement of a new cargo-transit artery along P. Bagrationi, Mtisdziri, and Eristavi streets; formation of an integrated transport center – port, railway, and bus station; bringing new high-rise buildings into compositional unity; arrangement of the sewage system, landfill territory, rehabilitation of Zhilini and other drainage canals, coastal protection works, etc. The second stage urban planning measures of this plan included tasks for spatial arrangement of specific locations, part of which was not implemented.¹ Third-tier urban planning tasks envisioned planning and construction of a new bypass

¹ It was envisioned to create „Varskvlavi“ (Star) Square“, Angisi sports zone, Batum-Gori recreational complex, a new sports-recreational center on the territory of the former poultry farm, establishment of a new megamarket equipped with parking facilities on the territory of the shipbuilding factory, formation of territories for a new local bus station and food market, and others.

highway, dismantling of „Khrushchyovkas“ and other amortized multi-apartment residential stock and construction of new complexes, issues of architectural-artistic rehabilitation of the historical zone, etc. (Batumi Land Use Plan, 2008:97-98).

In 2008-2011, reconstruction-rehabilitation of various sections of old Batumi's historical neighborhoods (M. Abashidze, N. Dumbadze streets, Europe Square, territory adjacent to St. Nicholas Cathedral, I. Gogebashvili and Shota Rustaveli streets) and cultural heritage monuments was implemented. However, this process was mainly conducted on the basis of development modernization, „renovation,“ functional adaptation, and leveling of authenticity (Chichileishvili, 2013:334-335). Batumi's new architectural concept implied transforming the previous period's plain and intimate city into an economically growing, rapidly developing, active urban city with a pretentious appearance. The desire to renew previous period Batumi was conditioned by reconstruction of old buildings with principles of pseudo-historicism and mostly modernist interpretation, which was followed by scale growth of the city's historical part, change of old and Soviet period urban fabric, or destruction of historical specimens. To increase the city's tourist image, with the involvement of foreign architects, the government implemented new projects („Alphabet Tower,“ hotels – „Radisson,“ „Kempinski,“ „Sheraton,“ Batumi House of Justice building, so-called Technological University, etc.), part of which is distinguished by sense of place and harmonious attitude toward the environment (Chichileishvili, 2014:316-324).

From the 2010s of the 21st century, architecture became part of tourism policy, although the „concept“ of cultural heritage rehabilitation and new development of the city conflicted with Batumi's traditional principles of regulated planning, order, moderate scale, intimate space, and harmony with the environment. As a result of increased density requirements and contemporary urbanization processes, the city's visual appearance significantly changed. Problems caused by leveling of regular street networks traditional to Batumi and large-scale, chaotic constructions emerged (unsystematic street development, parking, throughput capacity, insolation-aeration, city water supply, sewerage, garbage collection and removal, city supply with natural gas and electricity, etc.), whose resolution, despite a number of documents adopted by the Adjara AR and Batumi City Hall in recent years, is not being achieved.¹

Due to the inactivity of approved action plans, Batumi's appearance has significantly changed in recent years, and both historical and contemporary parts have been damaged as a result of rough interventions. Rehabilitation-restoration of monuments with cultural heritage status in historical Batumi proceeds at a slow pace. The number of „background“ buildings, which together with artistically distinguished buildings created old Batumi's historical urban appearance, has significantly decreased. Recent years' examples show that processes of protecting, rehabilitating, and gentrifying the historical core are proceeding with difficulty in Batumi.² New high-rise buildings integrated into the city center, due to sharp scale increases and artistically-stylistically unreasoned eclecticism, significantly violate the harmony and expressiveness of the historical city.

With large-scale buildings of the contemporary city developed in the coastal zone, the characteristic sign of Batumi's identity – the principle of orientation toward sea space – is being lost. High-rise development here almost completely covers the sea panorama, which in previous years was also possible to see from the slopes of the coastal mountains located in the southeast. Development outside the boundaries of the historical zone is distinguished by the neglect of the traditional factor for Batumi – the grid network, which is caused by the unsystematic placement of high-rise buildings on private plots of the population. In the

¹ In consideration are such urban planning documents as Batumi's Historical-Cultural Reference Plan – 2006, General Land Use Plan – Part I, Batumi's Perspective Development Vision 2008, Ajara Spatial Planning Scheme – 2012, Batumi Urban Development Strategic Plan – 2013, the draft Strategic Development Plan for Ajara AR for 2016-2021, and others.

² In the part of the historical core, a whole range of problems emerge – building deterioration, difficult social background, disregard of population demands by the Monument Protection Agency, minimal financial resources for rehabilitation of the historical part, investors' limited interest in these areas, attempts to liquidate historical structures, and others.

southwestern part of the city, due to harmful changes, the danger of losing the city's identity is outlined, which is caused by facts of coefficient violations due to developer demands and pressure, exceeding the normative K2 coefficient of development intensity by 10-20-30 times (Namgaladze, 2025: 131-133). The intensive development presented in the southwestern part of the city (territories adjacent to Shartava Street), despite polished surfaces and night lighting effects, appears stylistically monotonous. A certain chaos in building placement, leveling of perception principles, and disregard for spatial views indicate that the city lacks a formed development plan for this part. The existing infrastructure cannot satisfy the increased density requirements caused by buildings' unlimited scales and volumes, which creates discomfort for both residents and tourists.

In recent years, the process of relocating new constructions toward the city's depth, toward Mtisdziri Street, is taking place, although these neighborhoods are also distinguished by a somewhat unorganized, irregular structure of street networks and quarters, dissonant attitude toward the existing environment, and poor architectural appearance. The beginnings of high-rise, somewhat unsystematic development is evident in the so-called „Chaobi“ settlement, which creates the danger of forming unreasoned, unsystematic, and unsightly development.

In Batumi, problems of recreational zone deficit, development of parks and squares, public spaces are evident, as well as the threat of losing the identity of harmonious urban space and urban chaos organically connected with the natural environment, which is caused by the absence of strategic foundation plans for development of local neighborhoods or the city in general based on socio-economic priorities and disregard for existing regulations. The city lacks clear development priorities, strategic and local plans, and work on the new general development plan has been ongoing since 2021 and is still in the development process.

Conclusion. In recent years, the main directions of Batumi's economic development have emerged – port-transit function and tourism sector, in which the city's historical part maintains the importance of a tourist attraction center and requires special attention in terms of rehabilitation and care-patronage, functional adaptation.

For new, modernized development of neighborhoods formed from the second half of the last century and the coastal zone, the introduction of local plans, scales, height and density limitation regulations is important. The city's future should be oriented toward preserving its appearance and refinement, satisfying the growing demands of the population, and improving the ecological environment; the city still faces the most complex task of proposing a strategic vision for spatial development, preserving the historical core, maintaining regular planning, and creating a balanced, artistically expressive architectural environment.

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