



PODEHL, Markus. *Architektura Kaliningrada. Wie aus Königsberg Kaliningrad wurde* (Materialen zur Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte Ostmitteleuropas, Bd. 1). Marburg: Verlag Herder-Institut, 2012. – 420 S. ISBN 978-3-87969-375-7

Vasilijus Safronovas  
Klaipėda University

218

'How Königsberg became Kaliningrad': the subheading, used already in Per Brodersen's book<sup>1</sup> several years ago, attracts attention to a work on the history of architecture whose cover boasts an allegory that seems to support the subheading: it is a piece of the retaining wall of the former Königsberg Castle terrace, which leads to... the never completed Palace of Soviets (*dom sovietov*). The author is Markus Podehl, who currently works as an architect, and who in 2010 defended his PhD thesis at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zürich (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule ETH Zürich). The dissertation turned out to be the basis of this book, characterised by an interdisciplinary combination of spatial and urban planning, landscape architecture, and historical approaches. The author is not a historian, which evidently accounts for the scarce references in the book, and the somewhat strangely arranged bibliography, where books by previous historians are considered as 'published sources'. However, in the monograph, the thoroughness typical of an historian is demonstrated by the collection and interpretation of material on the architecture and planning of individual buildings, spaces, city districts, and the city itself. It is no accident that the subject of the book, as defined in the introduction, is 'Kaliningrad's architectural forms and internal spatial relationships in plans and in reality' (p. 3).

The author's attempt to analyse the architecture of the city, which previously belonged to Germany, and now to Russia, with Immanuel Kant as its symbolic icon, is basically not new. The engineer Baldur Köster, the author of the controversially received project for the restoration of the historical building of Kneiphof Island, with its proudly rising Königsberg Cathedral, analysed the architectural heritage 'from German times' in detail in his book published in 2000, and simultaneously made a thorough presentation of his own idea of how to restore the building of Kneiphof Island.<sup>2</sup> Bert Hoppe, who evidently was the first to analyse the reconstruction plans for the city of Kaliningrad after the Second World War,<sup>3</sup> also wrote on the subject

<sup>1</sup> BRODERSEN, Per. *Die Stadt im Westen. Wie Königsberg Kaliningrad wurde*. Göttingen, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> KÖSTER, Baldur. *Königsberg. Architektur aus deutscher Zeit*. Husum, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> HOPPE, Bert. *Auf den Trümmern von Königsberg. Kaliningrad 1946–1970* (Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, Bd. 80). München, 2000; ХОППЕ, Берт. Борьба против вражеского

of Podehl's dissertation. However, no authors, including Russian researchers, have looked at Kaliningrad from the perspective that Podehl did.

The four main chapters of the book reveal the course of Kaliningrad's planning and restoration in the Soviet years. The master plans (*general'nyj plan*), that is, the principal documents on the planning of each Soviet city that provided for design solutions, and gave forecasts for the city's growth and development, a history of the development of the residential districts and micro-districts, the architectural features and central spaces of the city (such as, for example, the Central Square and the Palace of Soviets), and individual buildings, are all analysed. Although Podehl occasionally tends to return to previously analysed subjects (such as the debates on the demolition of Königsberg Castle in the late 1950s and 1960s), these subjects appear in the context of the little-known discourse of architectural and urban planning, and therefore do not look hackneyed. Particular attention is paid to the design of the Palace of Soviets: Podehl both reveals details of the design peripeteia and also presents some unexpected architectural analogies.

Moreover, unlike other authors who have written about the formation of the Soviet experiment in postwar Kaliningrad, including the above-mentioned Brodersen, Podehl in his book actually reveals the transformation of prewar Königsberg into Kaliningrad, and goes much further, by indicating the relationships between prewar and postwar urban planning. He does this by starting his story not in the year 1945, but in the period after the First World War (apart from a brief introduction to the situation before 1914) in Chapter One. He both discloses the genesis of the modernist architecture in Königsberg, and reveals and graphically presents the Nazi-era plans to form axial streets in the city.

The metamorphoses in the Soviet city are revealed by Podehl not only in words, as is traditionally done by historians, but also in pictures. The copious illustration of the book with photographs and graphic pictures (451 illustrations and one additional map!) undoubtedly contributes to the book's great value, by visualising the architectural details, volumes, spaces and wider urban structures discussed in the text.

Despite the ideas in the prologue, the very concept of *architektura Kaliningrada* (the architecture of Kaliningrad) remains somewhat 'detached' and is not conceptually revealed in the book, although the author claims to be the first person to define it. We can only guess that it could have been a unique combination of structures of the prewar architecture, Stalinist pseudo-historicism, and Soviet modernism in the city. If the author means this, one could ask what the difference is between *architektura Kaliningrada* and, for example, *architektura Minska*, *architektura Narvy*, or the archi-

220 | tecture of any other city. Ambitions to radically transform city centres manifested themselves in most cities of the USSR and the socialist bloc after the war. Similar combinations of urban structures are characteristic of more than one city. Probably the juxtaposition of Kaliningrad and other cities of the former East Prussia, and, no less importantly, the more clearly revealed relationship between changes in urban planning in Kaliningrad and the demographic and social transformations, would have allowed for a better exploration of the specificity of Kaliningrad. In comparison with other East Prussian cities, Kaliningrad (as well as many other cities in the Kaliningrad Oblast) stood out after the war by the fact that the demographic turning point experienced during the Second World War was 'compensated for' at the very end of the Soviet epoch. To compare the figures for the city's population in 1939 and 1989, it happens that Olsztyn (Allenstein) and Klaipėda (Memel) grew three or four times after the war, while the population in Kaliningrad increased by just 1.11 times. This might explain the author's statement that only in the master plans of 1981 and 1985 did 'the planning of the City of Kaliningrad reached the prewar planning scale' (p. 383).

Anyway, Podehl's study of the expression of the utopian city idea in Kaliningrad's urban structures makes a valuable contribution to the increasing amount of research in the city over recent years.