
Breaking with tradition: an analysis of post-totalitarian discourse in Ukrainian architecture and the search for a national style

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Abstract: This article explores the impact of Soviet architectural policy on the “rupture of tradition” in Ukraine, viewed as a key factor behind the crisis of national identity in contemporary architecture. The relevance of the topic is underscored by an intensified need for cultural self-identification amidst full-scale war and the necessity of forming a theoretical foundation for future postwar reconstruction [1, 2]. The article highlights the risk of further loss of uniqueness due to the uncritical adoption of globalized styles and emphasizes the importance of engaging with Ukraine’s own heritage to shape a distinct architectural identity.

A comprehensive comparative analysis is conducted on two key phases in the search for a national style in the 20th century. The phenomenon of Ukrainian modernism in the 1920s – early 1930s is examined as a powerful, though interrupted, attempt to restore Ukraine’s architectural agency through a synthesis of national principles and cutting-edge avant-garde ideas [3, 4]. The policies of socialist realism and subsequent stylistic unification are analyzed as tools for suppressing these efforts and institutionally dismantling the national architectural school [5, 6]. The architectural practices of the 1990s – 2000s are also investigated, characterized by stylistic fragmentation, retrospection, and eclecticism – manifestations of a post-traumatic condition [7, 8, 9].

The article argues that the stylistic fragmentation of contemporary Ukrainian architecture is a direct consequence of the historical trauma caused by the rupture of tradition. It stresses the necessity and possibility of overcoming this rupture by critically reinterpreting historical experience. Suggested paths toward the formation of a coherent modern national architecture involve not the direct replication of past forms, but the revival of the 1920s – 1930s methodological approach – a capacity for creative synthesis. The need for a systemic strategy to create a new style is emphasized, one that includes the development of a contemporary theoretical base and consideration of lessons from both historical stages. The article contributes to understanding the deep-seated causes of crisis phenomena in modern Ukrainian architecture and offers a conceptual framework for its future development rooted in a unique national heritage.

Keywords: post-totalitarian discourse, socialist urbanism, standardized design, national identity, breaking with tradition.

1. Introduction

Russia’s full-scale military aggression against Ukraine, ongoing since 2022, represents not only a struggle for territorial integrity but also a war for the very existence of Ukrainian national identity [1]. In such conditions, every element of culture assumes exceptional significance, and architecture – being the most monumental and enduring form of material culture – emerges as one of the key arenas for asserting national distinctiveness [10, 11]. The deliberate destruction by Russian forces of Ukrainian architectural heritage, regardless of its style or era, underscores that the aggressor perceives the built environment as a critical ideological front [1, 2]. This existential threat has sharpened the need within Ukrainian society for a clear cultural self-identification and a final rupture with imperial and Soviet legacies.

Yet this acute need for architectural self-identification confronts a profound internal challenge – the consequences of the Soviet “rupture of tradition” and the stylistic fragmentation that characterized the architecture of the independence period [3, 7, 8]. This generates a paradoxical situation: at a moment when public demand for a distinct and recognizable Ukrainian architecture is at its peak, the professional community lacks a unified, well-developed theoretical foundation to respond to this call. There is a tangible risk that the future postwar reconstruction – absent a strong ideological framework – may repeat the errors of the 1990s – 2000s, once again dissolving into chaotic citation of the past or uncritical adoption of global trends.

This is precisely why critical analysis of the historical trajectory of twentieth-century Ukrainian architecture is acquiring not only academic, but exceptional ideological and cultural relevance. Understanding how and why the successful attempt to forge a modern national style in the 1920s – 1930s was interrupted – and why the efforts of the 1990s – 2000s proved so fragmented – is a necessary prerequisite to ensure that postwar rebuilding does not become another chapter of stylistic uncertainty. Rather, it should lay the foundation for a coherent, contemporary, and authentic national architecture – one that will embody the resilience and unbreakable spirit of the Ukrainian people.

The central idea of this article is that, in order to shape a coherent modern national architectural identity and establish a theoretical basis for meaningful postwar reconstruction, it is imperative – especially given the need to comprehend the consequences of Soviet totalitarianism that suppressed two distinct periods of stylistic inquiry – to conduct a comparative analysis of the modernist explorations of the 1920s – 1930s and the postmodernist attempts of the 1990s – 2000s. Only then can we uncover the deep causes of the “rupture of tradition” and formulate pathways to overcome it in the future.

2. Object and subject of research

Object of the Study The process of formation and transformation of national architectural identity in Ukraine throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, shaped by political and ideological ruptures.

Subject of the Study The breaking with tradition in Ukrainian architecture as a historical phenomenon and its influence on the contemporary post-totalitarian architectural discourse. The subject includes a comparative analysis of two key stages in the search for a national style:

1. Ukrainian modernism of the 1920s–early 1930s as an attempt to restore architectural subjectivity through the synthesis of national principles and avant-garde ideas;
2. Architectural practices of the 1990s–2000s as an expression of a post-traumatic condition characterized by stylistic fragmentation, retrospectivism, and eclecticism.

The subject also encompasses an analysis of Soviet architectural policy (Socialist Realism, standardization) as a tool of denationalization and the principal cause of this rupture.

3. Target of research

The aim of this article is to investigate the impact of Soviet architectural policy on the rupture with national tradition through a comparative analysis of two key phases in the search for national identity: Ukrainian urbanism of the 1920s – early 1930s and architectural practices of the 1990s – 2000s. This approach makes it possible to identify the root causes of the fragmentation characterizing contemporary efforts to develop a national style and to substantiate pathways for overcoming the consequences of this historical discontinuity.

In accordance with this aim, the article pursues the following objectives:

To examine the phenomenon of Ukrainian urbanism and architecture of the 1920s – early 1930s as an attempt to shape a modern national identity;

To analyze the policy of Socialist Realism and subsequent unification as tools for suppressing avant-garde explorations and as a primary cause of the “rupture of tradition”;

To conduct a comparative analysis of the architectural practices of the 1990s – 2000s with those of the 1920s – 1930s, highlighting differences in approaches to the “return of the national”;

To substantiate how a critical reassessment of both historical periods and their consequences can contribute to the development of a coherent, contemporary national architecture.

4. Literature analysis

The problem of shaping a national architectural identity in twentieth-century Ukraine has become a subject of growing scholarly interest, particularly in light of contemporary challenges and the urgent need to reassess Ukraine’s cultural heritage [1, 10, 12]. An analysis of the existing body of research reveals the depth of study devoted to specific historical periods and aspects, which provides a solid foundation for a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon of architectural discontinuity.

A significant corpus of scholarly literature is devoted to the 1920s – early 1930s, regarded as a unique phase in the development of Ukrainian culture. Researchers widely agree that this era marked an unprecedented flourishing of Ukrainian art and architecture [13]. In particular, Svitlana Smolenska argues that Kharkiv, as the first capital of Soviet Ukraine, became a genuine epicenter of modernism – a “vast experimental platform” for the implementation of the most advanced ideas [13, 14]. Her study of the international competition for the Kharkiv theater design in 1930 demonstrates the high professional caliber of the Ukrainian architectural school and its integration into the global avant-garde movement [15]. This thesis is also supported by works analyzing specific typologies – such as workers’ clubs – which became arenas for the triumph of modernism over archaic tendencies [16]. Studies examining Ukrainian modernism as a phenomenon inseparable from the quest for national self-identification are particularly important for understanding the intellectual foundations of this period [3]. Unlike Western modernism, the Ukrainian variant often combined avant-garde experimentation with reinterpretations of its own heritage, particularly folk art and Ukrainian Baroque [3, 17, 18]. These processes were catalyzed by the policy of Ukrainization which, coupled with urbanization, created unique conditions for the emergence of a modern urban Ukrainian identity, as detailed in the seminal work of George Liber [4].

The subsequent ideological shift in the late 1920s – 1930s and the turn toward Socialist Realism has also been thoroughly addressed in scholarship. Danylo Udovytshy-Selbh analyzes this transformation as a protracted and complex struggle rather than a single event, revealing the mechanisms of Stalinization through the creation of party-controlled professional organizations such as VOPRA [5]. Fabien Bellat, working with Ukrainian material, shows how this policy led to the marginalization of national architects and the erasure of authentic heritage, particularly in the postwar reconstruction of Kyiv [1]. The institutional dimension is explored by Andriy Puchkov, who examines the 1955 reorganization of the Academy of Architecture into the Academy of Construction and Architecture, which shifted the emphasis from art to purely utilitarian and industrial objectives [6]. The transition to standardized construction and its implications for national traditions are also addressed by Stanislav Zosim and colleagues [10]. Lithuanian scholar Vaidotas Petrulis offers a theoretical model for understanding Soviet architectural policy as a tool of totalitarian control, implemented through bureaucratization and state domination of the design process [11].

The architectural developments of the 1990s – 2000s, which constitute the second focus of this study, are represented mostly by works dedicated to sacred and residential construction. Roman Frankiv and Michał Janocha view this period as one of eclectic and fragmented identity-seeking in church architecture, marked by both free-form expression and borrowings from various historical styles (Neo-Byzantine, Neo-Baroque), often reflecting particular confessional or ideological stances [7, 8]. The study of residential construction in Poltava by Stanislav Zosim and Volodymyr Nikolenko reveals similar processes in civilian architecture: the proliferation of pseudo-historicism, the absence of a unified stylistic vector, and the chaotic formation of urban environments [9].

A separate body of research that underscores the relevance of the topic focuses on issues of heritage preservation and historical memory. Fabien Bellat, Mariya Rusanova, and Oleksandr

Maimeskul analyze how selective approaches to heritage and wartime destruction threaten the architectural integrity of Ukrainian cities [1, 2]. In his article, Alex Bykov highlights the catastrophic condition of architectural archives in Ukraine, pointing to “blind spots” in scholarship and the challenges they pose for researchers [19].

This review of scholarship not only confirms the substantial development of individual aspects of the topic but also allows for the formulation of the conceptual and categorical framework on which the present study is based. The central concept is the “rupture of tradition,” which in this article is understood not merely as a stylistic shift but as a complex process of political, ideological, and institutional suppression of the development of a national architectural school – a process that began in the late 1920s – 1930s and persisted throughout the Soviet period [1, 5, 6]. This process aimed to eradicate “architectural subjectivity” – the right and actual capacity of the national community to act as the autonomous creator of its own built environment. While the 1920s – 1930s, under the policy of Ukrainization, witnessed a rapid reestablishment of this subjectivity [4, 14], subsequent Soviet policies intentionally nullified it, reducing Ukrainian architects to executors of an imposed will [1].

The intellectual and practical context that emerged after the collapse of the USSR is referred to in this study as the “post-totalitarian discourse.” It is within this discursive field that architecture of the 1990s – 2000s took shape, largely as a reaction to the Soviet legacy [7, 8, 11]. This reaction was deeply conditioned by “historical trauma” – the enduring consequences of the violent “rupture of tradition” [1, 2]. Addressing this trauma occurs within the framework of “collective memory,” which in Ukraine constitutes a contested space of competing historical narratives and ambiguous attitudes toward the Soviet past [1]. The architectural manifestation of these complex processes in the 1990s – 2000s was “stylistic fragmentation” – a phenomenon characterized by the absence of a unified stylistic direction, eclectic use of historical references, individualistic experimentation, and chaotic design decisions. These tendencies are evident in both sacred and residential architecture of the period [7, 8, 9].

5. Research methods

The methodological foundation of this study is based on a comprehensive approach that combines general scientific and specialized methods of inquiry aimed at achieving the stated goal and addressing the research objectives.

1. The comparative historical method serves as the principal tool of the study. It is applied to conduct an in-depth comparative analysis of two key stages in the search for a national architectural style in Ukraine: the modernist efforts of the 1920s–early 1930s and the postmodernist attempts of the 1990s–2000s. This method enables the identification of fundamental differences in approaches to the “return of the national,” as well as their underlying causes and consequences.

2. The historical-genetic (diachronic) method is used to trace the sequential evolution of architectural processes in Ukraine. It facilitates the exploration of the genesis of the breaking with tradition phenomenon, analyzing how the policies of Socialist Realism and subsequent standardization systematically suppressed national architectural aspirations rooted in the previous era.

3. Historiographical analysis is employed in the first chapter to examine the state of scholarly research on the issue. This method enabled the systematization of existing academic literature, the identification of key theoretical approaches to studying various periods of twentieth-century Ukrainian architecture, and the formulation of the study’s conceptual and terminological framework.

4. Conceptual analysis is used to define and substantiate the key terms of the research, such as breaking with tradition, architectural subjectivity, post-totalitarian discourse, and stylistic fragmentation.

5. The method of systemic analysis and synthesis allowed the integration of findings obtained at different stages of the study into a unified conceptual framework. Through this method, the thesis of stylistic fragmentation in contemporary Ukrainian architecture as a direct consequence of historical

trauma was substantiated. On the basis of synthesizing the lessons of both historical periods, the study proposes pathways for the development of a coherent contemporary national architecture.

6. Research results

Ukrainian Modernism of the 1920s – Early 1930s: Reclaiming Architectural Subjectivity in the Interwar Period. The phenomenon of Ukrainian modernism in the 1920s – early 1930s represents a unique cultural episode inextricably linked to the specific historical context of the time. The policy of korenizatsiya (Ukrainization), coinciding with the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP), created favorable socio-political conditions for the rapid development of national culture, which began actively shaping its modern identity [3, 4]. During this time, after centuries of being relegated to a provincial adaptation of imperial styles, Ukrainian architecture launched a powerful attempt to restore its architectural subjectivity – the right and capacity to be an autonomous, forward-looking creator of its built environment. This process aligned with broader European avant-garde currents yet bore distinct national characteristics [3].

The epicenter of these transformations was Kharkiv, which served as the capital of the Ukrainian SSR from 1919 to 1934 and emerged as one of the largest industrial, cultural, and educational hubs of the USSR [14, 20]. The city's unprecedented growth and capital status necessitated new urban planning solutions and new building typologies, turning Kharkiv into a “gigantic experimental platform” for the realization of cutting-edge modernist ideas [13]. Unlike the more traditionalist Kyiv, Kharkiv became the stage for the fiercest creative battles, culminating in the official recognition of modernism as the dominant architectural trend in 1928 [14, 16]. It was a conscious choice in favor of the future rather than the past.

The revival of architectural subjectivity was not about isolation but about entering into active and equal dialogue with the global avant-garde. Ukrainian professional journals such as *Nova Heneratsiia* and *Budivnytstvo* regularly featured the achievements of European architects, including the Bauhaus, while Ukrainian architects participated in major international exhibitions [13]. This was a process of mutual intellectual exchange, not one-sided imitation. However, such dialogue also provoked internal debate. Within Ukraine's architectural community, various factions emerged: some, like the Society of Contemporary Architects of Ukraine (TSAU), aimed to integrate national features, while others, such as the All-Ukrainian Association of Proletarian Architects (VUTOPARKH), leaned toward internationalist styles [16]. This tension between national and international aspirations became the driving force of Ukrainian modernism's uniqueness. While critics at the time accused some architects of excessive reliance on international functionalism at the expense of themes established in the earlier Ukrainian architectural modern [17, 18], this direction was a deliberate choice by those who envisioned Ukraine's future as aligned with the global progressive movement.

The boldest architectural innovations of the period manifested in public architecture – especially in the construction of workers' clubs, which became symbols of a new era and a new social consciousness [16]. Kharkiv saw the rise of numerous such buildings, where architects from the “old school,” like O. Beketov (Club “Metalist”), began adapting to a new architectural language, and emerging voices like Y. Shteinberg, I. Milinis, and I. Maloziomov (Builders' Club) created radical constructivist compositions [16]. These buildings reveal how a new architectural expression was forged through creative tensions between constructivism and rationalism.

The high point and unequivocal proof of restored architectural subjectivity came with the 1930 international competition in Kharkiv for the State Ukrainian Theater of Mass Musical Drama. This world-class event, which drew around 100 submissions from nine European countries, the U.S., and Japan, demonstrated that Ukraine was capable not only of absorbing but of generating architectural ideas of the highest caliber [15]. The awarding of a top prize to a group of young Kharkiv architects – including Y. Shteinberg, V. Kostenko, M. Movshovych, and others – on par with celebrated figures

such as Walter Gropius, testified to the maturity and competitiveness of the Ukrainian modernist school [3, 15].

Thus, the architecture of Ukraine in the 1920s – early 1930s stands as evidence of a successful and vigorous attempt to reclaim national architectural subjectivity. This effort did not rely on replicating the past, but on creating a new modern identity – Ukrainian in its essence and context, international in its language and aspirations. The conscious dialogue with the European avant-garde was not a mark of inferiority, but rather a sign of strength and openness – a readiness to engage, as equals, in shaping the architecture of the future. This unique project was abruptly interrupted at its peak, setting the stage for the later “rupture of tradition.”

Breaking with Tradition: Soviet Architectural Policy as an Instrument of Denationalization.

The flourishing of Ukrainian modernism – marked by the reestablishment of Ukraine’s architectural subjectivity – was tragically and artificially interrupted in the early 1930s. This process, referred to in this study as the “breaking with tradition”, was not a natural stylistic evolution but the result of a deliberate policy by the Soviet totalitarian regime, which weaponized architecture as one of its most powerful tools of ideological control and denationalization. The shift in architectural paradigms from avant-garde to Socialist Realism, and eventually to wholesale standardization, suppressed unique national explorations and deprived Ukrainian architecture of its voice for decades.

The transition from modernism to Socialist Realism was not a sudden decree but a prolonged and complex process. As Danylo Udovytshy-Selb points out, the Stalinization of Soviet architecture unfolded over nearly a decade and was accompanied by sharp debates and resistance from within the professional community [5]. One key instrument of party control was the creation of state-directed organizations such as the All-Union Association of Proletarian Architects (VOPRA), which, paradoxically, initially used modernist rhetoric in its campaign against fellow avant-gardists [5]. The final blow came with the 1932 resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) “On the Reorganization of Literary and Artistic Organizations,” which abolished all independent creative groups and declared Socialist Realism the sole permitted method [3]. This decree transformed architecture from a field of creative experimentation into a tool of state propaganda [11].

In the multiethnic Soviet Union, this new policy acquired a distinctly denationalizing character. The formula of Socialist Realism – “national in form, socialist in content” – became, in practice, a mechanism for leveling and subordinating national cultures. “National form” was reduced to isolated, often superficial folkloric motifs (ornamentation, elements of folk art) overlaid onto standardized, monumental, classicist structures modeled on imperial Russian precedents. This is starkly illustrated in the postwar reconstruction of Kyiv, analyzed by Fabien Bellat. Proposals by Ukrainian architects to develop national traditions, particularly Ukrainian Baroque, were dismissed as expressions of “bourgeois nationalism,” and leadership of the city’s reconstruction was transferred to Moscow-based architects who implemented a pompous Stalinist Empire style [1]. As a result, Ukrainian professionals were relegated to the “unenviable role of bystanders” in their own capital – a direct manifestation of the loss of architectural subjectivity [1]. This architectural marginalization unfolded in tandem with the broader political rollback of Ukrainization, as George Liber demonstrates: the creation of a modern urban Ukrainian nation was increasingly perceived by the regime as a direct threat to its centralized authority [4].

If Stalinist Socialist Realism still allowed some space for monumentality and distorted ornamentation, the next phase of Soviet architectural policy – initiated by the 1955 decree “On Eliminating Excesses in Design and Construction” – pushed architecture toward full standardization. This policy, which championed industrialization, cost-efficiency, and functionality, resulted in the widespread adoption of standardized designs [6, 10]. Architecture ceased to be an art and was reduced to a branch of construction. This shift was institutionalized when the Ukrainian SSR’s Academy of Architecture was reorganized into the Academy of Construction and Architecture, shifting the focus from artistic and historical research to engineering and technical tasks [6].

The outcome was a monotonous, impersonal built environment that left no space for the expression of Ukrainian national identity. Standardized residential districts erected in Kyiv, Lviv, or Dnipro were indistinguishable from those in Ryazan or Novosibirsk [11, 21]. The architect was reduced to a “cog” in a vast bureaucratic system of state design institutes, where adherence to codes and norms mattered more than uniqueness or contextual sensitivity [11]. The only permitted expressions of the national were surface-level – such as ornamentation on prefabricated panel buildings – but these could not compensate for the loss of a holistic national architectural image [10].

Thus, Soviet architectural policy – particularly during the Stalinist and post-Stalinist periods – functioned as a consistent and effective mechanism of denationalization. It suppressed the unique avant-garde explorations of the 1920s – 1930s, replacing them first with an ideologically imposed imperial style and later with the depersonalized language of standardized construction. This process not only physically altered the face of Ukrainian cities but also inflicted deep trauma upon the professional consciousness, severing generational continuity among architects and halting the organic development of a national architectural tradition. It is precisely this “breaking with tradition” that formed the substrate upon which the complex and fragmented search for a lost identity resumed in the 1990s – 2000s.

Architecture at a Crossroads: Searching for Identity in the 1990s – 2000s. The attainment of independence in 1991 placed Ukrainian architecture at a critical crossroads. After decades of total ideological control and impersonal standardized development [11], the professional community gained the freedom to pursue unrestrained creative exploration. However, this process unfolded within a context of profound ideological vacuum and economic crisis, both of which significantly influenced architectural practice [9]. Liberation from Soviet design canon forced architects to choose: either engage in the arduous work of developing a new, authentically Ukrainian architectural style that met contemporary challenges, or pursue more convenient paths – direct citation of historical forms or adoption of global commercial trends. A survey of the first two decades of independence suggests that, in most cases, the latter approaches prevailed.

Sacral architecture – revived after decades of prohibition [8] – became the most telling domain of identity-seeking. Yet instead of producing a coherent new stylistic language, this wave of construction immediately revealed profound fragmentation. On one hand, Lviv witnessed the emergence of “emotional modernism,” where architects, freed from canonical constraints, created unique, expressive, and deeply individualistic structures [7]. These bold experiments, however, remained a series of isolated authorial statements and failed to consolidate into a school or unified movement. On the other – and far more widespread – end of the spectrum, the quest for identity took the form of directly reproducing historical styles. As M. Janocha notes, the choice of model – whether Ukrainian Baroque or Kyivan Rus architecture – was often less a creative act than an ideological declaration of confessional affiliation [8]. This amounted to a retreat from the difficult task of crafting a modern sacred language in favor of familiar, time-tested forms.

In civic architecture, these tendencies became even more pronounced. Urban centers saw a proliferation of “pseudo-historicism” – attempts to mimic classical urban forms using contemporary materials, often resulting in kitsch and disproportionate buildings [9]. Simultaneously, Ukrainian architecture became rapidly entangled in globalization, absorbing elements of Western postmodernism uncritically. This style – with its irony, playfulness, and citation – became a convenient substitute for the more demanding quest to articulate distinct Ukrainian architectural meanings [10]. As a result, many buildings emerged devoid of regional specificity, indistinguishable from developments anywhere in the world. Rather than seeking Ukrainian answers to global challenges, architects too often imported globalized solutions – deepening the erosion of national distinctiveness.

When compared to the architectural practices of the 1920s – 1930s, the approaches of the 1990s – 2000s reveal a fundamental divergence in how architects conceptualized the “return to the national.” Although both periods were marked by intense identity-seeking, their trajectories and results were diametrically opposed.

The first critical distinction lies in the absence of a conscious effort to construct a new, authentically Ukrainian style in the post-Soviet era. Whereas the modernists of the 1920s – 1930s deliberately set out to forge a forward-looking identity through synthesis of national traditions and the global avant-garde [3, 13], architectural thinking in the 1990s – 2000s was largely retrospective – characterized by quotation rather than synthesis, reproduction rather than innovation. Unlike the systematic and programmatic approach of the earlier period, grounded in robust theoretical discourse and urban planning [14, 16], the post-Soviet era was marked by deep fragmentation and a lack of unifying stylistic vision [7].

The second distinction concerns the relationship with global architectural discourse. The Ukrainian avant-garde of the 1920s – 1930s participated in international dialogue on equal footing – it absorbed global ideas and generated its own, affirming its architectural subjectivity [15]. By contrast, the 1990s – 2000s often cast Ukrainian architecture as a passive consumer of global trends. Immersion in commercial postmodernism offered a path of least resistance – one that did not require profound reflection on national identity. This was not a display of strength, but of vulnerability – a failure to counter globalism with a uniquely Ukrainian and competitive architectural product.

Thus, identity-seeking in the architecture of the 1990s – 2000s, while a meaningful response to the Soviet past, revealed a profound crisis rooted in breaking with tradition and historical trauma. The lack of continuous professional experience and theoretical foundations meant that, rather than creating a new national style, architects largely resorted to retrospective stylization and uncritical assimilation of global tendencies. The fundamental contrast between the two eras lies in orientation: the 1920s – 1930s looked toward the future with an ambition to create, while the 1990s – 2000s looked to the past in an effort to reproduce. This stylistic and ideological fragmentation became the visible symptom of a deep historical wound.

Post-Totalitarian Discourse in Ukrainian Architecture: Stylistic Fragmentation as a Consequence of Historical Trauma. The stylistic fragmentation identified in previous sections as characteristic of architectural exploration in the 1990s – 2000s is not a self-contained phenomenon; it is a direct consequence of historical trauma. This trauma stems from the violent breaking with tradition executed by the Soviet totalitarian system, which deprived Ukrainian architecture not merely of a style but of the very mechanism of its natural evolution and self-replication [1, 5, 11]. As a result, the contemporary architectural landscape of Ukraine reveals a fundamental problem: a coherent national style remains unrealized, and attempts to formulate one – unfolding within the post-totalitarian discourse – remain scattered. This condition clearly demonstrates that overcoming the legacy of rupture requires more than creative freedom; it demands a profound critical reassessment of the entire historical trajectory.

The attempt to construct a new national identity in the 1920s – 1930s, despite its artistic strength and international recognition [13, 15], ultimately failed to produce a resilient, self-sustaining tradition capable of resisting ideological suppression. Its eradication in the early 1930s was not simply the banning of the avant-garde – it was the elimination of the precedent for successfully restoring architectural subjectivity [4]. This elimination generated an intellectual and methodological void, against which the identity-seeking of the 1990s – 2000s began. In the absence of living continuity, architects were compelled to reproduce rather than create. As demonstrated, this gave rise to two main strategies: retreat into quotations of historical forms (Neo-Baroque, Neo-Byzantine), an attempt to find a ready-made “language” in the distant past [8]; or individualistic experimentation that, lacking a common theoretical foundation, failed to consolidate into a coherent movement [7].

The foundation for developing a coherent contemporary national architecture lies in the critical comparison of these two incomplete projects. The experience of the 1990s – 2000s illustrates that mechanical reproduction of historical forms or uncritical adoption of global trends cannot produce an authentic style; rather, it exacerbates fragmentation by substituting imitation for creativity [9, 10]. At the same time, the lesson of the 1920s – 1930s resides not in their forms – which are neither possible nor necessary to replicate – but in their method. This was a method of bold synthesis: one that

confidently combined national principles (spatial, compositional, landscape-based) with the most advanced global technologies and ideas [3, 12, 17].

Such an approach, grounded in deep analysis rather than surface-level stylization, may guide the emergence of a new architectural language. It entails moving from the citation of isolated elements to the reinterpretation of fundamental principles of Ukrainian architecture – particularly its capacity to integrate organically with the landscape and to generate unique spatial solutions [12]. In this light, the formation of a coherent contemporary national architecture becomes possible not through imitation of specific historical models but through the restoration of the very capacity for systematic style formation. This demands a critical rethinking of the entire architectural heritage – both its interrupted avant-garde ascent and its post-traumatic fragmentation – as the soil from which a living, resilient national architectural tradition may yet emerge.

7. Prospects for further research development

The present study opens up several promising avenues for further scholarly inquiry, aimed at deepening the understanding of the problem of breaking with tradition and identifying strategies to overcome it within Ukrainian architecture:

1. In-depth exploration of regional specificities. While this article concentrates on nationwide trends—with a focus on Kharkiv as the modernist capital of the 1920s–1930s—subsequent studies could pursue comparative analyses of architectural processes in different regions of Ukraine (Kyiv, Lviv, Dnipro, Odesa). Such investigations would reveal how overarching national movements (modernism, Socialist Realism, and the identity-seeking of the 1990s) manifested in local contexts and interacted with regional schools and traditions.

2. Development of a contemporary theoretical framework. The article emphasizes the need for a modern theoretical basis for a new architectural style. This highlights a direction for theoretical research focused on formulating specific principles and methodological approaches that—drawing from the experience of the 1920s–1930s—could underpin postwar reconstruction and foster a contemporary Ukrainian architecture that synthesizes national foundations with innovative solutions.

3. Typological studies of building forms. The current work primarily addresses sacred and residential architecture of the independence period. Further studies could examine the quest for a national style across other building typologies constructed after 1991—particularly public, administrative, and commercial architecture—to present a more comprehensive picture of stylistic exploration.

8. Conclusions

The conducted study, aimed at examining the impact of Soviet architectural policy on the breaking with national tradition through a comparative analysis of key stages in the search for architectural identity in twentieth-century Ukraine, has led to a series of conclusions that address the outlined objectives:

1. It has been established that Ukrainian urbanism and architecture of the 1920s – early 1930s constituted a powerful attempt to restore Ukraine's architectural subjectivity. This phenomenon was characterized by a deliberate synthesis of national ideas and cutting-edge global avant-garde currents. Its epicenter was Kharkiv – the then capital – which became an experimental platform for the creation of a new, modern identity, as evidenced by the high caliber of projects submitted to international competitions [4, 13, 15].

2. The study has shown that the policy of Socialist Realism, followed by total standardization and typified design, functioned as a deliberate instrument of denationalization. It led to the suppression of avant-garde explorations, marginalization of national architects, and an institutional and stylistic breaking with tradition that physically and ideologically reshaped Ukrainian cities, subordinating them to imperial models [1, 5, 6].

3. It was found that the architectural practices of the 1990s – 2000s, in contrast to those of the 1920s – 1930s, were characterized by a retrospective approach and stylistic fragmentation. Rather than creating a new, coherent style, they were dominated by direct citation of historical forms, eclectic combinations thereof, and uncritical adoption of global trends – manifestations of historical trauma and the loss of professional continuity [7, 8, 9].

4. The study substantiates that the path toward a coherent contemporary national architecture lies through a critical rethinking of the consequences of this historical rupture. Overcoming stylistic fragmentation requires turning to the methodological experience of the 1920s – 1930s, which offers a productive model of synthesis between national principles and innovative solutions – rather than imitation. Such an approach could serve as the foundation for restoring architectural subjectivity and fostering an authentic architecture of the future [3, 10, 12].

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