

# Modelling Yerevan in Latvian Printed Media (the 1940s–1990s)

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**Abstract** This paper examines how, through specific categories of experience, memory and imagination, people interpret and mentally visualise physical environments. It brings together depictions of Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, as found in Latvian periodicals printed from the 1940s to the 1990s by Latvian visitors. The study explores perceptions and representations of the city associated with an unfamiliar urban area by an observer who consciously or unconsciously selects, prioritises, and interprets the significance of the observed. By employing thematic analysis as a methodology, the research identifies patterns and themes that uncover a multi-layered image of the city showcasing its unique architecture, historical landmarks, and vibrant cultural scene within its cultural and historical context.

The portrayal of Yerevan in Latvian printed media during the Soviet era, influenced by censorship and propaganda, was characterised by stereotypes and framed through monumentalism and advancement, making it somewhat monolithic. Although visitors' experiences and perceptions were seemingly subjective and individualised, in reality, being so-called "socialist experiences", they were meant to represent the interests of the Soviet power and a unified Soviet worldview. However, the homogeneous model of Yerevan gradually transformed as a greater number of articles highlighted previously overlooked or fragmented aspects and cultural markers related to the most important archetypes of national identity, including its spiritual heritage and sacred architecture. Thus, the "foreign" (communist) metatext was gradually deconstructed and replaced by "one's own" (national) metatext which testifies to the city's capacity for introspection and renewal through intellectual experience. The sensory experiences of the city (colours, shapes, sounds, smells, etc.) have consistently been vividly depicted, showcasing it as a distinctive and multifaceted cultural environment.

**Keywords** city; cultural model; mental map; perceptions; periodicals; tangible and intangible culture

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## I. Introduction

The diversity of definitions and approaches to the concept of “city” testifies to the versatility and multifacetedness of the phenomenon and its perception. The city (from Latin—*cīvitās*<sup>1</sup>) is one of the most impressive and significant inventions and creations of the human mind (Mumford) that needs to be considered by its value-semantic aspect (Remm). As an absorbing object of study of various disciplines, the city manifests itself as not only an area with defined boundaries and a structural unit of an administrative-territorial division but also as a representation of urban lifestyle

1 From *cīvis*—a citizen, native.

and an entity with specific socio-cultural features that exists in time (temporality) and space (spatiality) and is subject to change (dynamics) (Fedorenko and Kolos; Remm). Although the city is typically seen as “unnatural” (Palmer 130), it may be perceived as an expression of creativity, since it is the people who, through their participation (and by the diversity of subjective experiences, perceptions, reflections and associations), model its socio-cultural reality. “In terms of modelling capacity, urban space is the model, its own object, its own material and a creative application of (partial) self-models in the society. Therefore, the city together with its spatiality and agentic capacity could be regarded as a self-sustaining modelling phenomenon” (Remm 125). Being semiotic (having attributed meanings and created spatial forms to signify or be a sign of something), the city becomes a mechanism “forever recreating its past, which then can be synchronically juxtaposed with the present” (Lotman “Universe of the Mind...” 195).

Among the modellers of city’s socio-cultural reality are reporters and journalists who may present objective or subjective perceptions of its geographic space. In addition, cities’ coverage pattern in periodicals and other mass media channels is influenced by a range of diverse factors, including socio-political, economic, cultural, and others. Portrayals of a city affect the perceptions of its inhabitants, visitors and non-visitors on the local, national and international levels; however, “the ‘reality’ that the media transfers from distant places is conceptualised as the places’ ‘objective’ or ‘true’ reality by those who do not live there” (Avraham). The impact of information on the opinion of non-visitors is the most powerful, as they experience a city and construct place images without travelling there; therefore, the more accurate the information, the more precise people’s perceptions will be.

Presentations of place as not merely a matter of geographical/physical boundaries but a spatial matrix consisting of different time layers, city codes (primal significations within the frame of the phenomenology of perception (Merleau-Ponty)), and impressions form the public opinion and view. The primary knowledge of the world around us is obtained through images, senses, and sensations which help structure and identify the environment (Sepe). One’s own and others’ visual, sound, smell, taste, and tactile perceptions of the spatial dimension of the city impact the development of mental maps of the spaces (Lynch) or cognitive maps (Kaplan). Mental mapping—defined as the “outcome of conceptualisation of space, places, buildings and other features and their interrelations through specific categories of memory and imagination achieved through sensorimotor and emotional experiences” (Błahut 48)—is a process of combining perceptions and associations characterised by specific meanings. Encountering the city and

modelling its image on the basis of mental maps “allows us to determine urban landmarks” that are viewed as most typical by its visitors, as well as “places that have been ignored in their notion of the city” (Osóch and Czaplínska 112).

This paper synthesises images of Yerevan as depicted in Latvian Soviet periodicals in the 1940s–1990s. Representations of the city space modelled by its Latvian visitors are approached as views on the city “from the outside” or from “others” (i.e. non-Armenians), presenting observations and experiences that create, broadcast and replicate the image of the little-known city for Latvian readers (mostly non-visitors). These representations include reporters’ and journalists’ own experiences as well as those presented in interviews with factory workers, sportsmen, musicians, students, and other “Soviet people” (*homo sovieticus* who, through their attitudes and perceptions, responded to the rules of the system they were forced to navigate) after their visit to Yerevan. The study examines perceptions of the city in the frame of the formal ideology of the Communist Party and Soviet-era writing standards to determine the dynamic changes in the urban landscape and the most positively perceived signs<sup>1</sup> of the city that constitute the model of it constructed by outsiders.

The portrayal of one country in the press of the other was impacted by the fact that both Armenia and Latvia were Soviet Socialist Republics at the time and were a part of the “union of peoples”—a multinational community defined by the concept of “friendship of peoples” and presented as a happy Soviet family (Hornsby 236). After Latvia’s Soviet occupation (1940), a change of political power, and the formation of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (1940–1941; 1944/5–1990), the country was deliberately exposed to Soviet ideology and propaganda until the middle of the 1980s, when a significant series of economic and political reforms known as *perestroika* [restructuring] and *glasnost* [transparency] policy commenced (Nollendorfs and Ščerbinskis) evoking also the Third Awakening<sup>2</sup> in Latvia.

After the end of World War II and for decades to come, especially with the onset of the Cold War and the descent of the Iron Curtain, the communist regime

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1 Signs act as modelling systems shaping our perception and understanding of reality. According to Juri Lotman’s semiotic theory, a sign is more than just a representation; it’s a dynamic entity embedded within culture and history, constantly interacting with other signs and shaping meaning (Lotman “Ljudi i znaki”).

2 The First National Awakening is the period in the second half of the nineteenth century when Latvian ethno-cultural awareness (Latvianness) and national identity were forged. The Second National Awakening refers to the establishment of the independent statehood in 1918. The Third National Awakening resulted in the restoration of independence of the Republic of Latvia after 50 years of Soviet occupation.

limited not only freedom of movement but also freedom of speech. Official periodicals were controlled by the authorities of the Soviet power; they were strictly censored and did not permit any plurality of opinion. They were oriented towards suppressing national identity and the unification of ethnic groups and their culture to develop the Soviet Socialist nation: “To propagate the socialist ideas all social and cultural activities were subordinated to Communist ideology and the control of the Communist Party. Local authorities followed the patterns and schemes and employed the methods and strategies which were approved by the regime officials in the metropolis of the USSR—Moscow” (Badina et al. 122).

Under Soviet power, relations between Latvia (then the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR), 1940–1941; 1944/5–1990) and Armenia (then the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), 1920–1991) were based on value-normative regulators of social behaviour established by the regime and tools for sovietisation, including those in relation to representation of everyday Soviet life and Soviet-style cities.

## II. The Soviet Image of Yerevan in Latvia

In most of the Latvian periodicals published in the 1940s–1990s, Yerevan is presented as both ancient and a modern city whose history dates back to the seventh century BCE (“Armenijas Mākslas darbinieku nams”; Nadirjans)—a city that is around 2000 years older than Riga<sup>1</sup> (Gordons “No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 2750–750”). Although the year Yerevan was founded is often given inaccurately in the studied accounts and differs from one article to the next, mentions of an ancient Erebuni fortress<sup>2</sup> as the beginning of the city in 782 BCE can be found (Gūtmane). Characterised by such metaphors and epithets as “a giant quickly growing out of the old skirt” and “a rosy youthful city” (Nadirjans 2), Yerevan is mainly presented within the binary opposition of “past” vs. “present” where the past, taking into consideration the specificity of the epoch, is related to stagnation (“smallness”, “darkness”, “dirtiness”, “poverty”, “suffering”, and “decay”) or partially rejected (Emins “Mūsu Erevāna”), whereas the present is associated with dynamics and growth (“monumentalism”, “light”, “beauty”, and “joy”) and everything “new”: “‘Nor’ [նոր]—‘new’; this word in the contemporary Armenian dictionary of frequency could be one of the most often used. Nor Nork [...], Nor Marasha, Nor Butania, Nor Aresh, [...] Nor Arabkir, Nor Sebastia [...]” (Gordons “No Erevānas

1 Riga, the capital of Latvia, was founded in 1201.

2 Latvian periodicals share impressions after attending the Erebuni Museum, as mentioned in the articles, established for the city’s 2,750<sup>th</sup> anniversary (Ziediņš).

piezīmju bloka. 2750–750” 4).

Based on ideology of the political system a turning point is defined by some authors in the development of the city described as being “20 years older than ancient Rome” (Zommers 2) and older than Babylon (Igitjans). This turning point is given as 1920, the year Soviet rule was established, leaving a huge imprint on Yerevan’s urban landscape and contributing to its grand Soviet-era architecture. To centralise authority in Moscow and emblematised it as the top of the socio-political and geographical hierarchy, a new homogenous structure was imposed on other cities of the USSR under Stalin which, on the one hand, mimicked the “icon” city (Moscow) and, on the other hand, ensured that the cities of satellite states remained in a subordinate position to the “centre”, thus representing sameness and spatial unity of the Soviet Union (DeHann).

According to Grigor Hasratyan (1919–2001), introduced to Latvian readers as the mayor of Yerevan (1962–1975) and architect in a conversation on the Yerevan of tomorrow, “the architects often say that the beginning of a house is a dream. People who plan an entire city have many dreams, but they must come together in a monolithic, rational formation” (Jaunzeme and Lazda 20). Latvian readers encounter Yerevan as “the city of pink travertine” (Dozorčevs and Moriss 3); they find a city that has gone through major transformations and experienced “its second birth” (“Ararata ielejā” 2) thanks to the grand reconstruction work undertaken in accordance with the conceptual urban plan of the modern city by Alexander Tamanian (1878–1936), approved in 1924. These reforms broke the “accidental” structure of the city (Čaklais 15). As a result of the search for urban unity “from the city with chaotic and centuries-ago-built constructions, and crooked streets” Yerevan has been transformed into “a comfortable city with wide green main roads, large squares and interesting architectural ensembles” (“Ararata ielejā” 2). In order to emphasise the “greatness” of the Soviet system, Latvian periodicals abundantly express the opinion that during the Soviet period Armenia, “the land of mountains” and “a former tsarist colony” (Grigorjevs 2), was reshaped into “a country with a highly developed national culture, modern industry and extensive socialistic agriculture” (ibid.). In this context, newspaper articles present Yerevan as a real metropolis, a truly modern city with magnificent architecture, a highly developed multi-branch industry, and famous research institutions, universities, theatres, and museums. Thus, contrary to Armenia being presented as a huge natural museum under the open sky, Yerevan is “daringly beautiful” in its manmade transformations (Čaklais 15).

Since the 1940s, the Lenin Monument (1940<sup>1</sup>) by sculptor Sergey Merkurov and Lenin Square—“the core of the radial ring of the city centre” (Papēdis 2) have been consistently presented in Latvian periodicals as the central and most symbolic sights of Yerevan that manifest the Soviet power (TASS fotohronika “Ļeņina laukums Erevānā”; “Armēnijas PSR galvaspilsēta Erevana”; “Erevāna. V. I. Ļeņina laukums”; TASS fotohronika “Erevāna...”, etc.). Scrupulous descriptions of the monument present it as the most recognisable hallmark of Yerevan’s architecture: “The almost eight-meter-high bronze figure of the great leader rests on a polished granite pedestal based on a dark-grey Armenian marble platform. [...] The whole balustrade seems to be woven from a bright Armenian national ornament which twists into peculiar stone lace” (Nadrijans 2). Since the 1950s, Latvian readers have been provided with a more complete view of Lenin Square, as it is presented as a complex of buildings—a “museum of building materials of the republic” (ibid.) that includes, as the periodicals state, the first Government House (built in 1941), the Second Government House (built in 1955), Museum of Armenian History (built in 1957), the hotel “Armenia” (1958), and the Council of Trade Unions and Communication Centre (1958). When presenting the rhythm of Yerevan, Lenin Square is immortalised as the heart whose veins—avenues and streets “with the green plane trees planted in their rows, along the edges”—carry blood “towards the city centre—Lenin Square” (Emins “Erevana. Stāsti par galvaspilsētām” 2).

Although symbols of Armenian cultural heritage and prominent streets from the central Kentron district such as Abovyan Street<sup>2</sup> and Tamanian Avenue (named after the main architect of Yerevan) are mentioned alongside so-called “correct” place-names and typical expressions of Communist power and ideology (e.g. Stalin Avenue and Lenin Square,<sup>3</sup> known respectively as Mashtots Avenue and Republic Square since 1990) (Demirčjans 4), no detailed characterisation or context necessary for readers are provided. Visual images such as Mount Ararat—a symbol of nationhood known as the Holy Mountain of Armenians which can be seen from the capital city—as well as images of Yerevan’s urban landscape alongside the

1 The articles provide the year 1920 as the year Lenin monument was erected, e.g. Papēdis.

2 The first planned street of Yerevan that runs from the central Republic Square to the statue of famous Armenian writer Khachatur Abovyan (1809–1848).

3 The street renaming policy in the Armenian SSR was mainly implemented in several stages—in the 1920–1930s, 1946–1950, the second half of the 1960s, and the end of the 1970s. It was based on the “four level system of adopting decisions on place-name renamings, allowing Moscow control of the entire place-naming process” (Saparov 185-186). Soviet toponyms originated with or were derived from figures and concepts important to the Communist regime, e.g., Lenin, Stalin, October, May (ibid.).

symbols of socialism (e.g., Shahumyan Square and a 1931 monument devoted to a Communist party figure) are presented in the periodicals with little or no commentary, mainly emphasising the changes to the city landscape initiated under the Soviet rule and their successful outcomes. In the publications of the 1950s aimed at marketing Stalin’s personality cult<sup>1</sup> and providing an iconographic perspective, a special place is allotted to the bronze statue of Stalin on the pedestal (1950)—one of the biggest monuments to Stalin on the territory of the USSR (sculptor Sergey Merkurov and architect Rafayel Israyelian) erected on top of the hill at the end of Stalin Avenue (now—Mesrop Mashtots Avenue) overlooking the city and its suburbs.

The mental cartography of the Latvian reader was gradually enriched with architectural monuments manifesting Soviet collective memory, among them the Park of the Communards and the monument to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution (1967), which is consistently mentioned in the articles praising the achievements of the Soviet power. A series of publications mention Yerevan’s 2,750<sup>th</sup> anniversary, celebrated in October 1968, while others provide readers with Latvian students’ impressions of and memories from visiting Yerevan, especially in the 1970s. In this connection, the symbols of Yerevan most frequently written about are “Mother-Yerevan”—the statue of Mother Armenia (designed by Ara Harutyunyan), erected in 1967 in place of a dismantled 1962 Stalin monument; the Eternal Fire in front of the statue; and Victory Park—a park of 2,750 fountains on Khachatur Abovyan Street, created “in memory of the fighters who fell while bringing about Soviet rule in Armenia” (Davtjans 3; Kleinberga; Lapuķe; Lejstrauta; Ziediņš). The Armenian Genocide Memorial Complex (completed in 1967) at the top of Tsitsernakaberd Hill, honouring the victims of Ottoman Turkey’s 1915 massacre of ethnic Armenians, is typically characterised as a pilgrimage site that provokes remembrance and reflection rather than a sight to be viewed among the other elements of Yerevan’s architecture (Lapuķe; Papēdis), thus putting collective memory to the fore.

These writings offer testimony that periodicals were a major tool of the Communist Party aimed at educating the New Soviet Man, or *homo sovieticus*, and at suppressing democratic, civic-minded expression throughout the territory of the USSR (Soboleva). When educating the Latvian SSR’s younger generation,

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1 In the context of Stalin’s personality cult, Latvian periodicals mention achievements of Armenian painting and textile industry and the portrait of Joseph Stalin by the Yerevan master and carpet weaver Dovlat Karanfilyan—“an outstanding work of art” representing a new portrait-carpet genre in the Soviet textile art (V. K. 11).

Yerevan is presented both programmatically and emotionally; in one textbook, as well as positioning it on a map of the USSR and Armenia, the author attempts to trigger the reader's imagination: "And suddenly the city opens up in front of you, suddenly, like a fairy tale, everything opens up like on the palm of your hand. The city is located in a hollow, with mountain ranges rising on three sides. But from the south, the flat valley of Ararat rises" (Emins "Erevana. Stāsti par galvaspilsētām" 2). Similarly, young readers are addressed in different issues of the newspapers *Pionieris* [Pioneer], issued from 1940 to 1990, and *Bērnība* [Childhood], issued from 1945 to 1964, where the focus usually shifts from the past and ancient cultural relics to present-day developments, such as a discussion on Yerevan industrial mines as a part of thematic meetings "Journey through the Soviet Union" (Mežs).

In Latvian Soviet periodicals, Yerevan is depicted in the context of persistent urban growth and striving to reach its economic goals, all in accordance with the rapid and large-scale industrialisation initiated in Soviet cities. To measure the city's progress and to exemplify urban growth, statistical information often overshadows the narratives on monuments of cultural significance. The essence of urban elements is presented in terms of the increasing number of industrial, scientific and cultural objects in the city—multistorey apartment blocks, road networks, industrial enterprises, and educational establishments—as well as in the reconstruction of the infrastructure system.<sup>1</sup> It is also exemplified by mentioning a number of factories that were renovated or built after WWII, such as Yerevan Factory of Synthetic Rubber (Vilkāre), Yerevan Electro-Machine Building Factory, Yerevan Glass Electro-Machine Building Factory, Yerevan Glass Packing Factory ("Staļina premiju piešķiršana..."; TASS "Padomju Savienībā"), and a cognac factory (Grigorjevs). These are accompanied by images in periodicals aimed at revealing grandiosity of these industrial buildings (Vilkāre). Perception of modern Yerevan is broadened with information about the cascade of a hydroelectric station, Yerevan

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1 For example, periodicals published in the 1940s mention eight Yerevan higher education establishments, among them the Marxism-Leninist evening university and other universities ("Armenijas Mākslas darbinieku nams"), 27 vocational schools (placing special emphasis on "Yerevan Vocational School of Energy" (TASS "Jauni enerģētikas tehnikumi"), and fifteen scientific research institutes (Vilkāre). Among the presented information, in 1958 the press mentions 85 secondary schools; 11 higher education institutions; a national university; and polytechnic, agricultural, medical, zoo-veterinary, pedagogical and other institutes, as well as more than 20 scientific research institutes at the ASSR Academy of Sciences (Nadirjans). The mention of a clinical hospital with a capacity of 800 beds in Achapnyak (Gordons "No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 2700+50") aims to evidence the impressiveness of the Soviet healthcare system; however the focus is laid on measures of inputs (quantitative indicators/ sums) rather than measures of outputs (effectiveness).

TES, the city's gas main (“Ararata ielejā”), and other essential industrial sights and engineering achievements.

Experiences of “meeting Rainis in Armenia” (Varlamovs 2) are also presented in the context of industrialisation and Latvian workers' visits to a car manufacturing association located in the area of Rainis Street in Yerevan. Within the factory walls, the words of Latvia's most prominent poet, Rainis' (1895–1929), are encountered, cited in Latvian. Numerous identical reprints were systematically disseminated in the Latvian press on this theme, oriented towards the depiction of industrial development of Soviet Yerevan, socialist competitiveness, and cooperation between Armenian enterprises and the Latvian bus factory (RAF) by means of familiar cultural icons.

The city's growth is also emphasised by articles discussing the appearance of new “luxury” neighbourhoods—blocks of living houses “meeting world standards” in Cheromushki (“Ararata ielejā”; Vītola), Shaumyana and Nork (Zarjans) and in the area of Amiryan Street and Teryan Street (Gordons “No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 2700+50”). Statistics are also given for structures representing the sphere of culture (Vilkāre), many of which come into focus upon their opening, for example, the new Armenian National Philharmonic Concert Hall (TASS “Erevānā atklāta Armenijas...”), Razdan Cinema (“Kinoteatru celtniecība Erevānā”), the Open Air Cinema in Tumanyan Street, a funicular station building, a twin building in Sayat-Nova Street (Zarjans), Aragacs Cinema in Achapnyak district, the Gallery of Children's Drawings on Tumanyan Street, the House of Chess, and a 14-storey Ani Hotel (Gordons “No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 2700+50”).

Another important object representing the capital city's architecture is the tower of Yerevan's Youth Palace (1979), descriptions and photos of which are actively published in newspapers (e.g., “Erevānā”; “Jauniešu pils Erevānā”; “Arhitekti Arturs Tarhanjans...” etc.). Yerevan's Youth Palace, also known as *Kukuruznik* [Corncob], is described in the Latvian periodicals as a cylindrical structure that is “[n]ot some youth house or centre, but a castle” built “according to the principle: if you build once, then [build] thoroughly, ambitiously and in a unique manner” (Prape 30). A sharp contrast between the modern building and numerous old houses on both slopes near the palace is perceived by authors as a sign of progress and recognised as a benefit for the city's modernisation; no sense of loss is expressed concerning the expected destruction of the old dwellings even by their dwellers (ibid.). This construction represents a general paradigm of depicting Yerevan as a city for youth and the future—a view actively circulated since the end of the 1940s, emphasising that the younger generation may pursue a variety of activities in the

field of education and culture (e.g., in the new building of the Gabriel Sundukyan State Academic Drama Theatre or the science centre), as well as in sport, with textual images regularly disseminated of subjects such as the university stadium and sports centre, the Spartak Stadium, and many others (TASS “Sporta jaunceltnes Armenijā”; TASS “Zinātniskais centrs Erevānā”; TASS fotohronika “Erevāna<sup>3</sup>”).

In the 1980s, descriptions of buildings seldom mentioned until now—such as the Konda block (“Erevānas vecais kvartāls”), Achalyak Supermarket (TASS fotohronika “Erevāna<sup>b</sup>”), Rossiya Cinema, Zvartnotsa Airport, and the city metro (Papēdis)—begin to reach Latvian readers. The new constructions are considered from the point of view of their design, thus, again, praising not only the Soviet system in general, but its creator—in this case, the mastery of Armenian architects and their innovative approach to building. For example: “Both the plain and the nearby mount [Ararat] determined the shape of the airport. The airport could not be high, because then it would contrast with the nearby mountain and could not be included in the construction of the Ararat valley” (ibid. 3). The airport is vividly presented as “a new interesting architectural creation”, “an original arch structure with a mushroom-shaped tower in the centre”, and “a unique air harbour” (Čerņišovs 5). To better illustrate the achievements, periodicals often offer schematic pictures of buildings (e.g., for a complex of living houses in Kafan, the Classical and Chamber Music House, the Sport Palace, the building of the Council of Ministers, and the school of Young Gymnasts) (Zarjans).

### III. “Genius Loci” of Yerevan

As an integral part of the city’s identity, a meta-concept—*genius loci* or the spirit of the place—imparts uniqueness and originality to it. Being “the intangible quality of a material place, perceived both physically and spiritually” (Vecco 225), *genius loci* is a signifier of a process happening unintentionally. The past, present and future are not only categories of time in an individual’s life but also in a constantly changing city’s life. Like non-derivable units, they merge into each other—the physical place, the spirit of that place, and the ways in which both have evolved (and will continue to evolve) over time. Being perceived and experienced by humans, *genius loci* reveal themselves through tangible and intangible features and may be considered “the most important archetypes of national identity” (Stepanjan and Simjan 9) or “semanticised cultural markers” (Simjan 13).

Yerevan’s “iconography” manifests itself through complex and multidimensional structures, the essence of which was not fully and openly elaborated upon during the Soviet period. For decades, Yerevan was presented as a city of rich cul-

tural-historical heritage; however, its religious heritage and sacral architecture were underrepresented. During the Soviet era, the secularisation policy enforced by the Soviet authorities contributed to the destruction or transformation of sacred spatial structures and churches into places mostly used for the purpose of education and entertainment. By presenting the city as secular, visitors' pilgrimages became educational excursions within the framework of work or study mobilities. Thus, Yerevan's religious code (especially that related to the life and work of saints) was actually muted and presented in the Latvian Soviet periodicals by mentioning the places located outside the city borders to emphasise the bygone past and history. Among them are the ruins of Zvartnots Cathedral (a vivid landmark of medieval Armenian architecture), St Hripsime Church, St Gayane Church, Echmiadzin Cathedral, and Geghard Cave Monastery, among others (Apsītis; Jēkabsons; Jēruma; Keçiņa; ZAKORA kolektīvs). However, in the context of the category of the present, these testimonies of the past are often neglected: "if we want to be fair, we must say that in years past, this ancient strange style hinders the architecture. New times, new building materials, and new construction methods force us to search for a new expression of national form in architecture" (Emins "Mūsu Erevāna" 2).

One expression of Yerevan's *genius loci* is a "mighty and as-yet unfinished sculpture" of Mesrop Mashtots, the inventor of the Armenian script (405), made from a massive basalt rock by sculptor Ghukas Chubaryan in 1962. It "expresses a proud spirit and wise mind" (Jaunzeme and Lazda 19). As an embodiment of the thousand-year-old culture and Armenian Christian literature, the statue is admired on the way to Matenadaran—the Museum of Ancient Manuscripts, which "seems to have grown out of the grey stone of the mountain", the same as Mashtots—out of the Armenian nation (ibid). Both manifestations of Armenian identity share an aura of majesty, eternity, silence and gratitude that stands in opposition to temporal haste, noise and voices.

The impact of Matenadaran on the city's landscape is exemplified by proving its development stages: "In 1921, on the basis of Echmiadzin Matenadaran, the Institute of Culture and History was established. In 1939, Matenadaran was transferred to the capital, where it became a part of the new building of the State Public Library named after A. Myasnikyan<sup>1</sup>. But two decades later, Matenadaran moved to a special building and was transformed into a scientific research institute for ancient manuscripts. Since 1962, it has been named after Mesrop Mashtots, the creator of the Armenian script" (Sarma 23). Brief notes in Latvian periodicals

1 Now known as National Library of Armenia, founded in 1832. Between 1925 and 1990 it was named after Aleksandr Myasnikyan, a military leader of Soviet Armenia.

mention the fact that visitors to Yerevan are always introduced to the depository of ancient parchments Matenadaran, as, for example, in the case of choral singers from the Latvian Academy of Sciences and representatives of other Latvia's delegations (Lečinskis; ZA kora kolektīvs). Although the significance of the mentioned "cultural artefacts" (Simjan 10) to Armenian national and cultural identity is revealed in very general terms, the very fact that they are mentioned shows the authors' attempts to instil these ancient codes of Armenian architecture and culture in the mental map of Latvian readers.

The monument to David of Sassoun by Yervand Kochar (1959)—the main hero of Armenia's national epic poem, *Daredevils of Sassoun*<sup>1</sup> "who cuts the air with a gold sword" (Lielmeža 2)—is given tremendous significance. The legendary hero, also referred to as the "Armenian Lāčplēsis"<sup>2</sup> (Gordons "No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 2750–750" 4; Kartenbeka and Siliņa 2-3; Hofmane 3) and related to literary characters by Rainis (Hofmane 3), is continuously described and visualised in publications dating from the 1960s onwards (Mežvēvers; Igitjans etc.). Being another "peculiar symbol of the city" (Noskovs 4), the monument meets visitors arriving to the city by train (ibid). It is described as the pride of the Armenian people, kept in their hearts in the home country and in exile: "The eyes of one and a half million ordinary Armenians scattered around the world are also focused on it" (Pīlādzis 23). The Latvian authors focus on details of the monument and its symbolic meaning: "Water flows from a bowl under the horse's hooves. Symbolically, it represents that the measure of the patience of the oppressed people is full, and, for this reason, David has pulled out his sword to go against the conquerors" (Mežvēvers 3); "the horse has overturned the vessel of patience and the vessel of tears of the oppressed people [...] The symbol is subject to invincibility" (Prome 3). The monument is so organically connected with the image of Yerevan (and Armenia) that "it seems to have been standing in the square of the station for centuries", but still manifests dynamism and action (Igitjans 18).

Another mythological symbol mentioned in the Latvian SSR press is the so-

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1 The Armenian national epic poem is masterpiece of oral history dating back to the eighth century. It was first set down in written form in 1873 by Garegin Srvandzedians and describes the struggle of the Armenian people against Arab invaders (see more: Khatchadourian).

2 Lāčplēsis [from Latvian "the bear-slayer"] is a mythological hero, a spiritual force, and national symbol of Latvia symbolizing the fight against Latvia's invaders. The story was written by Andrejs Pumpurs (1841–1902), a representative of the New Latvians movement of intellectuals during the First Latvian National Awakening, and was published in 1888. Under Soviet occupation, Lāčplēsis was attributed "a pioneering role" and his image was employed when emphasising the economic achievements of the Soviet Republic (Lāms 134).

called southern gate to Yerevan, described as three 15 m high tuff masses raised with an image of an eagle with spread wings on the gate's concrete pillar made by sculptor Ara Ha and architect Rafayel Israyelian. "The bird has a small stonemason's hammer in its claws—a symbol of creation. An arch has been created at the base of the arches, from which there is a wonderful view of the valley—at the foot of the mountain" (TASS "Erevānas dienvidu vārti" 4).

In general, the analysed data testify to the fragmentary representation of Yerevan's *genius loci* in the Latvian SSR periodicals and rarely depict their memorial sites. For example, lengthy descriptions of Tamanian are provided, but only a brief mention is encountered of a statue of Tamanian standing in front of Yerevan's iconic landmark, the Cascade complex: "We see the monument to the architect Tamanian, [...] [and] many other notable and historically significant places. Unfortunately, only driving by [...]" (Pļaviņš 2).

#### IV. Yerevan's Aesthetic Perception

Despite relatively unified representations, Latvian visitors and readers perceive Yerevan as a romanticised urban space on the foot of Mount Ararat, that is, as a city that welcomes its visitors by triggering all their senses.

For decades, the city was mainly characterised by uniformity and sameness, but gradually the sensory world of Yerevan came to be emphasised by its diversity of both colour and form. For example, "one house is not like another. Wide foundations, semi-arches, beautiful balcony lines, high open expanses of courtyards with unexpected views of the city" (Varlamovs 2). The bulk of all descriptions of Yerevan provided in Latvian periodicals speak about Armenia's local riches and represent Yerevan as a consolidated volcanic mass—tuff. The capital is enthusiastically immortalised as a city in red due to the notable buildings and structures made of red tuff, as seen in Baghramyan Avenue, Lenin Avenue, Stalin Avenue, Teryan Street, Rainis Street and elsewhere (Emins "Erevana. Stāsti par galvaspilsētām"; Nardijans). The colourfulness contributes to the sensual perception of the city: "This majestic stone that can be of different colours—pink, white, black—determines architectural forms which are organically related to the creativity of the Armenian people" (Varlamovs 2).

The greatness of the city is emphasised by not only Soviet monumentalism but also the aesthetic perception of its architecture and decorative ornaments, including national ones, and bas-reliefs: "all houses have been decorated by rich ornaments, flowers, vines and leaves cut into the stone—from that alone, it seems it is always spring in the city" (Emins "Erevana. Stāsti par galvaspilsētām" 2). Periodicals also

present specific Yerevan sights (houses, shops, pedestrianised streets, garages etc.) which underline the city's vertical dimension, as well as its brightness, lightness, and feeling of elation (water features, flying birds, silhouettes of people in motion) (“Gaisma pār Hajastanu”; Flaums; Pooks; Kipere).

The original lighting in Yerevan's streets—neon “tubes”, mercury bulbs, street crossings illuminated in an innovative way, and bulbs like “small suns” decorating the city centre (Gordons “No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. ‘LAV’...”)—creates an imaginative aesthetic-romantic urban landscape. In addition, the sunlit city with the two peaks of Mount Ararat in the distance combines both overwhelming industrial noise—“the noise of engines fills the city” (Varlamovs 2)—and complete silence, allowing the visitor to experience romantic dreaminess: “The city, emerging from the pre-dawn fog, gradually turns pink, orange, golden. The sun has already risen, but the colours do not disappear” (Nadirjans 2). Thus, Yerevan—“the capital of the land of Ararat” (Pīlādzis 22) located between “the sun and the stones” (Papēdis 2)—is described as not only a quintessence of the achievements of modern architecture but also as a space bathed in light and surrounded by tranquillity. In Latvian periodicals, we can also see Latvian translations of Armenian authors' works, such as, e.g., Mikayel Harutyunyan's poem “Yerevan” translated by Valdis Roja:

Tu kā pulksteni uz rokas sauli nes,  
Datumu nevienai ēnai neatļauj.  
Staru bultas stundām skaita minūtes.  
Ciparnīca dūrē gadusimtus kļauj.

Erevāna, vaigs tavs saulē kveldināts,  
Dzīva pastāvēji visās ugunīs.  
Prati nesadegt, kad viss bij liesmām klāts,  
Mums no tevis sirdīs dzirkstis līs.

Erevāna, vētrās ceļvedis un sargs,  
Saules kompass tev uz mūžiem dots.  
Tavu dzīvību laiks pārbaudījis bargs,  
Tā kā dārgu balvu to mums saņemt gods.

Nosargāji debesis, kur zilgmo rīts,  
Asinis tu atdod, sauli—velti cer!  
Viss, par ko es sapņoju, ir piepildīts,

Bet vēl jaunai dziesmai apvāršņus tu ver.

Atdzejojis Valdis Roja

(Arutjunjans 4).

The sensory world is also provoked by different smells and tastes. Yerevan's gastronomic code is displayed and made popular in descriptions of eateries of various types (e.g., "Araksa" coffee bar in Abovyan Street, "Ekjat" [a Fairytale] on the corner of Tumanyan Street, "Vahagan" bar, "Anahit" café in Nalbandyan Street, and "Sasuna" restaurant (the name of the street is not mentioned) (Gordons "No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 2700+50"; Gordons "No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 2750–750")). Although Yerevan is compared with the capital of Latvia—Riga, whose population was as large as that of Yerevan at that time, the catering sphere in Yerevan is claimed to be far more progressive (with longer working days, much fresh green garnish, mutton, etc.) than that in Latvia (Gordons "No Erevānas piezīmju bloka. 'LAV' ...").

#### V. Yerevan in Latvian Press at the End of the Twentieth Century

A dramatic shift in the content of newspaper articles on Yerevan can be observed from the middle of the 1980s. This change can be attributed to the new political situation in the USSR, including Soviet Latvia and Soviet Armenia, where a battle for independence in the general context of the conflict between Western pluralism and Eastern authoritarianism was taking place (Loth and Knight). In the context of a complicated geopolitical and armed conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Lenin Square in Yerevan came to embody transformation and an arena for the demonstration of political power and civic will. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Latvian readers' perceptions of Yerevan were based on news of Armenians' protests and their struggle for independence, as well as changes brought by new conditions that signalled an approaching transformation in the city's landscape.

The establishment of diplomatic relations between the European Union and Armenia on August 22, 1992, and the initiation of cooperation and visa-free entry procedures for EU citizens entering Armenia (2013) provided opportunities for more tourists from Latvia to explore Yerevan and create their own individual mental maps of the city. Perceived as exotic, sun-drenched and colourful (an opinion largely based on Yerevan's representation in Latvian literature, mass media, tour operator offers and so on) the city in the mountainous Caucasus region became a great attraction for Latvians.

The main tendency in depicting Yerevan after the restoration of independence involved substituting the paradigm of Soviet heritage with that of Armenian national cultural and religious heritage, which symbolised a complex post-Socialist transformation. Yerevan was modelled using the category of historical memory, emphasising the sights and events associated with tragic events in the distant or recent past. One example provided in the Latvian periodical *Diena* [Day] in 1993 was a failed attempt to blow up the Lenin Monument in Republic Square (LETA). Although no detailed information was included, the news apparently referred to the pedestal (removed in 1996) rather than the monument itself, which was pulled down from its former centrally displayed site in the early 1990s. While “deconstructing the communist metatext”, a new metatext was created, purposefully replacing “foreign” cultural codes with those of “one’s own” (Stepanjan and Simjan 9). Having been presented as the “Caucasian prisoner”, Yerevan’s text shifted to representing the nation’s sufferings and struggle for freedom under diverse political powers, including Stalin’s regime, and in relation to the Great Purge (1936) and June 14—the Day of Remembrance for the thousands of oppressed and deported Armenians in 1949. This day coincides with the day commemorating mass deportations of Latvians by the Soviet power in 1941 occupied Latvia. Thus, the “new metatext” brought the Latvian reader closer to grasping their own national history and reconsidering it in a wider context. However, more detailed articles in Latvian periodicals on the transformation of Yerevan and the appearance of new spatial elements in the city, including the inclusion of monuments to the victims of Soviet power, can be found only at the beginning of the new millennium; this topic requires separate research.

## VI. Conclusion

The research conducted for this article allows us to conclude that modelling the image of Yerevan in the Latvian press in the 1940s–1990s is a multidimensional process that reveals complex relationships between power and cultural manifestations. The data from the thematically relevant articles reveal a gradual change of emphasis in the narrative dedicated to the city of Yerevan in the Latvian press.

For decades, during the height of the era of propaganda, publications on Yerevan in the Latvian press were used as a tool to craft a strong and singular narrative that glorified Soviet power and “friendships between the people”. Being employed by the Soviet system as a means of expression and manifestation of political ideas, culture promoted ideology and became a kind of power itself,

not only in the city it represented but far beyond its borders. Although human perceptions of a city are affected by multiple factors—available knowledge and experience, presented and perceived information, social behaviour patterns, and cultural background and mentalities, as well as external stimuli, ideologies, and beliefs (Osóch and Czaplínska)—the cultural model of Yerevan in Soviet Latvia, taking into consideration the specificity of the era, was created by roughly identical descriptions.

By consistently reporting on spatial and social modernisation achievements, in the frame of Soviet secularisation policy, Yerevan's sacral architecture was paid little attention. Aimed at meeting ideological objectives and conveying the message of “successful” Soviet economic reforms, textual and visual images of Yerevan's industrialisation and growing affluence were presented to the Latvian readership, becoming a mirror of social, economic, and cultural change that reflected on the most emblematic urban signs as testimonies of social order and development. In the process of transforming the Armenian capital into a modern socialist city, emphasis was laid on the creation of new institutions for diverse socio-cultural practices. Thus, although Latvian readers gradually got to know Yerevan as a large industrial, educational, art and sports hub, newspaper articles failed to present a full-bodied physiognomy of the city, instead focusing on its most visible Soviet-era symbols.

Over time, content inconsistent with Soviet ideological positions (Yerevan's spirituality, creativity, freedom, etc.) was increasingly included in Latvian media. As the influence of censorship decreased, it became possible to avoid a homogeneous presentation of Yerevan and depict the authenticity and integrity of the city. A tendency emerged to include the monuments of the nation's culture, memory, identity and sense of place (i.e., earlier forms and images of the city's memory traces). This reminds us that the “demands and pressures of social reality constantly affect the material order of the city, yet it remains the theatre of our memory. Its collective forms and private realms tell us of the changes that are taking place; they remind us as well of the traditions that set this city apart from others” (Boyer 31). The city provokes identification and interaction with all elements of the urban space, “whereas the observer subjectively, often subconsciously, chooses, hierarchises and assigns meanings to what he/she sees” (Osóch and Czaplínska 111). From the second half of the 1980s, Yerevan was presented as a unique and multidimensional cultural space in the freedom-seeking discourse, and therefore spiritually close and understandable to a Latvian reader.

The study has also revealed that the stereotyped images of Yerevan by Latvian visitors were largely determined by the perspective of the traveller—usually Soviet

workers or representatives of the elite loyal to the Soviet power—often guided by a local host as a representative of a corresponding sphere. Therefore, the choice of sites was based on the specificity of the field one represented, and through their depiction these sites were obligatorily included in the general framework of the Soviet ideology. Although such experiences and perceptions were seemingly subjective and individualised, in reality, being “socialist experiences”, they were meant to represent the interests of the Soviet power and a unified Soviet worldview, i.e., to convey “‘the Soviet way of life’—the slogan of the era” (Roth-Ey and Zakharova). In this way, they were applied as a powerful tool of propaganda in the frame of official paradigms used to form a public opinion. This, however, did not exclude a diversity of views and experiences on a private level, which means that Yerevan, like other cities, is capable of self-reflection and self-renewal through intellectual experience (Stepanjan and Simjan 2012). Its urban codes (cultural artefacts, images, sculptures, buildings or their parts), as presented in Latvian periodicals of the analysed period, are markers of social and cultural memory that, at a different level, reveal the most significant layers of culture.

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