
THE RUSSIAN EXPERIENCE IN THE PRESERVATION OF THE HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURE OF PERM REGION AND THE PROMOTION OF UPPER KAMA CULTURAL HERITAGE ROUTE THROUGH A DIGITAL DOCUMENTATION PROJECT

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The research activities in Central Russia, more specifically in the Ural area, started in 2012 through academic collaboration activities between the Department of Civil Engineering and Architecture of the University of Pavia and the Department of Urban Planning of the Polytechnic University of Perm. These activities, which involved researchers and students, were focused on summer schools and research seminars with the aim of developing a research laboratory at the Russian University that would deal with the preservation of historical and architectural heritage. Specifically, since 2015, systematized investigation of the Upper Kama historical-architectural heritage has been carried out by the International architectural schools, starting a process of getting to know this region, its inhabitants and its traditional architecture, which is undergoing a slow and inexorable process of disintegration and disappearance.

The format of architectural schools includes field research and theoretical component (discussion) and immerses in the historical context and mysterious atmosphere of the study area.

The International architectural school is an opportunity to unite the joint efforts of students, scientists, restorers, museum and archival staff to study and preserve the architectural heritage in the North of the Perm region.

Upper Kama (*Verkhnekamye*) is a unique phenomenon at the crossroads of different cultures. The culture of the upper Kama region has absorbed the national features of the pre-Christian period in the Urals, Russian historical and cultural heritage and European traditions.

Side page, Fig. 01

Watercolour and Architectural Memory

The watercolour drawing interprets the Cathedral of the Transfiguration of the Savior, capturing the architectural presence of the complex through a synthetic and evocative representation. The use of colour contributes to defining the atmosphere of the view, highlighting the relationship between the built elements and the surrounding landscape. (Drawing credit: Sandro Parrinello)



Fig. 02

Study activity conducted at the Stroganov Museum in Usolye

The students involved, together with the researchers, learn the decorative patterns of traditional ceramics through a practical workshop. (Drawing credit: Sandro Parrinello)





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Fig. 03
Student Presentation on Stroganov Baroque Architecture
 Mixed groups of Italian and Russian students engage in a shared discussion based on experiential models for heritage analysis. (Drawing credit: Sandro Parrinello)

Side page, Figs. 07
Navigation along Kama River
 To reach the most remote locations, it is necessary to navigate along the Kama River using boats, and the landscape of the riverbanks becomes a thin strip of land defining the horizon. (Drawing credit: Sandro Parrinello)

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Fig. 04
Break moments during the missions
 When the research group, exhausted at the end of the day, takes time to rest and gather around a table for discussion. (Drawing credit: Sandro Parrinello)

Over the 20th century more than 30 % of the Upper Kama architectural heritage has been lost; many objects are in the dilapidated state. Now it is possible to notice a fast degradation and abandonment of the rural environment throughout Russia, which is the last stronghold of the provincial architectural tradition. Its losses are deeply felt in the Urals, known as a natural territory, which preserves numerous examples of vernacular stone architecture. Meanwhile, the unique style of the Upper Kama direction of Russian architecture formed under the European influence in the 16th-19th centuries has not been studied enough. Preservation and reconstruction of the lost require the modern approach to documentation, to the use of new instruments for the examination of the monuments, to the planning of their transformation and valorization processes. Digital technologies present larger possibilities and means of preservation of the existed and reconstruction of the lost heritage.

Recently in the process of the Russian-Italian cooperation it has been carried out perceptive and accurate digital measurements of the most important objects of architectural complex in Usolye, of the churches of Cherdyn, Nyrob and rural settlements lost in the depth of the inhospitable Urals nature. Definite steps in the direction of creating digital database of these objects have been made. Landscape and ecological aspects of the monuments and their surroundings have been studied and documented.






The ambitious is that the Urals architecture become a source of inspiration for the international researchers and for local communities that lives in this area in order to preserve this relevant heritage, at the edge of Europe, from the disappearing process.

The documentation of a cultural heritage, as dispersed as that of Upper Kama traditional architecture, requires the elaboration of a new way of understanding the meaning of the target sites. Upper Kama Region has always attracted the interest of historians and researchers, representing a border territory between East and West and a meeting point between European and Asian culture. The region preserves several examples of a peculiar architecture, reach in orthodox complexes and neoclassical industrial settlements of the eighteen century. The Upper Kama heritage is currently experiencing a period of decay and abandonment, concentrated on the rural landscape, the last stronghold of the tradition of provincial Russian architecture. The aim of the research is to integrate different digital documentation methodologies, in order to create an instrument of analysis and evaluation of the condition of the cultural heritage for the development of territorial renewal plans. The importance of Upper Kama documentation is due particularly to the lack of a detailed census archive from survey analyses that provides precise information on the quantity and quality of monuments and environment. During the 20th century, numerous historians and researchers have attempted to document the wide phenomenon




Figs. 05, 06
Students drawing while framing different angles of the landscape (Drawing credit: Sandro Parrinello)



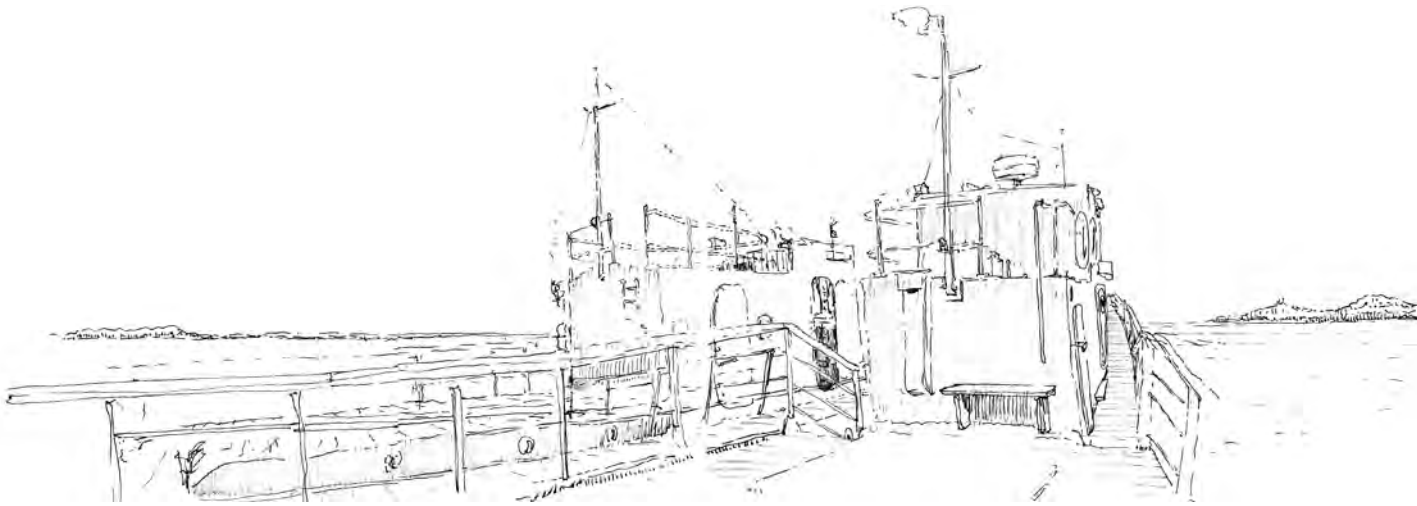


Fig. 08

From the boat

A promontory comes into view from time to time, and on its summit the ruined remains of a monumental church emerge. The vessel crossing this river, vast as a sea, reveals the connective scale of these immense territories. (Drawing credit: Sandro Parrinello)



of these religious buildings combined with industrial archeology complexes. Nevertheless, these researches do not provide a global heritage census and the technical basis for preservation processes, which are necessary to maintain and promote the cultural tradition of the region.

If the choice of this territory was approached by virtue of its historical architecture and heritage, it should be noted that through applied research other results were also achieved. In particular, these results concern the process of knowledge and awareness of the value of the historical architectural heritage, both on the part of the personnel involved in the fieldwork and the local communities. In the numerous missions carried out over the years, villagers have undergone modest invasions where students of various nationalities, researchers and teachers have been confronted with the life of these remote regions, the rhythms of living, the resources of the taiga and the value of the river and water. This interpenetration and contamination of knowledge took place not only by venturing into the forest in search of ruins, but by participating in cultural and social activities that were organised to encourage the involvement of local communities.

Drawing courses open to all, conferences, restoration and green maintenance workshops near the main buildings, interviews on local broadcasting stations, and all that was necessary to create a cultural inducement that would stand in the way of the normal industrial and productive dimension that is normally associated with such places. The character of the traditional architecture of Upper Kama is strongly connected with industry, first with the industry of the Stroganov family and then with the models of the industries of the Soviet Union. Solikamsk originated as an industrial district, as did Usolye, production areas linked to the salt trade, inextricably linked by the presence of the river that connected these urban and industrial realities with the entire system of central Russia. The echo of this dimension, which built its own style by imitating the models of Moscow and St. Petersburg, reaches as far as Perm, as far as Kazan and the Tatar regions, and then continues, skirting the mountain chain on the bed of the Kama and Volga rivers, as far as Samara and, descending further, to the Caucasus. It is a border region and for these very reasons it is a region that absorbs styles



and twists them in an eclectic, unpretentious way. The Upper Kama is a model of the intersection of Asia and Europe, but one that thrives on the relationship between north and south, following the direction of the river as the main road that connects and links. Thus, if the view of the mountains from the great plains of Cherdin is a reminder of the boundary towards the great Siberia to the east, the sunsets and the northern light seen from Nyrob during summer nights make one imagine the lands of the Komi or, further north, the boundless territories of the Nenets. This remote region has the power to thicken meanings, convert them and create a centre, with linguistic specificities, and with a decorum that is very strong and has managed to overcome any decadence induced by the communist purge. A reason that places itself at the centre of its own world and that dialogues, by virtue of the romantic landscape, with a dimension that is in some way cosmic, finding its sacredness in the small monuments, convents, churches, chapels, right down to civil architecture, right down to the inside of houses, in the red corner, and even more so in the detail, right down to the decoration of wood, in the carving, where the language of tradition, of rituals and shamans, is combined with the settlement process to find the stars.

Figs. 10, 11

Preserving Moments

There is something at once melancholic, romantic, and quietly hopeful in watching the students draw beside the monuments in this forgotten oasis, distant and yet close to civilization, a romantic feeling that compels one to preserve these very moments through drawing. (Drawing credit: Sandro Parrinello)

Side page, Figs. 09

Looking beyond the river from the monumental area of Usolye

The new urban district of Berezniki comes into view, with its factories and chimneys, while a bucolic scene brings together students sketching and people bathing in the river. (Drawing credit: Sandro Parrinello)

