

**THE BUILDING OF THE KHARCHOVYK CLUB IN KYIV:
FEATURES AND LOSSES OF THE ORIGINAL DESIGN**

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Abstract. The building of the current Music Theatre at 2 Mezhygorskaya Street, formerly the House of Culture or the Kharchovyk Club, is a prominent landmark on Kontraktova Square in Kyiv. It was built in the 1930s according to a design by the renowned architect Mykola Oleksandrovych Shekhonin. However, existing images show a noticeable difference between the final appearance of the building and the original design, although the latter was initially used. In printed publications that examine in detail the history of the construction of the former Kharchovyk Cultural Centre, this circumstance is either ignored or perceived as a normal working episode. Meanwhile, the facts show that construction was suspended at the final stage and part of the structures was redesigned, changing the appearance of the building. We have reason to believe that this unusual situation should be considered primarily in the context of the evolution of the Bolshevik leadership's attitude towards artistic forms at the time, in particular, the use of the constructivist style in the development of Soviet cities, which was initially perceived as the most "revolutionary" and then subjected to persecution. Based on this understanding of the changes to the building, an attempt has been made to reconstruct the course of events, examine the most characteristic features of M. Shekhonin's original design, and recreate the lost layout of the upper floors of the Kharchovyk Cultural Centre. It also shows the techniques the author of the project was forced to use in order to move away from the constructivist solution for the facades and volume of the building in the direction of "Soviet Art Deco" (later, during the restoration of the building in the late 1970s, the relevant elements were largely removed). The research materials allow us to conclude that the building of the former Kharchovyk Cultural Centre became a telling example of the direct intervention of ideological guidelines into architectural creativity at a certain historical stage.

Keywords: Art Deco, constructivism, reconstruction, workers' clubs, totalitarianism, Shekhonin M.

Introduction. The object of consideration is the former House of Culture (or club) "Kharchevnik", built in the Petrovsky (Podilsky) district of Kyiv as a centre for cultural and educational work for food industry workers (now the premises of the Music Theatre at 2 Mezhygorskaya Street). The building under study is located in the central part of the historic Podil district, is part of the development of the ancient Kontraktova Square, and is located next to the Baroque building of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (18th century) and the classicist Kontraktova House of the 1810s. In this distinguished setting, the former Kharchovyk Cultural Centre was intended to represent the constructivist architecture of the 20th century. However, its exterior underwent numerous transformations, and the history of its construction remains unclear. A series of available images shows that at the initial stage of construction, the building was erected in accordance with the original constructivist design by architect M. Shekhonin, but later its construction was suspended and resumed with a modified facade design.

Analysis of recent publications. The former Kharchovyk House of Culture occupies a prominent place in one of the most researched complexes of Kyiv's architecture. It has been mentioned more than once in literature. However, there are noticeable discrepancies, in particular, differences in the dating of the building. For example, the 1958 edition of the Kyiv guidebook states without further explanation that the building (then the Kyiv Palace of Culture of the Food Industry

Workers' Union) was built in 1933 [11, p. 153]. It should be noted, incidentally, that the protective plaque installed on the facade of the building as a result of its recognition as an architectural monument in 1986 contains the date "1933–1934".

Art historian Viktor Moiseenko, author of an article about the Kharchovyk club in the Compendium of Historical and Cultural Monuments of Ukraine, believed that construction of the building lasted from 1931 to 1933. Analysing the architectural design, he wrote nothing about the differences between the preliminary project and the final result and described the monument at 2 Mezhygorskaya Street as "a rare example of a public building from the transitional period between constructivism and Soviet neoclassicism" [12].

Dmytro Malakov, a researcher of M. Shekhonin's biography and local historian, also claimed that the building was completed in 1933 (although he dated the start of construction to 1929). He stated: "While the original design of the building remained unchanged, significant changes were made during construction. For example, the right-hand corner cubic volume was increased by one floor, and the balconies here, instead of the solid concrete barriers provided for in the project, were given transparent metal inserts, which visually and physically reduced the weight of the structure. The facade of the left wing on Mezhygorskaya Street also changed. The central, convex part of the facade was deprived of the upper tier of windows provided for in the project. However, the overall architectural image of the building remained as innovative and very expressive as before" [9, pp. 155, 156]. In other words, it can be understood that M. Shekhonin made significant changes to the project "in the course of work", apparently with the aim of enhancing the expressiveness and visual appeal of the building. D. Malakov also provided a number of interesting photographs, in particular from M. Shekhonin's author's album, but some of them were inaccurately dated, which made it difficult to imagine the actual course of events.

Semen Shirochin, author of a number of publications and books on the architecture of interwar Kyiv, recalls the Kharchovyk club and provides the most reliable dating of its construction. He examines the title lists of Kyiv construction projects for various years, starting with 1930, and notes that before 1935, an additional 300,000 rubles were allocated for the construction of the Kharchovyk club, and dates the completion of the work to the end of 1935. His article is also illustrated (some of the illustrations are borrowed from D. Malakov), but again, not all of the dates of the images are accurate, and S. Shirochin, like V. Moiseenko, does not pay attention to the discrepancy between the architect's original idea and its final implementation [16, pp. 293–297].

Among the sources reviewed, only the historical and architectural reference to the restoration and repair project "Restoration of the Kyiv Opera Theatre" (2020) notes that changes to the exterior of the building during construction were made "due to the influence of Soviet ideologues, who imposed contradictory assessments of architectural creativity in different years". The author of the reference cites a critical publication from 1933 (by M. Kholostenko), which most likely led to the departure from the original project [5]. To develop these ideas further, it would be worth analysing the specific content of the changes that took place at this stage (D. Malakov does not cover them fully) and trying to explain the lost solutions for the facades and plans. This would allow us to better understand the creative approach of the outstanding architect M. Shekhonin to constructivist design, as well as provide some "food for thought" given that the renovation and restoration work at the Music Theatre (or "Kyiv Opera") has not yet taken place.

The aim and objectives of the study: to reveal the influence of prevailing ideological attitudes on architectural creativity in Soviet times, to examine the forced alterations to the exterior of the building under study as a result of politicised criticism, and to identify the most characteristic lost features of the original design concept.

Research methodology: comparative analysis and reconstruction of events.

Main material. Constructivist architecture spread throughout Ukraine in the 1920s and found its most vivid expression in the then capital of Ukraine, Kharkiv. In Kyiv, it was actually introduced in 1927 (earlier, construction work here consisted primarily of overcoming the severe destructive consequences of numerous coups and hostilities during 1917–1920). Constructivism found many supporters not only for creative reasons, but also for ideological ones. It was perceived as a "new

style", a "revolutionary style", a rejection of "outdated bourgeois art", and adherence to it was actually presented as a sign of loyalty to the political course and "Marxist-Leninist doctrine". This was also mentioned in the manifestos of architectural groups of the same orientation, in particular, the TSAU (Society of Contemporary Architects of Ukraine). The young architect Mykola Kholostenko took an active part in the founding of the latter [10, p. 75].

The manifestos proclaimed the voices of the new generation ("New Generation" was the name of the literary and artistic association and magazine of "leftist" adherents with whom M. Kholostenko collaborated). However, in practice, the leading authors of constructivist architecture in Kyiv were specialists born in the 1870s–1880s. This was a generation that included architects with considerable pre-Soviet achievements: P. Alyoshin, O. Verbitsky, V. Krychevsky, V. Osmak, V. Rykov, and others. Among them was Mykola Oleksandrovych Shekhonin (1882–1970), who had already built a number of notable buildings in Kyiv during the 1900s and 1910s. All these masters creatively embraced the "new style", seeing in it the opportunity to introduce simple, "clean" forms and rational, logical compositions based on modern technology and materials, unshackled by templates. At the same time, experienced architects took into account the existing urban development with its peculiarities and traditions.

This was precisely what M. Shekhonin sought to achieve when he prepared the design for the Kharchovyk club on Chervona (Kontraktova) Square, commissioned by the trade union of workers in the meat and fish canning industry. When constructing a fairly large public centre on the site of an old estate destroyed in 1919, he did not try to visually diminish the existing historical buildings. On the contrary, according to his plan, the main masses of the Kharchovyk were stretched horizontally, with a fragmented front, and the most massive volume (the stage box on the side of Mezhygorskaya Street) was "pulled up" to the previously built local dominant feature – a six-storey apartment building at 6 Spasskaya Street. In general, the building, following the then common models of workers' clubs, was divided into two functional volumes – a club and a theatre, which were oriented along the modern Hryhorii Skovoroda and Mezhygirska Streets, respectively. They were connected by an intermediate cylindrical space that opened directly onto Kontraktova Square. On its first floor was a lobby, above which was a round hall for club activities and dancing.

Construction of the club began in 1930. This can be judged not only from the title lists reviewed by S. Shyrochyn, but also from that year's guidebook, which reported on the ongoing construction according to M. Shekhonin's project [6, p. 588]. The 1932 edition included a project image (Fig. 1), which formed the basis for the work being carried out [1, p. 125].

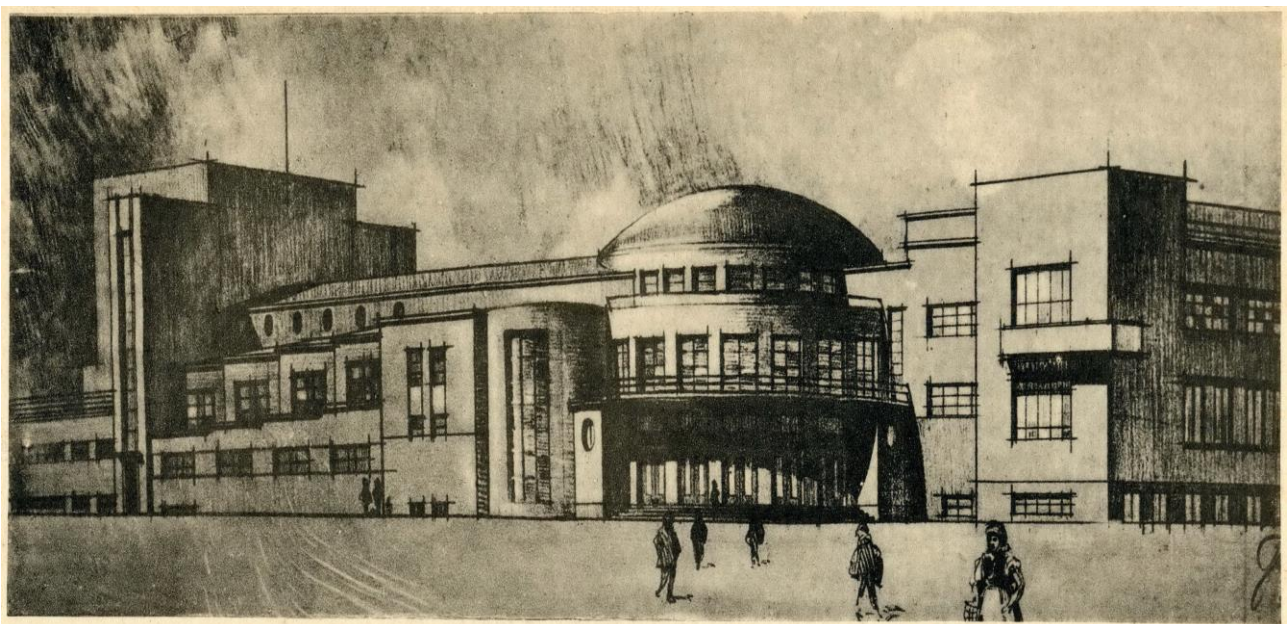


Fig. 1. M. Shekhonin. Initial design of the facades of the Kharchovyk club. 1931–1932

In early 1933, a photo of the new building appeared in the press (Fig. 2), the construction of which seemed to be nearing completion [15, p. 7]. The material embodiment basically corresponded to the author's idea. Some changes were made to the corner part on the side of the modern Hryhorii Skovoroda Street. D. Malakov believed that during construction, "the right corner volume grew by one floor" [9, p. 155], but in fact its height did not increase; only the area of the window opening was adjusted and another balcony was added.

Both the project and the photo allow us to see certain features of the building that were later removed and not restored. These are primarily the cylindrical intermediate volume and the theatre part. The cylindrical surface on the side of the square was to be completely "dematerialised" by openings. During the day, the round hall received natural lighting from two sources, while the cylinder acquired a stepped structure. The presence of a dome above the chain of windows was reminiscent of the tradition of Byzantine sacred buildings, long known in Kyiv. The façade along Mezhygorskaya Street was impressive in its richness and dynamism. Its appearance was determined by the stepped boxes of the second tier of the auditorium. All the boxes corresponded to the stepped, well-lit foyers leading to the façade, as well as the adjacent loggias. It seems that the author of the project took into account that the auditorium could be used both for performances and concerts, as well as for festive or working meetings of trade union members. With this in mind, the foyers and loggias next to the boxes became a kind of lobby where people could communicate and exchange ideas during events. In general, the project provided for a significant number of balconies and loggias, which allowed visitors to take "smoke breaks" or breathe fresh air. From an architectural point of view, all this brought the new building closer to historical buildings in terms of scale.

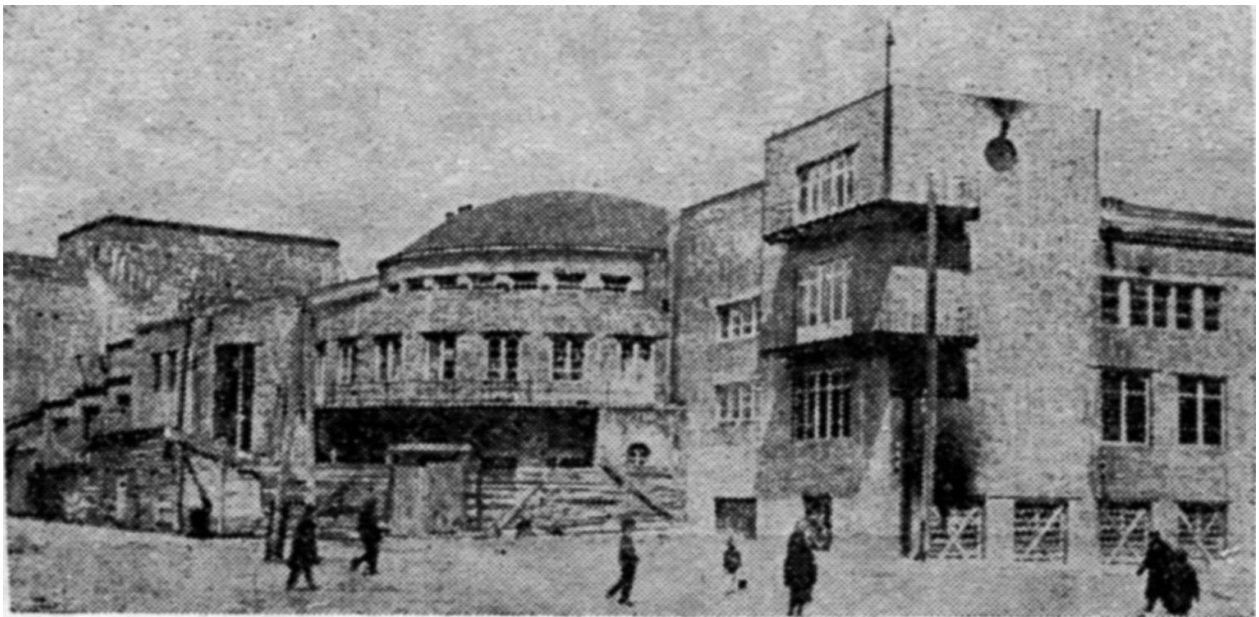


Fig. 2. Construction of the Kharchovyk club in its original form. Publication from 1933

However, starting in 1933, a campaign unfolded in Kyiv that ultimately revised previous creative explorations in architecture. It became one of the manifestations of the infamous social processes of the Stalinist totalitarian era. These processes instilled a spirit of unanimity and obedience among the general public, promoting the "only correct" opinion of the leadership. Any free discussion was suppressed, especially against the backdrop of the stark contrast between optimistic declarations and acute socio-economic problems, which found tragic reflection in the Holodomor of 1932–1933.

At this time, architecture was once again transformed into the material embodiment of the prevailing ideological attitudes. The personal tastes of the "leader of the peoples" and his entourage, who preferred conservative forms and external pomp, played a decisive role. Instead of creative exploration, architects once again had to submit to established guidelines. It was as if the workers were being given back the adornments that had been "stolen by the formalists". Any objections were

interpreted by official propagandists as a "class-hostile" position, which was very dangerous in the context of unfolding political repression.

Taking into account the aforementioned realities, the events in Kyiv architecture in the 1930s become understandable. One of the "first warnings" was a publication in the magazine *Socialist Kyiv*, a review of local new buildings with the telling title "Against simplified schematism – for the joyful architecture of built socialism. *That's right!* The practice of urban construction and the tasks of Soviet architects in Kyiv". In it, new buildings were criticised for being "mainly constructed in the form of simplified schematism, the so-called 'new style' or in the style of simplified modernism of pre-revolutionary apartment buildings in Kyiv from 1910-1914. (the latter two types are most common in Kyiv), and they also reflect the influences of contemporary Western architecture – the architecture of rotten capitalism and echoes of Soviet constructivism". Combining all manifestations of "hostile architecture" in such a not very clear period, the author expressed corresponding claims to a number of specific objects. Among them was the Food Industry Club, which was described as "architecturally unsatisfactory, with unfavourable proportions". The publication hinted at the personal responsibility of the architects for the alleged mistakes, since "the opportunities and conditions for the project's authors were favourable" [14, pp. 11, 13]. It is very telling that the author of the aforementioned article was none other than M. Kholostenko, the recent ideologist of Ukrainian constructivism. In those difficult times, some people felt it necessary to "change their shoes" as quickly as possible and protect themselves with the help of "correct" statements.

The condemnation of the constructivist movement became even more active in 1934, when Kyiv regained its status as the capital of Ukraine. From then on, Kyiv's architecture set the tone and became a model for the entire republic. "Correcting mistakes" went as far as direct intervention in the physical structure of buildings. In an article by M. Kalnytsky for the publication "The Architecture of Kyiv 1921–1932" gives examples such as the Zhovten cinema, this was «redressed» with new facades, or the Jewish theatre on Khreshchatyk, which was left unfinished and eventually demolished due to the frantic search for appropriate forms. The most striking example was the fate of the "building of institutions" on the corner of what are now Bohdan Khmelnytsky Street and Khreshchatyk Street, which was started in 1932 and largely built in a distinctly constructivist style. Its builder, incidentally, was M. Kholostenko, who was not helped by enthusiastic publications. The building was completely demolished; in its place, the Central Universal Store (TSUM) was later built [4, pp. 15, 16]. To these examples, we can add the constructivist building of the former Zootechnical Institute, designed by D. Dyachenko [1, p. 118; 14, p. 13], which was eventually rebuilt with "enriched" facades (now the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences).

As for the Kharchovyk club, it became an example of facade and floor plan transformations directly during construction, due to the extension of its terms. What were the main changes?

The cylindrical volume was simplified, the stepped structure was removed, and the diameter of the dome was increased accordingly. The second-light windows were eliminated, leaving a blank surface on the façade, divided by vertical blades. The ring balcony on the third floor lost its exit to the outside.

On the side of Mezhygorskaya Street, the small volumes of the local foyers and adjacent balconies were completely removed. Subsequently, the stepped lodges, which had already been completely completed inside [9, p. 153]), were converted into horizontal balconies with a common foyer. Times had changed, and there was no need for independent communication between event participants – everyone had to show unanimity and vote "yes". Instead, a completely ordinary façade with regular, paired windows was built on the street side.

Subsequently, the composition of the facades of the former Kharchovyk club did not undergo any fundamental changes – only the details differed. Immediately after the reconstruction, in 1935–1936, relatively few elements were added (primarily cornices, blades and four pylons under the cylindrical balcony), as evidenced by the photograph in Fig. 3, published in 1936. [8, p. 15].



Fig. 3. The Kharchovyk Club after the first stage of reconstruction. Published in 1936

However, over time, the "enrichment" of the building's exterior became quite pronounced. By the end of the 1930s, additional Art Deco elements had been added: patterns on the plaster, balustrades above the cornice, balusters in the balcony railings, and in some places, cornices and mouldings. All this can be seen in the photograph in Fig. 4, published in 1939 [13, p. 21]. Since then, the Kharchovyk club no longer aroused suspicion of formalism. This was further facilitated by the interior design, which was carried out at different times in accordance with the requirements of socialist realism (in particular, the ornamental and decorative decoration by the artist H. Dovzhenko, 1956–1957 [2, pp. 10, 14]). Thus, the building acquired eclectic features, although the overall spatial design testified to the high professionalism of the author.

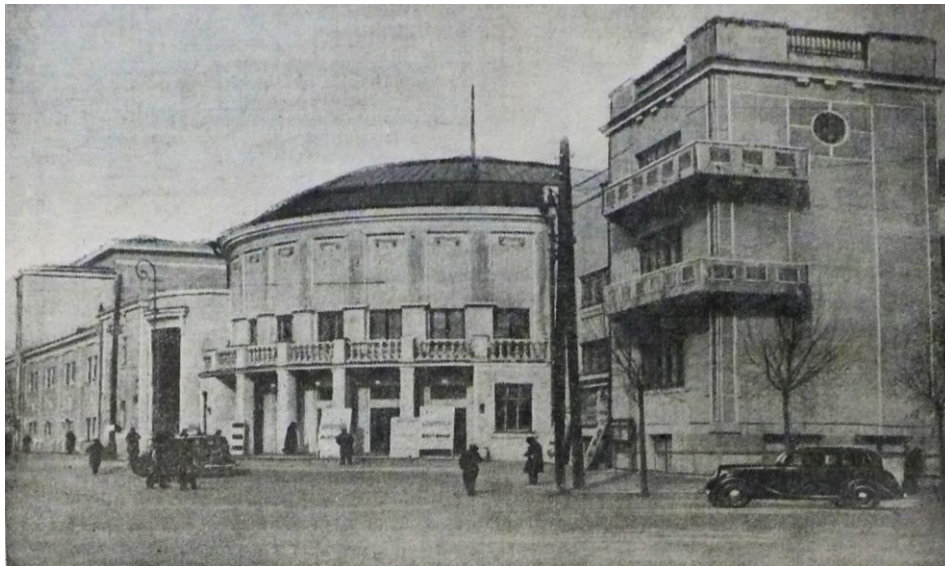


Fig. 4. The Kharchovyk Club after the second stage of transformations. Publication from 1939

However, later, in the 1960s and 1970s, attitudes towards the domestic heritage of constructivism changed for the better. Certain principles of this movement were revived in the architecture of "Soviet modernism," particularly in the work of such Kyiv architects as E. Bilsky, M. Budylovsky, A. Miletsky, N. Chmutina, F. Yuryev, and others. In line with these preferences, at the end of the 1970s, it was decided to reconsider the decoration of the facades of the public building at 2 Mezhygorskaya Street. During the repair and restoration work under the direction of architect O. Grauzy, decorative layers were removed from the front facades (they were partially preserved at the

rear of the building). Clean geometric volumes, smooth texture of plastered surfaces, and clear outlines of openings were restored.

After the transformation, the former Kharchovyk House of Culture was renamed the Slavutych Palace of Culture; during 1980–1985, performances of the Variety Theatre took place here [3, pp. 24, 25]. In 1993, the building ceased to be under departmental control and was given the status of the Kyiv City Arts Centre "Slavutych". Later, in 1998, the Kyiv State Music Theatre for Children and Youth began performing in the building. This was preceded by the reconstruction of the main hall with the installation of an orchestra pit. The round hall took on the appearance of a chamber stage with an amphitheatre. Thus, the existing interior layout took into account the functional changes of different periods. Since 2024, the official name of the institution located at 2 Mezhygorskaya Street has been the Kyiv Municipal Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre, abbreviated as the Kyiv Opera [7].

The current exterior of the building (Fig. 5) was mainly determined by the renovation and restoration work carried out in the 1970s. However, there are still some problematic areas related to past violent interventions. We are referring, in particular, to the extremely bland façade of the main hall on Mezhygorskaya Street and the dull, monotonous surface of the cylindrical volume at the level of the upper tier (currently decorated with the inscription "Music Theatre"). In view of this, an attempt has been made to reconstruct the original author's vision of the appearance of the plans and facades of the building (Fig. 6) in order to better understand the ways of restoring this cultural heritage site in the future.



Fig. 5. The Music Theatre building in its current form. Photo by the author, 2020.

Conclusion. The former Kharchovyk Club in the Podilskyi district of Kyiv was conceived by its author, the renowned Kyiv architect M. Shekhonin, as an expressive work of constructivist domestic architecture. It met functional needs well, used clear geometric forms, and at the same time was consistent in its volumetric and spatial characteristics with the historical buildings of Kontraktova Square. However, during its construction, processes related to totalitarian pressure on architectural creativity were actively unfolding in the country's public and political life. This led to significant distortions in the planning and design of the building's facades. Some of them were later removed, but some of the changes proved irreversible. It is necessary to be aware of the complex history of the building when referring to it as an example of urban architecture of a certain period, as well as when considering the possibility of restoration work here in the future.

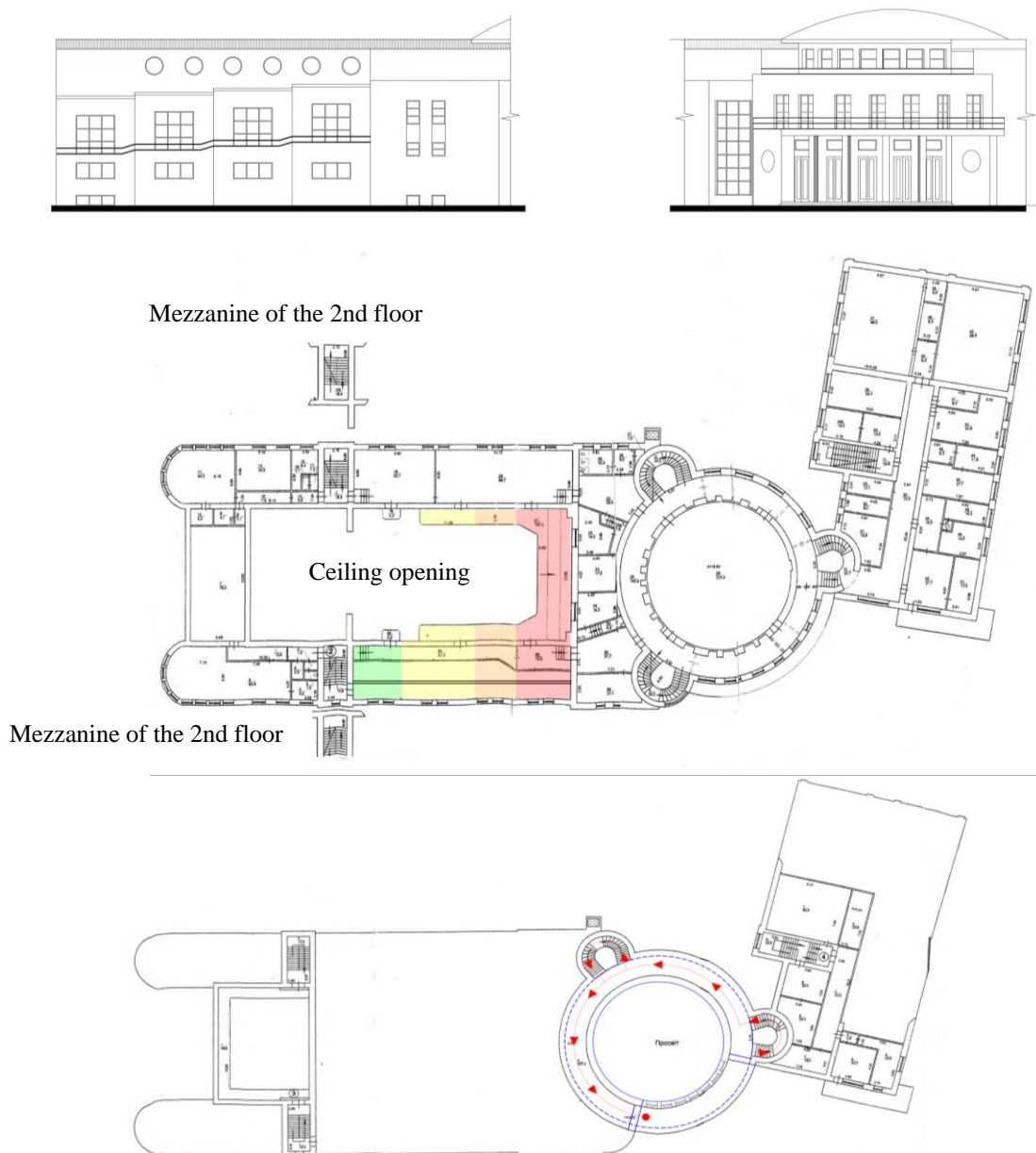


Fig. 6. Attempt to reconstruct the original design by M. Shekhonin (facade fragments, plans of the 2nd and 3rd floors)

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БУДИНОК КЛУБУ «ХАРЧОВИК» У КИЄВІ: ОСОБЛИВОСТІ І ВТРАТИ ПЕРВИННОГО ЗАДУМУ

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Анотація. Споруда нинішнього Музичного театру на вул. Межигірській, 2 – колишнього Будинку культури або клубу «Харчовик» – є помітним об'єктом на Контрактовій пл. у Києві. Її було зведено у 1930-і рр. за проектом відомого архітектора Миколи Олександровича Шехоніна. При цьому наявні зображення показують помітну відмінність остаточного вигляду будівлі від первинного проекту, хоча спершу був використаний саме він. У друкованих публікаціях, які докладно розглядають історію спорудження колишнього БК «Харчовик», цій обставині або не приділено уваги, або сприйнято її як звичайний робочий епізод. Між тим факти засвідчують призупинення будівництва вже практично на фінішній стадії та подальшу переробку частини конструкцій зі зміною зовнішнього вигляду споруди. Маємо підстави вважати, що цю незвичну ситуацію слід розглядати насамперед у контексті еволюції тогочасного ставлення більшовицького керівництва до художніх форм, зокрема, до використання в забудові радянських міст конструктивістського стилю, що його спершу було сприйнято як найбільш «революційний», а потім піддано гонінням. Згідно з таким розумінням змін будівлі зроблено спробу реконструювати хід подій, розглянути найбільш характерні особливості попереднього задуму М. Шехоніна, відтворити втрачене планування верхніх поверхів БК «Харчовик». Показано також, якими прийомами був змушений скористатися автор проекту, аби відійти від конструктивістського вирішення фасадів і об'єму будівлі у напрямку «радянського ар-деко» (в подальшому, під час реставраційного перетворення об'єкта наприкінці 1970-х рр., відповідні елементи значною мірою були усунуті). Матеріали дослідження дозволяють дійти висновку, що корпус колишнього БК «Харчовик» став промовистим прикладом прямого втручання ідеологічних настанов до архітектурної творчості на певному історичному етапі.

Ключові слова: ар-деко, конструктивізм, реконструкція, робітничі клуби, тоталітаризм, Шехонін М.

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