

IS ASTANA A NATIONALISTIC PROJECT? THE ROLE OF KAZAKHSTAN'S NEW CAPITAL IN DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATIONAL IDENTITY

Diana Kopbayeva, MA in Sociology and Social Research
L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan

Abstract:

Academic literature suggests that transformation of the state power fosters shift in national identity (Verdery, 1999). The capital relocation is one of the reflections of this shifting. This paper explores the role of Kazakhstan's new capital in nation-building process and Kazakh identity formation. Kazakhstan obtained its independence after disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991; 6 years later in December 1997 the President moved the capital from Almaty to small town in the North Aqmola (Astana). The government did not provide convincing explanations for the relocation, which caused people and international observers to develop various theories about the real meaning of the relocation including geopolitical and nationalistic reasons.

Theoretical framework suggests that capital relocation is one of the effective tools of national identity development that is commonly used in post-socialist states. The paper suggests that Astana is the political elite's project aimed at becoming a centerpiece of the nationalist nation-building strategy in Kazakhstan. The research contributes to the theory by investigating unrequited question of intersection of national identity and nationalism and built environment in post-soviet Asia.

Key Words: National Identity, Nation-Building, Kazakhstan, Capital Relocation, Astana

1. Introduction

The issue of national identity in post-socialist states is widely represented within cross-disciplinary studies. Yet, there is lack of literature on intersection of national identity and built environment, specifically in Central Asia and Kazakhstan. This paper demonstrates the results of the MA research on the role of built environment in national identity formation at the example of Kazakhstan's capital Astana. The research was fulfilled and presented in September 2011 at Newcastle University, United Kingdom.

In December 1997 Kazakhstan moved its capital from Almaty in the southeast to the north - Aqmola, renamed to 'Astana'. Appearance of Astana in the middle of Kazakh steppe became most remarkable event in Kazakhstan's history, as well as most noticeable project of President Nazarbayev. Yet, even these days the decision of the President to build new capital remains confusing for Kazakhstanis and external observers (Matloff, 1999). The cost of the relocation project, estimated about \$ 400 million only at first stages of its realization, was called as misguided act by majority of international observers, due to severe economic crisis that that Kazakhstan was undergoing; during growing inflation and rising unemployment the relocation was disastrous for Kazakhstan's budget (Jeremy, 1997; Schatz, 2003).

The government explained the necessity of relocation by poor seismic and environmental conditions of Almaty. None of these reasons was meaningful enough to justify the relocation. The facts listed above can be considered as rational-technical reasons that commonly used by governments as plausible, yet superficial explanation for the capital move (Schatz, 2003:7). As Potts (1985) suggests, well-designed move of the capital may foster economic development of the country. For example, majority of the African and Asian countries in 1950s-1990s were guided by aim to built new capitals that would evade economic and geographical limitations of old colonial capitals, and therefore become the new hubs of commercial exchanges (Schatz, 2003). Another factor is the government's desire to weaken political influence of former colonizers by distancing administrative center (Ibid). Although, these explanations seem viable, they are plausible in Kazakhstan's case. Firstly, despite Almaty was a capital of Soviet Kazakhstan, due to its geopolitical location it remains a

key financial center of Kazakhstan. It was economically unreasonable to move capital to distant Astana in the North. Secondly, if the government wanted to distance from the Russian colonial legacy, the move to Astana was useless since its close proximity to Russian border.

There is a common logic in capital relocations in African and Latin American states; besides rational reasons these states use capitals as centrepieces of the nation-building projects. In this paper, the author shows how capital relocation, nation-building, and national identity intersect in case of Kazakhstan. The author suggest that capital's move in Kazakhstan was a symbolic action designed to foster Kazakh identity. It is also demonstrated that Astana is initially designed as a centrepiece of the nationalistic project.

2. Methodology

The research applied the modernist approach of the nation as a theoretical framework for the study. Anderson's (1991) work on imagined communities and Billing's (1995) notion of 'banal nationalism' were valuable for the research. According to theoretical framework, post-colonial states implement same models of nation-building as Western nation-states applied in 17-18th centuries (Anderson, 2001; Smith, 2000). In order to build a nation, political leaders produce discourses about it in the forms of myths, holidays and built environment (Billing, 1995). The paper argues that Kazakhstan's new capital-Astana has become a centerpiece of nation-building project. This paper suggests that, as well as other 'banal' symbols Astana becomes a symbol reflecting national identity and nationalism.

The article explores 'How Astana is used to develop the national identity?' In order to answer this question, it is divided into three main sub-questions:

1. The reasons of the capital's relocation to Astana
2. How Astana is presented in official discourse?
3. How national identity is represented in the cityscape of Astana

The findings discussed in the next section reflect those 3 questions.

The research applied a qualitative approach, using textual analysis and visual analysis of Astana's cityscape. The analysis was conducted by interpretive textual analysis approach. Particularly, rhetorical analysis was applied to the written documents while semiotics is used in the visual analysis. The literature suggests that given types of analysis look for deeper meanings of the texts exploring their implied social meanings in order to discover their relation to wider social discourses (McKee, 2003).

3. Findings

The findings reflect the three research questions identified in previous paragraph.

3.1 *The reasons of capital relocation*

The research findings show that official reasons give logical though un-sufficient justifications for the capital's move. Examination of unofficial theories has demonstrated that relocation was driven by a number of political reasons, including nationalistic concerns.

The justifications for the capital move that produced by the government concerned with domestic questions. Despite multiplicity of official justifications they could be categorized into two groups: environmental and geographic reasons.

Seismic activity

According to government, high probability of earthquakes in Almaty was one of the main reasons that fostered the capital's move. Statistics show that major earthquakes happen in Almaty nearly every 100 years, and last destructive earthquakes occurred in 1887 and 1911, damaging 1700 building and killing 322 people (UN OC HA, 2004). The frequency of quakes during 1990s gave the government more confidence to claim that there was a possibility of another major earthquake in near future. The natural catastrophe cannot be claimed as sufficient explanation for the move. Yet, the possibility of capital destruction in next 20 years was a strong motive to move it.

Pollution

Pollution has been the main problem of Almaty for several decades while overpopulation, emission and mountainous area are considered as its major sources. Clearly, being a major problem,

pollution partly explains the capital relocation. Still, it can not explain its relocation to Astana city. If the ecology of Almaty was a key issue, any other city with better environment could be chosen as a new capital. Likewise, due to semi-deserted landscape causing regular dust storms and poor water conditions, Astana was not best choice for the capital of Kazakhstan.

Geographic issues

Geographic location of Astana, as explained by the government is its main advantage over Almaty (Nazarbayev, 2005). The idea of ‘Eurasianism’, promoted by government as a centerpiece of the new national identity, is one of the key explanations of the capital’s move. The concept of ‘Eurasianism’ was developed in Russian Empire and then in Soviet Union in order to control the inter-ethnic relations. The concept argues that due to its geographical location between Europe and Asia, Russia embodies the cultures of both continents and thus appears as a symbol of harmony between different nations and ethnicities. In Kazakhstan the Eurasian concept was initiated by President and suggests the same idea about ‘unique’ position between European and Asian cultures.

Promoting the Eurasian idea, the government stated that Kazakhstan needed new capital that would embody the idea of country’s ‘uniqueness’ (Nazarbayev, 2005). According to the President, overpopulated Almaty in the south-east was not able to express Kazakhstan’s exclusive mission as a ‘bridge’ between Europe and Asia. On the contrary, “...just as Kazakhstan was uniquely situated at the crossroads of cultures, Astana enjoyed a singular location at the heart of Kazakhstan and could ensure stable and effective transportation, communication, and defense” (Clapham, 1999).

The probability of inter-ethnic tensions in the North can also be argued as important factor affecting the move to Astana. From Astana the government can control problematic Northern regions and keep it under constant surveillance, which was difficult to fulfill from Almaty located 700 miles away from the North.

Hence, despite lack of attention to official theories, the discussed reasons can be argued to have adequate and objective character.

3.1.1 Nationalistic motives

The research has revealed that for Kazakhstan the capital relocation has two symbolic meanings: firstly, the reconciliation of Kazakhstan’s sovereignty; secondly, the new identity production.

Reconciliation of sovereignty

Place is an important basis for national identity. In terms of modernist theory of nationhood, place plays a key role in modern sovereign states. For Kazakhstan, the capital move to the North was a symbolic action demonstrating that despite it is a Russian populated area, the North remains an integral part of Kazakh state. By moving to North, Kazakhstan thus reconciles its land, constructing new community the entire territory of which should be ‘imagined’ as Kazakh. Due to the policy of Russian Empire and Soviet authority in 19-20th centuries, in terms of ethnic composition the North of Kazakhstan actually became Russian area. For instance, still after collapse of the Union in 1991, about 63% of population of the northern regions (Aqmola, Karaganda, Pavlodar, Kostanai, North Kazakhstan) was Russian, whereas southern and western areas were predominantly inhabited by Kazakhs (The Agency of Statistics, 2011). The concentration of a large percentage of Russians in the North increased the threat of separatism, which was not groundless due to the following facts:

The large scale of geographical segregation between Russians and Kazakhs was a real problem for Kazakhstan. Figure 3.1 demonstrates that majority of ethnic Kazakhs is assembled in southern regions of the country (Kyzylorda, Shymkent, Taraz,), while there is only small percentage of Kazakhs in the North. In contrast, the Russian population mainly inhabits North and East of Kazakhstan (Figure 3.2). As it is said by Gellner (1983), the regional deviation between two nations in a single state usually causes resistant attitudes of one of them. In Kazakhstan’s situation, the regional segregation could intensify separatist attitudes among Russians in the North, which would disturb the nation-building process in Kazakhstan.

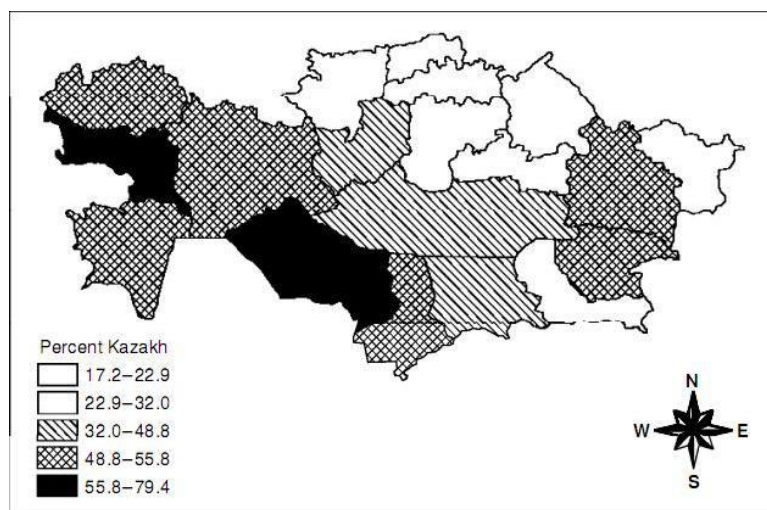


Figure 3.1 Demography of Kazakhstan. Source: Wolfel, 2010:490

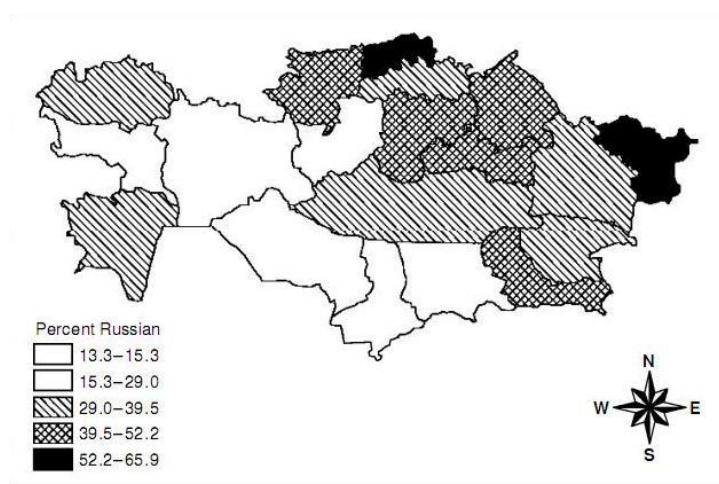


Figure 3.2 Demography of Kazakhstan. Source: Wolfel, 2010:491

Proximity of Russia always meant the possibility of Russian Federation's support of ethnic Russians in the North, which jeopardized Kazakhstan's sovereignty. In 1930s-1950s the Soviet administration was promoting the policy of dispersion of ethnic Kazakh population by forced migration of Russian and Slavic nations to Kazakhstan. As a consequence of those campaigns by the end of 20th century demographically Kazakhstan was divided into Kazakh South and Russian North. This fact fostered groundless theories of Russian nationalists, arguing that North Kazakhstan historically belongs to Russia while traditional Kazakh territory is restrained by South and South-East areas. Majority of Russians leaning to Russian Federation demonstrated resistance to the new national identities. The refusal of Kazakhstan's new language policy was one of the examples of Russian's denial of new circumstances.

In August 1995 the new Constitution proclaimed Kazakh as 'State' language, while in 1996 the amendment to the Constitution proclaimed Russian as 'Official' language (Dave, 2005). By adopting comparatively tolerant language policy, President Nazarbayev intended to balance the nationalistic attitudes of some ethnic Kazakhs, who claimed to revive the Kazakh language on the one hand, and nationalistic Russians who did not want to adopt the new identity from another (Olcott, 2002). However, influenced by nationalists from Russian Federation, Russians claimed for proclamation of Russian as a second state language and resisted to learn Kazakh. Martha Olcott (2002) explains this situation as a 'zero-sum game' where '*. . . hypersensitivity* [for ethnic communities] has locked the people of Kazakhstan in a situation in which the advance of one ethnic

group are understood as losses by the other'. Therefore, any policy regarding cultural issues could become a potential source of the inter-ethnic discords.

The discussed problems encouraged the government's decision to move the capital to the North. Firstly, it would let to keep constant control over potential separatist movements. Secondly, the capital's move is an effort to balance ethnic diversity by distribution of Kazakhs to the North. Thirdly, the move to the Russified North is a symbolic reclamation of the Kazakh territorial integrity and sovereignty (Melvin, 1995).

Alternative nationhood

One of the reasons of capital move is an attempt to distance from Soviet legacy. The move has symbolic and political implications. In terms of politics, it is an opportunity to establish new governmental apparatus. Majority of new administration in Astana are Kazakhs, while old soviet cadres stayed in Almaty. Symbolic importance of the move lies in the construction of the new state on a principle of *tabula rasa* (Schatz, 2003).

The relocation is intended to show Kazakhstan's legitimate statehood within political and economic world. The parallels could be drawn between the capital moves in Brasilia and Kazakhstan. One of the main reasons of capital's move in Brasilia was the President's effort to demonstrate the country's readiness for socio-economic transformations (Ibid). In Kazakhstan this aspiration is reflected in the new capital's cityscape. The architecture of Astana symbolizes both Kazakhstan's willingness for independent nationhood, and state's openness for new international affairs. Moreover, the capital's move to the steppe can be considered as a reclamation of nomadic past practiced by Kazakhs before Russian colonization. Thus, Astana creates a symbolic link between the past of Kazakhs before Russians colonization and present independent period, skipping therefore an undesirable colonial.

3.2 Representation of Astana in official discourse

The research findings have revealed several discourses about Astana, each reflecting various and contradictory ideas about national identity. The chapter begins with the analysis of Astana as a visual representation of the official notion of a civic society represented in 'Eurasian' concept, and at the same time as a centerpiece of the nationalistic notion of the 'Kazakh' identity.

Eurasian concept

The theoretical framework suggests that it is common for new states to seek for new ideas or concepts that would represent the state and bring the nation together (Billing, 1995). For Kazakhstan the notion of 'Eurasianism' is aimed at filling the ideological gap caused by communism's breakdown, and to shape a new national idea. President Nazarbayev applied the Eurasian notion to Kazakhstan, developing the idea about the 'uniqueness' of Kazakh state due to its location between European and Asian civilizations. Astana has become a centerpiece of this ideology. The city has been promoted as a geopolitical center of Eurasia, representing centrality and multiculturalism of Kazakhstan. This idea not only mentioned in official documents but it also inscribed in Astana's landscape. Astana's contemporary architecture physically represents the concept of Eurasian identity. The capital has become a central point of a new discourse indicating Astana and Kazakhstan as the center or the 'heart of Eurasia' (Nazarbayev, 2003; 2005).

Not only the significance of Astana as a new center of a distinct Eurasian state is underlined, but also formation of the new 'Eurasian' identity based on the principle of multiethnic society emphasized in this discourse. The 'Eurasianism' can be considered as an attempt to prevent the nationalistic tendencies, by suggesting an alternative non-ethnic concept of the 'Eurasian' nation - the amalgam of people living at the center of supercontinent (Ibraeva, 2005).

Along with the Eurasian idea, the idea of 'Kazakhstani' people is a part of the government's project of civic nation. The term 'Kazakhstani' is used to refer the whole population of Kazakhstan regardless ethnic belonging. The Eurasian or Kazakhstani notion operates as a main element of the President's idea about civic society. At the same time, the Eurasian concept allows the government to de-legitimize any disturbing claims such as arising from Kazakh nationalists or Russian minority.

Glorifying Kazakh nation

Along with promotion of the Eurasian identity, the government started to work towards construction of the national identity exclusively for the ‘Kazakh’ nation, which in contrast to ‘Kazakhstani’ idea, includes exclusively the Kazakh population. In terms of this, the representation of Astana as a symbol of Kazakhstan’s ‘uniqueness’ could be considered as an expression of Kazakh nationalism. The official discourse characterizes Kazakhs as the “genuine Eurasian people”, and Kazakhstan as the “epicenter of the world”, that certainly gives the nation an emblematic prestige and promotes national pride (Shnirelman, 2009; Nazarbayev, 2005). The role of Astana in here is the “bridge between Europe and Asia” (Ibid).

These discourses can clearly be understood as a glorification of the Kazakh statehood. Moreover, recently the government frequently uses the expression ‘Kazakh’ instead of ‘Kazakhstani’ while talking about Kazakhstan’s development and future strategies. To illustrate, Astana is often called as ‘sacred fatherland of the free nation of Kazakhs’, which actually contradicts the official discourse of non-ethnic Eurasian identity.

3.2.2 Manifestation of sovereignty

The research findings revealed that official discourse portrays Astana also as a symbol of the Kazakhstan’s sovereignty. One of the reasons of the capital’s move was the President’s attempt to distant from Soviet legacy, that were still recalled in old capital’s memories, and to begin a new history from the construction of the ‘Kazakh’ capital. Official documents describe Astana as a “capital of the free nation”, a “symbol of Independent Kazakhstan” and the “new capital of the new era” (Nazarbayev, 2011; Dzhaqsybekov, 2000).

Though, most documents frequently refer to Astana as ‘Kazakhstani’ capital, the city is also represented as ‘Kazakh’ capital, thus proclaiming the unconditional rights of the titular nation (Kazakhs) to Kazakhstan’s land (Dzhaqsybekov, 2000; Kazinfrom *b*). To illustrate, the expression “the capital of the free nation” obviously refers exactly to Kazakhs rather than to the whole population.

From the Stalinist era, Soviet administration used nationalistic policy towards national minorities. Millions of Kazakhs died as a result of the program for collectivization, meanwhile Russian families were moved to Kazakhstan and provided with houses taken from bankrupted Kazakhs. Therefore, by ‘free nation’, officials mean the Kazakh nation, which finally gained Independence from Russian dominance. Thus, the capital move to North was a political gesture symbolizing the reconciliation of Kazakh territory, previously associated with Russians. The move to the steppe can be thought as symbolic return to historical roots, and as declaration of the legitimacy of Kazakh nationhood.

Astana as symbol of Kazakhstan

Astana has been promoted as a symbol that would foster national pride, and represent Kazakhstan to the world. Astana is represented not only as an original capital of the ‘Eurasian’ nation, but also as Kazakhstan’s main achievement. Astana has been turned into the main object of public attention. For instance, the summits of the Organization on Security and Cooperation summit and the 7th Asian Winter Games all were held in Astana, that certainly increases the city’s prestige. The organization of such important events in Astana is a chance to introduce a new capital to the world, and thus to promote it as a success of Kazakhstan’s statehood and a new national symbol. Thus, Astana itself has become a big symbol of certain ideas.

Moreover, Astana is also promoted as national ‘brand’. Despite being known as a large oil producer and owner of the world’s largest operational space launch facility (*Baikonur*), in 20 years of independence Kazakhstan has not developed its own brand that would characterize the country. Astana became an ideal brand representing Kazakhstan. Firstly, it is the world’s first capital built in 21st century which gives Kazakhstan exceptional status as an initiator of a grandiose capital building project. Secondly, both national traditions, and modernism are embodied in the architecture of Astana, symbolizing thus the unity of past, present and future. Furthermore, it can be argued that Astana appears as not only a brand in its symbolic meaning representing Kazakhstan to the world, but also as

a huge business project. By ‘advertizing’ Astana to the world, Kazakhstan seeks for foreign investments new contracts with the world’s biggest building companies.

3.3 Representing national identity through urban landscape

From the first site Astana seems as illusion appeared in the middle of Kazakh steppe. The monumental buildings with unique designs are the main features of Astana (Figure 3.3). The idea of modernity suggested by Japanese designer Kisho Kurokawa is a central concept reflected in Astana’s architecture. According to postcolonial studies, in a prospect of developing countries, ‘modernity’ represents an attempt of those states to advance toward European model of development (Koch, 2010). In case of Astana, modernist architecture represents two symbolic meanings:

- Independent statehood
- The new national identity





Figure 3.3- Architecture of Astana, Left Bank. Appendix IV for other images

3.3.1 Independent statehood

Modernism and monumentalism of architecture show total rupture with the Soviet design of majority of Kazakhstan's cities. Astana was founded by Russian Cossacks in 19th century as Aqmolinsk town which had always been associated with Russian legacy. Accordingly, the city's landscape recalled the Imperial style; after the Soviet Union's formation it was re-designed into Soviet city. By 1880s Russian peasants constructed the residences in a style of typical Russian *izba* and rectangular brick structures called *sammany* (Figure 3.4).



Figure 3.4-Astana in 19th century (www.astana.kz)

At that time, Kazakhs from Middle Horde began to adapt sedentary lifestyle leaving traditional nomadic life. Transformation of Kazakhs' lifestyle affected the architectural types of their houses. *Sammany* and *izbas* had totally replaced traditional Kazakh *yurt* made of wooden walls which was used by Kazakhs for several centuries (Figure 3.5).



Figure 3.5- Kazakh yurt (<http://www.eco-tourism.kz/html/culture.htm>)

During Krushchev's Virgin Lands program, Akmolinsk was renamed in Tselinograd and filled with Soviet block apartments instead of *sammany*. After relocation, Astana has transformed into modern capital of Kazakhstan with original architecture. Soviet apartments were replaced by innovative projects such as *Baiterek*, *Pyramid* and *Khan Shatyr* (Figure 3.6). The theory suggests any architectural style represents the ideology of its time (Alexander, 2007). In Soviet Union block apartments were common for all major cities of the Union Republics; similar architecture reflected key ideology of Socialism-Unity and equality between the nations. It could be considered then that destruction of soviet constructions in Astana is a part of nationalistic project intended to erase the old ideology by introducing a new vision of Kazakhstan's future.

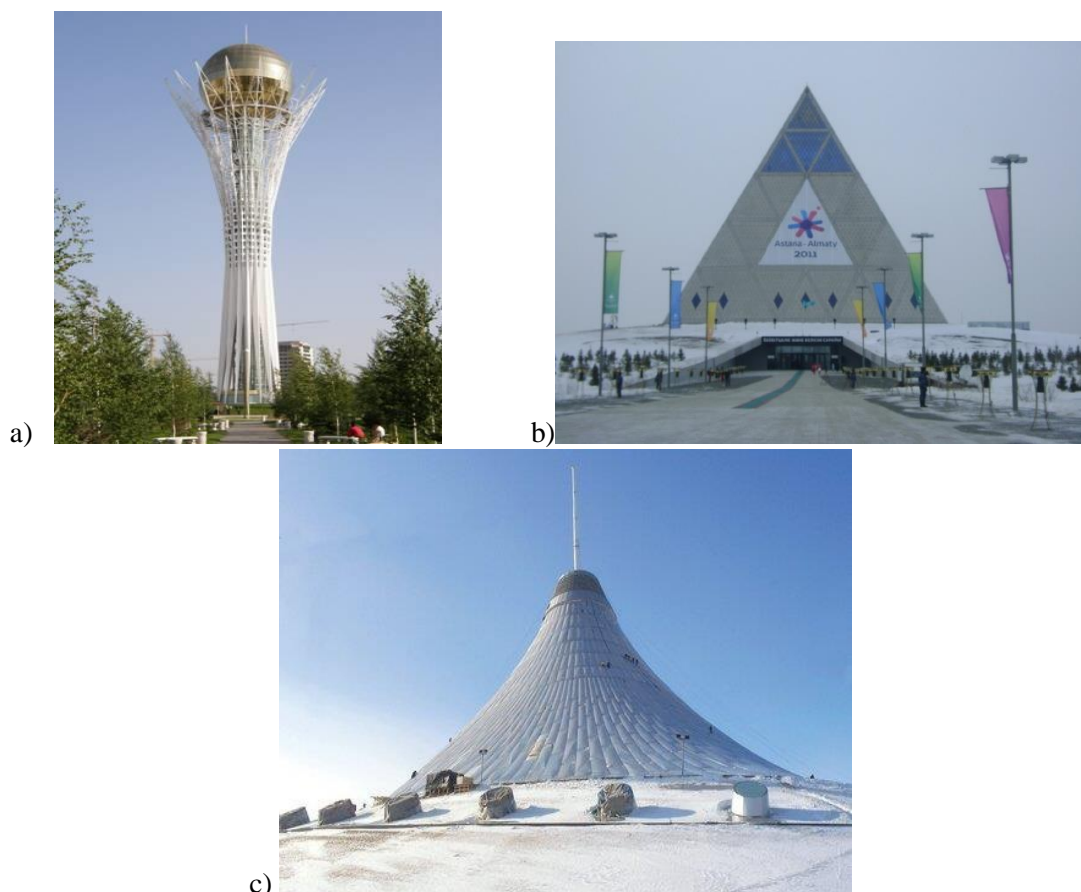


Figure 3.6- Constructions a)Baiterek, b)Pyramid,c)Khan Shatyr

Symbolically major new constructions in Astana are located on the Left Bank of Ishim River. 'Left Bank' is a name of a new city center of Astana. Before 1997, this side of Ishim was covered by steppe; in 13 years the territory transformed into the main administrative centre of Kazakhstan.. The reconstruction of Astana was not sufficient to represent the statehood and President Nazarbayev decided to build a new city within Astana itself (Left Bank).

The re-construction of Astana also symbolizes declaration of Kazakhstan's economic openness. Astana turned into one of the world's largest building projects with estimated cost of 8 billion dollars from 1997 to 2010 period (www.infrom.kz). Construction of Astana demonstrates Kazakhstan's readiness for the new relations with the world economies. Thus, it could be said that principal metaphors engraved in Astana's architecture signify Kazakhstan's desire to be seen as legitimate and equal international actor.

New national identity

Futuristic architecture represents President Nazarbayev's idea of *Eurasianism* ('Evraziystvo'). In Kazakhstan Eurasianism indicates Kazakhstan's special role as a 'bridge' between European and Asian cultures (Nazarbayev, 2005). Historically, the central route of famous 'Silk Road' lied across Central Asia and the territory of Kazakhstan, connecting Asia with the Mediterranean world. As a capital, Astana is supposed to signify this intersection of cultures. Indeed, Astana's is a mixture of different architectural designs including Western style skyscrapers, mosque like museums, and buildings representing Kazakh culture. Thus, Astana's architecture is used to reflect President's vision of Kazakhstan's future based on prosperity and inter-ethnic unity.

The Palace of Peace ('Pyramid') is an example of how the built environment becomes a part of official discourse (Figure 3.6).The Palace, designed by Lord Norman Foster, reflects President's idea of multiculturalism and religious accord. Built in 2004, the Pyramid held three 'Congresses of World and Traditional Religions' that took place in 2003, 2006, 2009 (Pearman, 2011). The Pyramid is one of those 'special projects' promoting the official project of Eurasian identity, representing

Kazakhstan as a center inter-ethnic harmony for both domestic and international audiences (Nazarbayev, 2006).

‘Eurasian’ identity based on inter-national unity is an alternative identity suggested by government. Applying Soviet type internationalist discourse, the officials uses the terms ‘Eurasian’ and ‘Kazakhstani’ instead of ‘Kazakh’ (identity) in order to erase the disparity between nationalities (Koch, 2010).

Kazakh nationalism

The research also revealed that the latest constructions in Astana reflect the nationalistic ideas that are different from official discourse. Alongside with the inclusive ‘Eurasian’ and ‘Kazakhstani’ identity, the government develops the ‘Kazakh’ identity for the titular nation.

‘Kazakh Eli’

‘*Kazakh Eli*’ (‘Kazakh Land’) is one of the recent complexes opened in Astana. The Monument symbolizes the freedom, pride and future of the Kazakh nation (Kazinform, *c*).The constructions’ main element is the 91-meter white stele with mythical golden bird *Samruk* on its top which is a symbol of freedom and hope (Figure 3.7).The monument’s height signifies 1991-the year of Kazakhstan’s independence. There are 4 main relief compositions inside the monument, each of which represents key ethical principles of Kazakh nation. The monument appears as one of those ‘iconic sites’ that expresses the Kazakh nationalism.

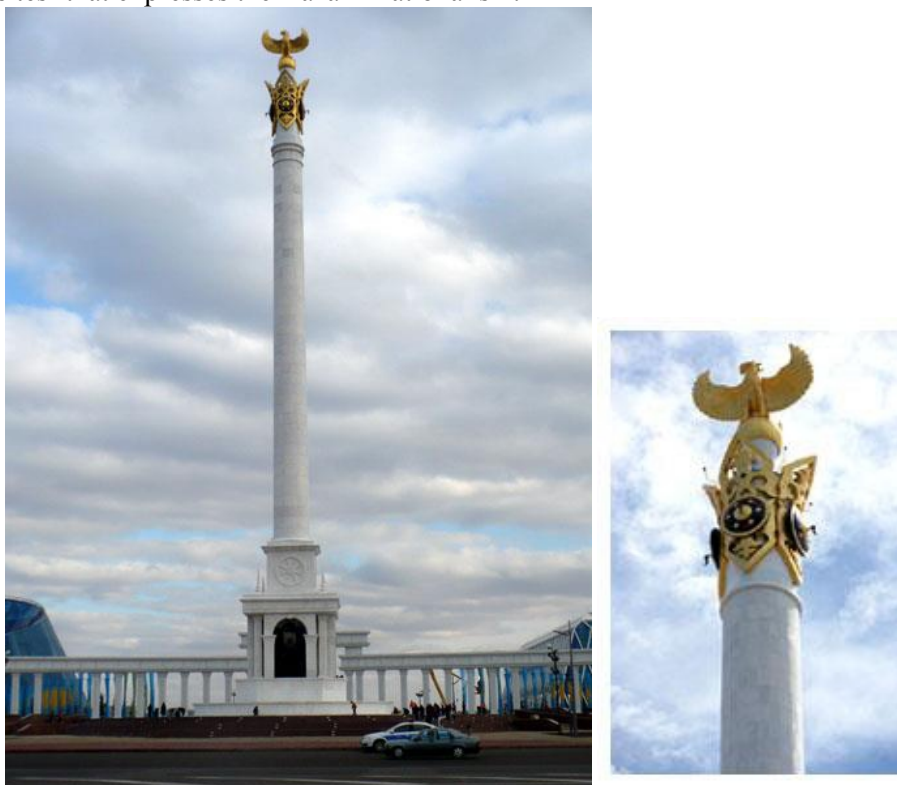
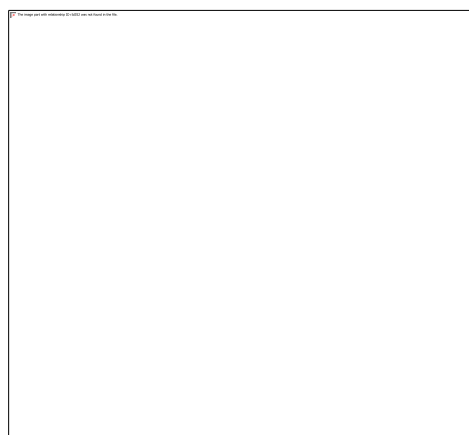


Figure 3.7- Kazakh Eli monument

Firstly, the symbolic height (91) represents the beginning of an independent statehood. There are complexes in other cities symbolizing the independency such as monument of ancient Kazakh golden warrior ‘*Altyn Adam*’ (‘Golden man’) in Almaty. However, except ‘*Kazakh Eli*’ there is no monument, the structure and composition of which clearly signifies the liberty from Russian legacy. One of the monument’s 4 compositions - ‘*Courage*’ glorifies Kazakh heroes of early years of resistance to Russian imperialism. From one side, it signifies a gratitude of Kazakhs to the predecessors who for centuries fought for the state’s independence. From another side, the images of Kazakh heroes recall a national history, which was almost forgotten during Soviet period. Due to national policies of Soviet administration not only facts about Kazakh resistance were removed from the history books, but also many traditions of national minorities were forgotten. Recalling the

history, the government thus revives a national culture which is a foundation for the development of national identity. Due to official discourse of multiculturalism, the government expresses ‘Kazakh Eli’ as a gratitude for all ‘Kazakhstani’ people, for their patience and support of the current power. However, in other official documents there could be found the nationalistic notes that emphasize the importance of *Kazakh Eli* for the ‘Kazakh’ nation. Considering the colonial past *Kazakh Eli* indicates Kazakhs’ enduring desire of independence and resistance to Russian colonization. Since Russian colonization in 18th century till Union’s breakdown, for 2 centuries Kazakhs wished the independent statehood. The wish was fulfilled when Kazakhstan obtained sovereignty; and ‘Kazakh Eli’ has become a symbol of this contentment.

Secondly, the title ‘Kazakh Eli’ (‘Kazakh Land’) itself brings patriotic tones. The monument could be named ‘Kazakhstan’s Land’, and then it would follow official doctrine about Kazakhstani identity. However, in order to develop patriotism, the name should have reflected Kazakh sovereignty. The monument together with a new capital becomes an element of a large nation building project in Kazakhstan.



a)



b)



c)

Figure 3.9-Relief compositions Kazakh Eli

Hence, ‘Kazakh Eli’ is one of those cultural sites aimed to revive the national pride and foster national identity of Kazakh people.

Recalling the literature review it can be said that urban landscape plays significant role in reflecting national identity. The analysis shows that Astana’s landscape represents the following ideas:

Firstly, its 'futuristic' style manifests Kazakhstan's independent and legitimate statehood. Secondly, it reflects the government's project of 'Eurasian' identity. Yet, along with the 'Eurasian' notion, a new idea of the 'Kazakh' nationhood has been reflected in particular constructions. The appearance of nationalistic monuments demonstrates that alongside with an inclusive 'Kazakhstani' identity, the government promotes an exclusive 'Kazakh' identity for the titular nation, demonstrating Kazakh nation's right to Kazakhstan's statehood.

Conclusion

The main aim of this paper is to examine the role of Kazakhstan's new capital in national identity formation. The research shows that Astana is a project produced by the government in order to reflect various discourses concerning the development of Kazakhstan and the Kazakh nation. However, it can be argued that these discourses are not always consistent, and in reality contradict each other. The research demonstrates that the Eurasian notion of multiethnic identity, which has been promoted as the state's key principle, is challenged by the developing idea of Kazakh nationalism. Noteworthy that both ideas are developed by the government, though the 'Eurasianism' has become an official discourse while the idea of 'Kazakh' identity is proliferated indirectly in coded metaphors and built environment. Both ideas are embedded in Astana: in its cityscape and in a general discourse of the city. On the one hand, Astana has become a symbol of independency, inter-ethnic harmony and Kazakhstan's prosperity. On another hand, Astana is often represented as primarily 'Kazakh' place, symbolizing an unconditional right of the Kazakh nation to Kazakhstan's statehood.

The contradictory character of the official discourse of national identity could be considered within wider theoretical framework as a contradiction between ethnic and civic forms of nationalism (Brubaker, 1996). As Brubaker (1996) suggests, majority of post-communist states develop in two ways: either as a civic nation based on the principle of equality regardless ethnic background, or as an ethno-state founded on the idea of superiority of one nation. In terms of this Kazakhstan is at the stage of deciding whether to continue to construct a civic society through Eurasian concept, or to develop the idea of ethnic nationalism. It should be noted that until now the government has been constructed a civic society through different aspects such as promotion of bilingual policy, equal representation of national minorities in legislative branch and through 'Kazakhstani' idea. Yet, after 20 years of the building of an independent statehood, Kazakhstan started to think about developing more certain ideas about the nation and national identity rather than generic 'Kazakhstani' idea. However, as the research demonstrates, Kazakhstan is still far from the transformation into ethno-centric state since despite the capital's move and changes in the landscape, there is no radical ideological shift happened until now.

Summarizing the project, it would be sensible to evoke the research's main question-**'Is Astana a nationalistic project?'** From the discussion above it can be stated that Astana is clearly a nationalistic project developed in order to promote the official ideas about Kazakh statehood and national identity. It can be stated that the research also has fulfilled its main motivation: the examination of the connection between national identity and built environment through the demonstrating of Astana's role as a centerpiece of the official nation-building project in Kazakhstan.

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