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Architectural and urban planning context of the physical dimension of urban identity

Abstract. In the contemporary context, urban identity is a critical aspect of city development. Its influence is evident in decision-making regarding the preservation of cultural heritage, the enhancement of social cohesion, and the stimulation of economic growth. For these interrelated goals, architectural and urban planning serve as foundational elements in shaping and reflecting a city's unique character and value. The study aimed to analyse architectural and urban planning determinants as essential multidimensional components in the formation and maintenance of urban identity. Using a comparative approach, the study identifies specific forms of material expression in the urban environment that foster a sense of identity and belonging among residents and visitors alike. A comparative analysis of analogous global and Ukrainian sites was conducted, including the cities of Palmanova (Italy) and Zhovkva (Ukraine); architectural and urban planning ensembles of the Circus (Bath, England) and Stometrivka (Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine), Empire State Building (New York, USA) and the Lviv Theatre of Opera and Ballet (Lviv, Ukraine). The findings indicate that the study of urban identity centres on a comprehensive understanding of human-place identification dynamics. The study reveals that examining urban identity necessitates a comprehensive understanding of human identification with their place of residence. Consequently, arguments for the preservation of landmark sites within established urban settings are insufficient and require specification at the level of their physical manifestations. It is proposed to emphasise the architectural and urban planning context, analysing it in alignment with three widely accepted levels of city organisation. Physical components of the urban environment, such as buildings and structures, architectural complexes and ensembles, streets and squares, as well as the city's overall territory, can serve as primary active elements, each equally contributing to the formation of urban identity. In some instances, understanding the city as a cohesive whole offers significantly greater potential compared to viewing its components separately, and vice versa. The capacity of individual elements to merge historical and contemporary aspects within a unified urban structure enhances the overall appeal and functionality of urban

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areas, further promoting a socially and culturally cohesive environment. The findings of this study can support more effective planning and implementation of urban development strategies, potentially preserving each city's uniqueness and enhancing the quality of life for residents

Keywords: urban environment; physical characteristics; urban planning theory; belonging; uniqueness

INTRODUCTION

Cities play a pivotal role in the development of contemporary society, serving as catalysts for economic growth, scientific and technological innovation, as well as cultural and social progress. When a city possesses significant potential in various areas of human activity, it opens up additional opportunities for development and prosperity. However, a city's true potential lies not only in its contemporary achievements and infrastructure but also in its rich historical and cultural heritage, which shapes the city's unique identity. A city's heritage encompasses architectural landmarks, cultural traditions, historical events, and social practices that are passed down through generations. If a city's true potential is not carefully considered, the rapid pace of urbanisation can lead to imbalanced trends. These trends can reduce the urban context to a formal level and erode social cohesion at the level of shared perspectives.

Concurrently, there has been a growing body of research focused on the issue of urban development within existing city boundaries and the assessment of its negative impact on the functioning of historically established urban environments. For example, B. Ashrafi *et al.* (2020) analysed and provided a well-argued assessment of the consequences of urban development on World Heritage cultural sites. The authors highlighted the conflict arising from the divergence between the need to preserve cultural heritage and the need for urban development. Such a problem stimulates the search for identity in architecture and urban planning and correlates with the uniqueness of specific places and their inhabitants.

Historical cities that undergo consistent and systematic renewal maintain their authenticity and identity, as affirmed by A. Pleshkanovska (2024). The author argues that a condition for the sustainable and harmonious development of an established city is its comprehensive reconstruction, and notes that reconstructive activity in its various forms, methods, and means of implementation is an integral part of a city's life cycle. H.M. Mansour *et al.* (2023a) emphasise that the nature of urban identity is multidimensional and therefore its study should not be limited to concepts of preserving cities and their heritage. In another study (Mansour *et al.*, 2023b), the authors trace the fundamental connection between urban identity, place identity, city image, and its brand. They conclude that, despite physical changes occurring over time, cities have the ability to maintain their identity in various manifestations.

The contradictions arising at the level of recognising urban identity are discussed in the research of C. Hudson *et al.* (2019). The authors argue that insufficient attention

paid to historical and cultural preconditions in reproducing urban identity can provoke political conflicts. B. Cherkes & J. Hernik (2021), comparing the architecture of central public spaces in the capitals of Central and Eastern Europe during their authoritarian and post-authoritarian development, demonstrate that the transformation of identity directly influences the formation and reconstruction of historical places.

The foundation of urban identity lies not only in social and cultural aspects. Physical characteristics of the urban environment also play a significant role. This is the key perspective taken by E. Manahasa & O. Manahasa (2020) in their study of the loss of identity in the city of Tirana (Albania) due to damage to its physical fabric. The authors note that the focus on the physical aspects of urban identity is a result of the influence of Modernism. This approach facilitates the recognition of the uniqueness of the urban environment and an understanding of its content. It is visual perception that is the primary way of identifying and understanding them. H.M. Mansour *et al.* (2023b) note that urban identity, as studied within the framework of urban planning, goes beyond social structure; instead, the social aspect is merely a factor that influences it. In this regard, the authors identified three directions for studying urban identity, in which spatial scale, the role of the consumer and time, urban memory, and urban identity as a dynamic transitional concept are significant.

The Ukrainian experience, studied by O. Musiyezdov & K. Maryniak (2020), also points to the variability of urban identity. It is based on the understanding of a city as a collection of different groups of people who consider it their home and feel a connection to it. Each of these groups has its own perception of the city, based on their living conditions and experiences. A. Pleshkanovska (2021) has examined the understanding of the spatial order of the city. She highlights the contradictory nature of the functional-planning organisation of Ukrainian cities formed in the post-industrial era. The author substantiates the directions for transforming the territory and development from the existing state to a city of an innovative character.

Given the rapid pace of development in European cities and the unprecedented political and socio-economic situation in Ukraine, scientific literature demonstrates a constant search for effective ways to preserve urban identity and to support and strengthen it in the contemporary world. This study aimed to identify specific forms of urban identity through the physical space and material resources, with a focus on Ukrainian settlements. Due to their uniqueness, they are not inferior to their global counterparts and





require due attention. This article compares different ways of positioning objects of historical architectural and urban heritage and aspects of the relationship between city dwellers and these objects through the connection with cultural potential and emotional perception, as well as ways of using them in everyday life: work, study or leisure.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study draws on the experience of creating globally recognised and iconic architectural and urban planning objects to explore methods of shaping urban identity. It uses the characteristics of a city's physical space and material resources, which serve as expressions of the cultural and

historical aspects of urban identity. Methodological approaches to understanding the material and spatial environment of societal life (Ashworth, 2009) have been crucial in addressing the study's objectives. The selected sample of objects allows for a detailed and systematic examination of various aspects of urban form and its evolution, facilitating clarity and precision in conducting comparative analysis. Central to this analysis is an understanding of the spatial functioning of the city according to its formal organisation across three main hierarchical levels: macro, meso, and micro. This approach reflects the need for a comprehensive analysis of popular forms of urban identity expression and their impact on different aspects of city life (Fig. 1).

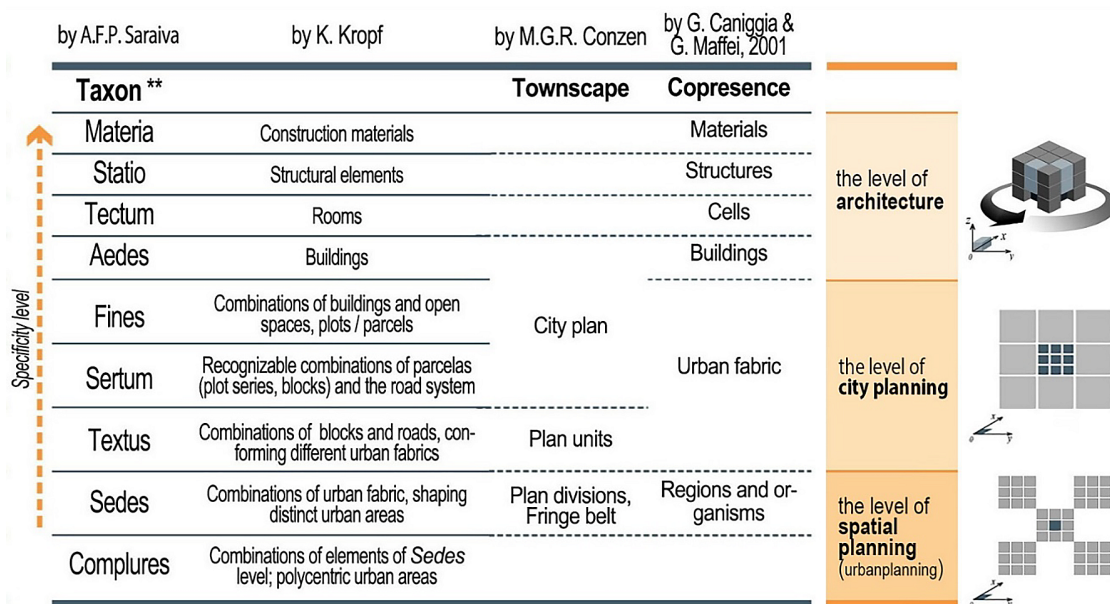


Figure 1. Comparison of the hierarchical organisation of architectural and urban planning objects and their structural elements, as well as generalisation and alignment with the commonly accepted understanding of the structural organisation of the urban environment

Source: Yu. Idak (2022)

The macro level encompasses large-scale objects and spatial structures such as cities, towns, and villages. This level provides an overview of the city and its role within the regional context. The meso level includes individual fragments of the city that form its fabric: blocks, streets, parks, squares, and other medium-scale spatial units. These elements are key to forming the local identity of residents in specific districts of the city; they reflect their daily lives and interpersonal relationships. The micro level consists of small architectural forms, individual buildings, courtyards, small parks, and playgrounds. These elements are often the most important for the personal perception of space, emotional connection to place, and the daily experiences of residents.

For a detailed study, objects at different hierarchical levels were selected: macro level – the cities of Palmanova (Italy) and Zhovkva (Ukraine); meso level – the Circus in Bath (England) and Stometrivka in Ivano-Frankivsk (Ukraine); micro level – the Empire State Building in

New York (USA) and the Lviv Theatre of Opera and Ballet (Ukraine). The selection of these objects is representative as they have significant historical and cultural importance and play a key role in shaping both global and local cultural heritage. Moreover, they have international recognition, making them a focal point for study and discussion, as well as for the implementation of innovative ideas towards adapting to contemporary challenges.

The methodological foundation of the research was a comparative approach focused on identifying and analysing the similarities and differences, as well as trends in the formation of the material and spatial environment of human life. This approach made it possible not only to assess the mechanisms of functioning of the physical environment but also to interpret the processes and states of its influence on the formation of urban identity. In this context, a detailed comparison of different ways of positioning objects of historical architectural and urban heritage was conducted in



the context of their interaction with the local population through the prism of cultural potential and emotional perception. Aspects of the use of these objects in everyday life, such as work, study, and leisure, were also taken into account. Given the importance of the development and management of urban spaces, the comparative approach was based on a comprehensive understanding of the problem of forming urban identity, taking into account the cultural and social significance of the living environment of society.

The research was conducted in three stages:

- The first stage, theoretical, was associated with defining the concepts and categories that describe the specifics of the self-expression of urban identity, the features of the formation of physical space, and the significance of material resources in promoting urban identity and the tourist potential of the city. This stage was implemented using the method of theoretical analysis, which is based on a systematic review and synthesis of existing scientific studies, theories, and concepts related to urban studies, sociology, cultural studies, and architecture. The methodology includes a comparative analysis of scientific literature, historical documents, and research, which allows identifying key factors and trends in the formation of urban identity and revealing their impact on the development of the urban environment.

- The second stage involved the selection of case studies and the identification of unique characteristics that define each. A comparative analysis of architectural and urban planning elements, identified as key in forming a sense of belonging to a particular settlement, was conducted. Historical, cultural, and social factors influencing the perception and significance of these objects within the context of the established urban environment were taken into account.

- The third stage aimed to determine the specific functions of the selected objects and to identify those aspects of the material and spatial environment that directly contribute to the formation of urban identity. This stage was achieved through content analysis. It allowed for the identification of key elements influencing the formation of urban identity and the evolution of urban form, including social, cultural, and economic factors that interact with these objects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research begins by highlighting the pressing issue of the consequences of rapid urban development and the transformation of the urban environment. At the beginning of the 21st century, particular attention was drawn to the critique of urban sprawl (Brueckner, 2000). K. Nilsson *et al.* (2014) noted that since the mid-1950s, European cities have expanded on average by 78%, while the population has increased by only 33%. In 2017, the European Commission presented a report (European Environment Agency, 2017) that emphasised the unprecedented impact of urban sprawl on the environment.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the idea of urban densification, grounded in the concept of compactness,

moved to the forefront of academic discourse as a logical solution to the problem of urban sprawl (Neuman, 2005). At its core, this idea involves leveraging the potential of existing urban areas to reduce the need for new resources (Pelczynski & Tomkowicz, 2019). Consequently, urban densification strategies began to be seen as a method that could contribute to sustainable development (Marique & Reiter, 2014).

Existing examples demonstrate that current urban development processes, when not integrated into the cultural context of cities, can lead to the loss of historical heritage, as outlined in the study of P. Kaur & H. Bhandari (2023). Conversely, international institutions emphasise the need to strengthen efforts for the protection and preservation of the world's cultural and natural heritage (United Nations, 2015). Questions regarding the impact on the visual integrity and aesthetic value of individual buildings (Alnsour *et al.*, 2023) and historically formed urban structures (Chahardowli *et al.*, 2020) have become increasingly pressing.

To influence crucial architectural and urban planning decisions and to gain the support of international organisations working to preserve historical environments and contextualise them within the framework of sustainable development, it is necessary to refine discourses on the role and significance of historical heritage in urban planning. G.J. Ashworth *et al.* (2007) emphasised that historical heritage should not be viewed solely as a city's calling card but should remain a key factor determining its potential for future development, including its economic dimension. Without exaggeration, business development and investment attractiveness have been and remain the driving force of urban development (Doel & Hubbard, 2002; Mahtta *et al.*, 2022).

The problem of urban identity. R. Marmo *et al.* (2018), operating with the category of identity, emphasised that European society is closely linked to its architectural heritage, which is an indispensable resource for its inhabitants in terms of psychological, economic, and social well-being. The authors noted that the culture of collective heritage and the development of methods for its preservation evolved throughout the 19th century and was documented in the form of various reports and recommendations in the 20th century. By the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the problems arising from the rapid pace of urbanisation and industrialisation of society had become the basis for the creation of various documents aimed at preserving historical cities and urban areas. One such document was the ICOMOS Charter (1987). It emphasised the need to preserve and restore historically formed areas, as well as their development and harmonious adaptation to contemporary challenges.

In conclusion, the question of identity is one of the most contentious and ambiguous in contemporary academic and scientific discourse. For example, M.S. Merry (2010) focused on cultural, sociological, psychological, and historical aspects. Generally, in such cases, identity is viewed as a dynamic and multi-layered phenomenon shaped by numerous factors such as ethnicity, social connections, individual experiences, and historical contexts.





These issues remain particularly relevant in the context of globalisation and migration processes, which create new challenges for the preservation of cultural heritage and local identity, as highlighted in the articles of M. Castells (2000) and T. Beviz (2022). On the other hand, due to rapid globalisation, the concept of urban identity has become fragile and less popular. In this regard, A. Cheshmehzangi (2020) emphasises the importance of contextualising urban identity. The author proposes studying urban identity through the complex interplay of physical, cultural, and social attributes, focusing on how the perception of a specific place shapes the sense of identity within a particular spatial scale. At the same time, M. Ziyadeh (2018) notes that the physical dimension is insufficient for assessing the quality of urban identity. It is also necessary to pay attention to non-physical aspects, which are determined at the level of the cultural landscape.

The physical dimension of urban identity. In today's world, travel plays a significant role in discovering new cultures and natural landscapes, and also contributes to a better understanding of different ways of life. Due to the high concentration of cultural heritage resources, city breaks have become particularly popular (Su *et al.*, 2018).

Meanwhile, there is a growing trend among consumers to seek out novel experiences, coupled with an increasing focus on the quality of these experiences from service providers (Richards, 2018). Destinations that capture public attention and allow visitors to identify with their location are becoming increasingly popular. The absence of interaction with key urban elements, such as historical landmarks, iconic architecture, or significant public spaces, significantly diminishes the overall visitor experience. This limits opportunities for a deeper understanding and appreciation of the urban environment, as visitors do not gain a full sense of its historical and cultural context. Consequently, insufficient integration of these elements into tourist itineraries and a lack of effective promotion can negatively impact the cultural experience and perception of the city as a whole.

Global experience convincingly demonstrates the existence of a significant number of architectural buildings, structures, and spatially defined objects. These reflect the uniqueness and embody the characteristic features of the established urban environment, actively contributing to the formation of urban identity. For example, the city of Palmanova (Italy), the urban planning ensembles of Bath (England), and the architectural objects of the Empire State Building in New York (USA). Under the right conditions, they have become key elements of interaction between tourists, investors, and the public at large. Such conditions include the integration of valuable objects into tourist routes and their support as cultural heritage sites, as well as effective use in urban development and promotional activities.

Successful city trips generate impressions in visitors. Under certain conditions, these impressions manifest themselves in cognitive perceptions, affective reactions, and evaluative judgments (Belanche *et al.*, 2017). The

cognitive component is linked to the generalisation of knowledge and information. It includes ideas about the physical dimensions of the visited place, its overall structure, components, history, architecture, and infrastructure. The affective component encompasses emotions and feelings that people experience about a particular object. These can be positive or negative and convey feelings of pride, nostalgia, or even disappointment. The evaluative component refers to judgments and evaluations of a particular object. This may include personal assessments of the quality of life in a city, its convenience, attractiveness, or other aspects. Thus, the impressions formed during travel create a specific set of material and spiritual attributes that define the uniqueness of each individual city.

G.J. Ashworth (2009) proposes three categories to denote the uniqueness of a place: identity, image, and branding. Urban identity encompasses the characteristics and qualities that define a city's distinctiveness, the image includes the perceptions and associations people have of a city, and branding involves the strategic efforts aimed at shaping this perception and creating a positive and recognisable image. Each of these concepts plays a crucial role in understanding and justifying strategic approaches to the modernisation of the urban environment.

Recognising the role of urban identity, both places and people, has become a defining aspect of urban governance. The interaction between people and their urban environment is a complex and dynamic process. Studying this interaction provides valuable knowledge for effective management, creating harmonious, vibrant, and diverse cities (Mansour *et al.*, 2023a). Ultimately, urban planners and policymakers often use a clear understanding of a city's unique features and characteristics as a foundation for developing strategies that help preserve and enhance the urban environment. They consider urban identity when making decisions related to urban design, heritage conservation, urban regeneration projects, and policies aimed at preserving the city's image (Hudson *et al.*, 2019).

D.A. Bell & A. De-Shalit (2013) have argued, with specific examples, that each city has its own unique ethos. The authors emphasised that to understand and address contemporary challenges, philosophy and social science must once again turn to the spirit of cities, as was done in ancient times. They call on researchers and practitioners to seek inspiration from historical examples and adapt these ideas to modern conditions. The researchers supported their position with examples from the ancient world. For instance, Ancient Athens was a symbol of democracy, while Sparta was synonymous with military discipline and a rigid social structure. Similarly, many contemporary, especially European cities, are associated with important characteristics, based on prosperity, wellbeing, and sustainability. For example, London (England) is known for its high economic performance, Copenhagen (Denmark) – for its real-world implementation of energy-efficient initiatives and adherence to social equality, Vienna (Austria) – for its cultural diversity and high standard of living, and Frankfurt am



Main (Germany) – for its effective urban organisation and advanced technological progress.

Ultimately, the characteristics that reveal economic, environmental, social, and innovative aspects are not exhaustive. Other factors also enable the uniqueness of a city to be discerned. These include elements defined by the spatial organisation of its components, which fall within the realms of urban planning and city morphology. In morphological terms, a city can be considered from the perspective of its form, which is visually perceived and can be assessed through a plan or from the air. This understanding underlies morphological concepts that attempt to explain the specifics of a city's territorial growth (Spolaor & Oliveira, 2022), as well as the consequences of transformational processes in its functional, spatial, and structural composition (Musiaka *et al.*, 2020).

In this context, it is necessary to consider the complex nature of the structural organisation of urban reality for a deep understanding and detailed analysis of its various elements from the perspective of their physical characteristics. According to classical urban planning theory, a city consists of at least three hierarchical levels: the macro level, encompassing the city as a whole; the meso level, including fragments of the urban environment such as districts and zones; and the micro level, which encompasses individual buildings, squares, nodes, streets, or plots. All these objects can be attributes capable of articulating the identity of a specific place. Thus, urban identity can manifest itself at different levels (Cheshmehzangi, 2020) and be conceptualised depending on the scale: 1) as a separate structure or building; 2) as a territorial object within a specific settlement; 3) as a holistic urban formation. Each time, this modality is present in the material resources that fill the urban space and is present in textual, graphic, auditory, visual, and audiovisual forms.

The formation of urban identity at the micro level. Individual buildings and structures play a crucial role in shaping urban identity. They not only define the physical landscape of a city but also become its symbols and markers of cultural and historical significance. Serving as material embodiments of identity in the public consciousness, such objects often become synonymous with the city itself. In the context of the urban environment, the role of these buildings and structures extends beyond their aesthetic and symbolic value. They also act as benchmarks for architectural and urban planning innovations, setting standards for future developments. Embodying the technological, artistic, and cultural achievements of their time, these structures provide a foundation for understanding the city's development in a historical context. This, in turn, helps to preserve the continuity of the narrative of urban development, connecting past achievements with present ambitions. Furthermore, such objects influence the state of the surrounding environment. They serve as a focal point for social interaction, fostering a sense of shared identity.

For example, the Empire State Building is not merely an architectural icon in New York City (USA). It is a symbol of early 20th century technological advancement (Nye, 1996) and an efficient method of organising the construction process. Completed in 1931, this skyscraper was the world's tallest building for many years and eventually became a model of effective construction management and innovative engineering (Ghosh & Robson, 2015; Jacobsson & Wilson, 2018). Its construction, in particular, set a precedent for future high-rise buildings, and even in the 21st century, thanks to its elegant Art Deco architecture, it continues to influence global architecture and serve as a symbol of American might (Batchelor, n.d.) (Fig. 2).

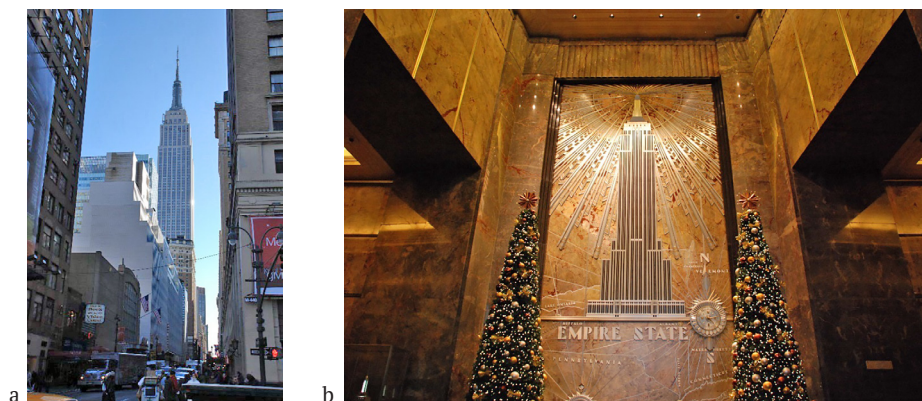


Figure 2. Empire State Building (New York, USA) – a material embodiment of urban identity at the city micro level

Notes: a – street view; b – aluminium relief of the building in the Fifth Avenue lobby

Source: photo by Bohdan Cherkes

An interesting fact highlighting the uniqueness of the Empire State Building relates to its construction. Unlike many megaprojects that often exceed budgets and deadlines, the Empire State Building was completed not only within budget but also ahead of schedule (Jacobsson &

Wilson, 2018). Its location within the urban structure is also significant (Moudry 2008). Situated at the geometric centre of Manhattan, the Empire State Building stands as a self-contained element, organically integrated into the city's planning structure and skyline (Fig. 3).





Figure 3. Empire State Building in the city structure

Source: photo by Bohdan Cherkas

The Lviv Theatre of Opera and Ballet is a striking example of a Ukrainian landmark that has remained one of Lviv's most distinguished buildings for over a century. Throughout this time, it has been a symbol of the city's cultural richness and a defining feature of its identity. From the beginning of its construction (1897), the theatre occupied a key position in the ensemble of the newly created city avenue and

became the main visual focus of the grand promenade boulevard (Linda, 2008). In the 21st century, it serves not only as a venue for significant cultural events, from opera premieres to international festivals, but also remains an important organising element of the urban landscape. The theatre acts as a landmark on Liberty Avenue, anchoring the city's central street and forming a hub of social and cultural life (Fig. 4).



Figure 4. The Lviv Theatre of Opera and Ballet (Lviv, Ukraine) – a material embodiment of urban identity at the city micro level

Notes: the main facade of the building and the square with the fountain, where the crowd stands, is one of the most important and popular places for relaxation, tourist attractions, and photography for both locals and visitors

Source: photo by Bohdan Cherkas

In conclusion, the significance of individual buildings and structures in shaping urban identity cannot be overstated. The Empire State Building in New York and the Lviv Theatre of Opera and Ballet serve as both physical and symbolic markers of a city's urban structure, cultural values, and historical evolution. By defining the urban

landscape and influencing social interaction, these architectural elements play a pivotal role in forming the unique identity of a city.

Formation of urban identity at the meso level. Urban identity, formed at the meso level, is a crucial aspect in determining a city's potential and development. At this level,



individual neighbourhoods or districts within a city, which have strategic locations, distinct functional purposes, historical significance, or socio-cultural assets, contribute to the formation of urban identity. Additionally, specific neighbourhoods or microdistricts may possess unique characteristics that set them apart from other parts of the city. Often, such areas have a clear compositional structure and a distinctive geometric configuration. A notable example of such a territory with all of the aforementioned characteristics is the enclosed social housing complex in Augsburg – Fuggerei, founded in 1521. Since its inception, Fuggerei has functioned as a separate administrative unit with its own rules and traditions, providing affordable housing for residents with limited financial means (Giovannazzi, 2023).

Among the crucial components of a city's physical identity, historical districts play a significant role (Oktay & Bala, 2015). K. Kropf (1996) suggested that urban fabric is the most understandable element of a city's character. This characteristic possesses the ability to comprehensively express the most substantial and typical morphological features of a city's material structure at the meso and macro levels (Idak, 2020). The application of the concept of urban fabric became an important tool in urban planning in the mid-20th century. In contemporary conditions, urban fabric is used to differentiate between physically distinct territories (Marshall, 2011; Idak, 2020), assuming that the identification of different fabrics implies the identification of historically distinct territories. To preserve the identity of the city of Mery-la-Bataille (France), researcher B.N. Vis (2018) employed an approach based on mapping urban fabrics. The analysis of urban fabric allowed for the identification of key elements that define the character and uniqueness of individual districts, and based on this, strategies were developed for

their preservation and integration into the overall structure of the city.

The interaction between physical elements, such as buildings and infrastructure, and socio-cultural processes occurring within a specific territory plays a key role in shaping urban identity at the meso level. This interconnectedness manifests in the creation of unique urban landscapes that reflect historical development, cultural traditions, and cater to the needs of the community. A striking example of urban identity formation at the meso level is the Circus in Bath (England). Bath's architectural landscape presents an intriguing blend of international influences, interpreted through the lens of British national identity in the 18th century and adapted to local conditions (Baigent, 2011). One of Bath's central places is the Circus, formerly the Royal Circus. The author intended to create a new, socially acceptable, and elegant place to live (Kilby, 2019). The Circus is an example of a harmonious blend of historical context with innovative urban planning solutions that were unusual for the 18th century. Despite the popular belief that the image of the square was taken from the Roman Colosseum, new research suggests that the author, John Wood the Elder, drew inspiration from Stonehenge (England), which he was studying at the time (Conway & Roenisch, 2004). The size of the square and the height of the surrounding buildings create a sense of isolation. When a visitor leaves this area, they are presented with new views of the city, creating a sense of unexpected discovery (Hammond, 2016). In the 21st century, the Circus remains a unique place that shapes a sense of identity with the city of Bath. This sense has two components: on the one hand, it is the legacy of past generations, and on the other, it is a dialogue with the environment, filled with unexpected interpretations of the historical and contemporary, the natural and artificial, the logical and the chaotic (Fig. 5).



Figure 5. Circus (Bath, England) – a material embodiment of urban identity at the city micro level

Notes: a – tourist map of the city with the circus highlighted; b – residential buildings surrounding the square

Source: photo by Bohdan Cherkes

Ukrainian cities also offer numerous examples of places that preserve their unique character and serve as symbols of urban identity at the meso level. From ancient architectural ensembles to contemporary urban spaces, these places not only recreate the memory of the past but also

integrate it into contemporary life, creating a unique atmosphere and sense of belonging. Examples of such combinations include avenues, promenades, embankments, squares, quarters, and other structural elements of cities. A significant place in Ivano-Frankivsk is Stometrivka, which,





along with Rynok Square, is the epicentre of the city's cultural, economic, and business life. The name Stometrivka is conditional and has nothing to do with a quantitative

measure of 100 meters. In fact, it is a wide pedestrian street over 500 meters long and formally marks the beginning of the city's main street – Independence Street (Fig. 6).



Figure 6. Stometrivka (Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine) – a material embodiment of urban identity at the city micro level

Notes: general view of the street; on the right is Heroes Alley, and in the centre is Viche Maidan, a key site for leisure, tourist, and cultural attractions within the city

Source: photo by Volodymyr Idak

Since its establishment in the 1980s, this stretch of just under 500 meters has functioned as a multifunctional public space, serving as a promenade on weekdays and evenings, and transforming into a venue for active arts and entertainment events on weekends and holidays, including street performances, festivals, exhibitions, and other cultural events that attracted both local residents and visitors. In autumn 2022, Heroes' Alley was established on Stometrivka (Rudenko, 2024). In 2024, it remains a place of societal consolidation, where two contradictory realities intertwine: the first reflects the severe consequences of war, and the second represents a social activism that is entirely opposed to the first. Therefore, the material embodiment of urban identity, formed at the meso level, plays a crucial role in responding to contemporary challenges, preserving cultural heritage, supporting social cohesion, and developing the city's economy. It also contributes to maintaining the attractiveness and multifunctionality of individual parts of the urban space, making them important elements of the city as a whole.

Formation of urban identity at the macro level. The macro level represents a global perspective on the city, encompassing a comprehensive aspect of urban identity. While the details of the urban space may not be emphasised at this level, the social component remains significant (Cheshmehzangi, 2020). In this sense, the attributes necessary for a city's self-differentiation are symbolised at an abstract level through unique characteristics. Such uniqueness is determined not only by physical components such as buildings, geographical features, rivers, and lakes, but also through cultural events, such as fairs, exhibitions, or other entities (Manahasa & Manahasa, 2020).

In shaping urban identity, where the city as a whole plays a central role, its authenticity is of paramount importance (Nursanty *et al.*, 2023). This characteristic can be defined as key, especially when residents and visitors are confident in its genuineness and originality. This contributes to the formation of a positive city image, increasing its attractiveness to tourists and strengthening local pride among residents. Such an awareness of authenticity helps the city to preserve its individuality and remain unique even in the context of a globalised world.

A prime example of such an approach is the city of Palmanova (Italy). Palmanova preserves a significant architectural and urban heritage and is considered one of the most striking examples of well-preserved and planned ideal cities of the Renaissance. Its unique layout, including a perfectly symmetrical appearance with a radial street organisation and fortified fortification, reflects an innovative approach to urban planning at that time (UNESCO, 2017). Designed and built by a team of engineers, scientists, and military architecture experts, including Giulio Savorgnan (1510-1595) and Vincenzo Scamozzi (1548-1616), it was an "invisible" fortress city, built along the horizon to conceal it from enemy eyes. Thus, its buildings had to be low, and the walls had to be covered with earth and vegetation (Gatti *et al.*, 2017). This makes Palmanova an important element of the world's cultural and historical heritage.

In the 21st century, the inhabitants of Palmanova (Italy) are acutely aware of their city's value and take pride in its unique historical and architectural heritage. They feel a connection to its past, as many important historical sites have been preserved, despite the decline of some (Gatti *et al.*, 2017). At the same time, their sense of belonging



to the city is shaped by its distinctive geometric form and layout, which has remained unchanged since its foundation. Architectural features such as the nine-sided shape of

the fortress and the three entrances leading to the central square have become symbols of the city, reinforcing the sense of local identity (Fig. 7).



Figure 7. Palmanova (Italy) – a material embodiment of urban identity at the city meso level

Notes: a – tourist map of the city, engraved on a metal surface; b – a night-time view of the street emphasising the atmosphere and character of the historically formed urban environment. Sculptures placed at the beginning of each of the six streets that radiate evenly from the central square are a characteristic feature of all six streets and are an element of the recognisability of the architectural ensemble; c – a view of the central church – Chiesa del Santissimo Redentore; d – a place for religious ceremonies in Chiesa del Santissimo Redentore, decorated with a symbolic depiction of the city panorama, which emphasises its cultural and historical significance

Source: photo by Bohdan Cherkes

Ukrainian cities also demonstrate significant potential in preserving and popularising their historical and architectural heritage, which have survived in the context of the entire city. A striking example is the city of Zhovkva (Lviv region, Ukraine) with its rich historical heritage. This city is not only a living witness to history but is also actively developing as a centre of cultural tourism (Zhovkva tourist information..., n.d.). Zhovkva was founded as a private town, so it was the owners who decisively influenced the development of this settlement – its

planning and organisation of urban space, and the composition of the city government (Kapral, 2016). The functional-planning structure of the city was developed according to the model of the Renaissance ideal city (Fig. 8). The city consisted of two interconnected parts: the owner's castle complex and the fortified city centre. This combination had a specific and strategic character, which emphasised the hierarchical structure of the urban space and ensured effective control and protection against potential threats (Bevz, 2019).

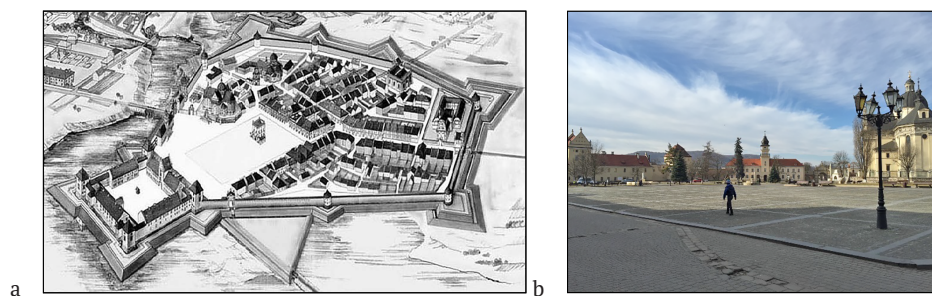


Figure 8. Zhovkva of the Lviv region – a material embodiment of urban identity at the city macro level

Notes: a – general view of the city, 17th-18th centuries; b – the central square of the city

Source: a – V. Tymofiyenko (2003); b – photo by Bohdan Cherkes



In 2024, Zhovkva remains a significant cultural and historical centre, uniting numerous monuments from various eras (Fig. 9). Their concentration in a relatively small area conveys the atmosphere of an ancient city, and their compositional order is evidence of the existence of stable architectural and urban planning traditions over several

centuries. Among the important landmarks are medieval fortifications, a Renaissance square, Baroque churches and monasteries, as well as preserved sections of the city walls and gates. Each of these monuments reflects the city's multi-layered history, giving Zhovkva a special character and attracting tourists from all over the world.



Figure 9. Zhovkva of the Lviv region – a panorama of the square with significant city landmarks

Source: photo by Bohdan Cherkes

Therefore, the macro level of urban identity is critically important for understanding how historical events, cultural traditions, and socio-economic transformations influence the character of a city and its uniqueness. Proper popularisation and strategic management of historical and cultural assets can help historically formed cities preserve their individuality even within the framework of globalisation and urban trends.

CONCLUSIONS

Architectural and urban planning heritage serves as a foundation for creating an attractive urban environment that attracts tourists, investors, and is valued by local residents. Preserving and integrating historical heritage into a contemporary context allows the city not only to maintain its uniqueness but also to use it as a valuable resource for economic growth, cultural enrichment, and social cohesion among local residents. Moreover, awareness and appreciation of the city's heritage contribute to strengthening the local community and shaping its identity.

In the 21st century, there is a growing trend where urban identity is becoming a defining factor in making important strategic decisions within the purview of architects and urban planners. This gives rise to the need to view cities and their inhabitants as a reflection of the interconnectedness of their physical form and spiritual essence. Conversely, understanding this interconnectedness can reveal the unique characteristics of urban formations or highlight specific features inherent to each particular place. The buildings and structures that fill such places act as a kind of visualiser. It is capable of reflecting the physical essence and indicating the ideas and values that have accompanied the history of a particular place for a long time. The concept of the physical dimension used in this research refers

to the direct perception of the physical properties of architectural buildings and structures or their groups, located in a well-defined territory. Due to their diversity and complexity, various logical schemes are used in the theory of architecture and urban planning. In this study, the concept of distinguishing three hierarchical levels of organisation of architectural and urban objects is used. This approach is effective for analysing urban development and in the question of the specifics of urban identity formation.

This research draws parallels between iconic landmarks on a global scale, such as the city of Palmanova (Italy), the architectural and urban planning ensemble of the Circus (Bath, England) and the Empire State Building (New York, USA), and their counterparts in Ukraine: the city of Zhovkva, the architectural and urban planning ensemble Stometrivka (Ivano-Frankivsk) and the Lviv Theatre of Opera and Ballet (Lviv). These objects serve as symbols of unique historical and cultural narratives. This highlights the importance of such objects in the context of urban identity and their influence on the perception of the city as a whole.

This study highlights the lack of attention to issues related to the peculiarities of forming urban identity and its impact on decision-making in the field of architecture and urban planning. The authors aim to continue research in this direction, focusing on studying specific examples of cities, analysing their historical and contemporary characteristics, and developing recommendations for the effective integration of heritage into urban development strategies.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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Архітектурно-містобудівний контекст фізичного виміру міської ідентичностей

Анотація. В сучасних умовах міська ідентичність є важливим аспектом розвитку міст. Переконливим є її вплив під час прийняття рішень щодо збереження культурної спадщини, зміцнення соціальної згуртованості та стимулювання економічного розвитку. Для цієї тріади архітектурно-містобудівне проектування є основою формування та відображення унікального характеру і цінності міста. Метою дослідження був аналіз архітектурних та містобудівних детермінант як ключових багатовимірних компонентів у формуванні та підтримці міської ідентичності. Застосовуючи порівняльний підхід, виявлено конкретні форми матеріального вираження міського середовища, які сприяють відчуттю ідентичності та приналежності серед його мешканців і відвідувачів. Проведено порівняльний аналіз аналогічних об'єктів світового та українського масштабу: міста Пальманова (Італія) та Жовква (Україна); архітектурно-містобудівні ансамблі – Батський цирк (Бат, Англія) та Стометрівка (Івано-Франківськ, Україна), Емпайр-Стейт-Білдінг (Нью-Йорк, США) і Львівська Національна Опера (Львів, Україна). Виявлено, що вивчення міської ідентичності зосереджене на комплексному розумінні проблеми ідентифікації людини із місцем свого проживання. Через це аргументи збереження пам'ятних місць у сформованому міському середовищі є недостатніми та потребують конкретизації на рівні його фізичних проявів. Запропоновано виділяти архітектурно-містобудівний контекст та розглядати його відповідно до трьох загальноприйнятих рівнів організації міста. Фізичні компоненти міського середовища, такі як будівлі та споруди, архітектурні комплекси та ансамблі, вулиці та площі, а також територія міста загалом здатні бути головними дійовими елементами і рівнозначно брати участь у формуванні міської ідентичності. Є випадки, коли розуміння міста як єдиного цілого має значно вищий потенціал порівняно з ситуацією, коли його складові розглядаються окремо і навпаки. Здатність окремих елементів поєднувати історичні та сучасні аспекти в єдиній міській структурі підвищує загальну привабливість і функціональність міських територій, а також сприяє зміцненню соціально і культурно згуртованого середовища. Результати дослідження можуть сприяти ефективнішому плануванню і впровадженню стратегій розвитку міст, що потенційно допоможе зберегти унікальність кожного та покращити якість життя їхніх мешканців

Ключові слова: міське середовище; фізичні характеристики; теорія містобудування; приналежність; унікальність