



## SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT

Regnr Östersjöstiftelsen: 21/19

Project manager: Irina Seits

Project title: **Muted histories and reunited memories: neglected Swedish and Finnish architectural heritage in St. Petersburg.**

### 1. Purpose of the project

The purpose of the project was to bridge the diverse cultures of the Baltic region through reconstruction and analysis of the cross-national urban heritage created during the shared history of their coexistence and interaction since the late nineteenth century.

I focused on the urban heritage that the Swedish and Finish architects had formed in St. Petersburg since the late nineteenth century and up to the Bolshevik Revolution, and specifically on the projects that were commissioned by the Nobel family. Settling and developing their business in St. Petersburg, international entrepreneurs, such as the Nobles, provided commissions to their compatriot architects. After the Russian revolution of 1917, many international architectural projects were interrupted, while the completed ones suffered from nationalisation, destruction, and neglect, which explains the poor state of remaining objects. This applies primarily to industrial architecture and workers' settlements that were developed by the Nobels and other international families in St. Petersburg. Among the project's main cases were the workshops, the office buildings, and the residential complexes of the mechanical plant "Ludvig Nobel."

Despite their utilitarian nature, these industrial and housing ensembles serve as vivid examples of the Northern Modern and proto-functionalist architecture, resembling early experiments with the rational organisation of the working spaces inside the factory workshops on the one hand, and introducing innovative solutions for the workers' housing on the other. The so-called 'Nobel workers' town' in St. Petersburg combined functional planning and design with a developed social infrastructure, which made it one of the earliest prototypes for the later modernist residential estates in Europe, such as e.g. zhilmassivs in the Soviet Union and siedlungen in Germany.

After the Revolution, a large part of the international heritage of the early twentieth century in St. Petersburg was either demolished or publicly re-introduced as the achievements of



the new Soviet regime. The paradigm has changed; the architectural heritage was suppressed, and its creators were forced to leave the country and returned to their homelands. During the Soviet period, the industrial architectural sites built by foreign entrepreneurs were introduced neither to the academic/architectural community nor to the general public as an artistically, historically or culturally valuable heritage. This has led to a critical current state of these objects and a lack of knowledge not only about their existence, but also about the long history of cooperation between Sweden and Russia, which developed in various areas of economic and cultural life in the region before the Revolution.

Along with the identification of neglected architectural objects of that period and their inclusion in academic discourse, the purpose of the project was to explore the mechanisms and strategies of oblivion and forgetting that were elaborately developed and applied to all “inappropriate” legacy left from the defeated Empire.

The articles published within the frames of the project address the issues of ‘heritagisation’ of modernist architecture. I trace and analyse the changes in the status of ‘legitimacy’ of the industrial architecture since after the Bolshevik revolution and reflect on its current invisibility and vulnerability in the urban space of St. Petersburg.

The preservation of modernist architecture is associated with a discussion about the very definition of the concept of heritage, as well as with the formulation of policies regarding preservation and exploitation of existing material and cultural heritage at various levels.

Among the purposes of the project was to raise awareness about the status of the Swedish architectural heritage in St. Petersburg within academic community and beyond, as well as to attract attention of the local policy-makers and representatives of the Swedish community in St. Petersburg to the problem of the current status and condition of the Swedish urban heritage in Russia.

## **2. The three most important results of the project and what conclusions can be drawn from them**

1. The project resulted in publication of three peer-reviewed articles and of the two large essays on the themes of neglected industrial Swedish heritage in St. Petersburg, as well as on the strategies of remembrance and forgetting of material and historical artifacts that operate in the Baltic region under various political and ideological circumstances. I



recorded a rich video material that is valuable for promotion and argumentation for the preservation of the vulnerable urban heritage in St. Petersburg that is related to Sweden.

2. During the project period I developed original lectures and seminars for a course “Aesthetics and Society” that was taught at the Aesthetics department at Södertörn University and encompassed a theme of “exile” that is highly relevant to my research. Besides, I was invited to lecture on the themes of my research at the Uppsala University and Jönköping University, and at the European University at St. Petersburg.

3. I established new academic networks, which allowed for the further dissemination of the project’s results and contributed to the promotion of knowledge on the Russian-Swedish shared heritage in the Baltic region. I developed cooperation between the Södertörn University and other universities in Sweden (Jönköping University) and St. Petersburg (Higher School of Economics and European University at St. Petersburg).

One of the results of this networking was the joint preparation of an application to the Swedish Institute for the seed collaboration project between Södertörn and the universities of the Baltic region. In my case these were the European University at St. Petersburg and the Higher School of Economics on the Russian side and the Jönköping University in Sweden. The application for the project *HSUD – Heritage for Sustainable Urban Development* that allows to continue developing networking and to launch a new research project on the theme of the Swedish urban heritage in Russia was approved by the Swedish Institute and received funding. As the project leader I will continue to develop these themes and to work on the issues that were targeted in my postdoctoral project.

I established collaboration with the General Consulate of Sweden in St. Petersburg that expressed their interest in preservation and promotion of the Swedish heritage in St. Petersburg and in supporting further development of the project’s main agenda.

### **3. The project’s contribution to the international research frontline**

#### **Publications**

During the project’s period I published three open-access peer-reviewed articles in the international volumes by Taylor & Francis (CRC), which increases visibility and distribution of my research.



I have written three other open-access essays published, two of which are published on the online platform of the Site Zones project.

All my published texts are written in English, which makes them more accessible to international academic community and general public.

### **Conferences / Public talks / lectures**

Even though the ongoing pandemic has severely limited opportunities to participate in international events, I was invited to give lectures at the Jönköping University to the international students at the Institute for Education and Culture via zoom (December 2020) and in-person (December 2021). I was also invited to give two public lectures on the shared Russian-Swedish heritage at the Department of Modern Languages at the Uppsala University for the students of the international Master Program “*Sweden & Russia: They and We*” (November 2020).

I lectured at the course “*Aesthetics and Society*” for the international students at the Department of Aesthetics at Södertörn University on a theme of Exile, with a focus on my ongoing research (April-May 2021)

I gave seminars and a public lecture on my project’s main themes and outcomes at the European University in St. Petersburg (fall term 2020 via zoom; April 2021 – in-person)

I presented my postdoctoral project and its outcomes at the Advanced Seminar at CBEES (November 2021, in-person)

I presented the results of my project at the CBEES Annual Conference (November 2021, via zoom) with the presentation: “*Breaking (with) the Empire: renaming industrial heritage in the post-revolutionary Petrograd*”, focusing on the Nobel’s industrial heritage in St. Petersburg.

I participated in the roundtable “*Landskrona, Nevsky Mouth, Nyenschantz. An insight from the XXI century*” organized at the Institute of History at the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg on the issues of current status and condition of the Nyenschantz Excavation site in St. Petersburg (June 2021, in-person)

### **Networking / heritage preservation**



I organized a public lecture by Professor Jan Levchenko from the Higher School of Economics in Moscow and the Baltic University in Kaliningrad: *Magnificent Settings: The East Prussian colony in (Post)Soviet cinema* at the Advanced Seminar at CBEES (September 2021, in-person).

In September 2021 I organized a hybrid international roundtable "*Urban Space in Transition after collapse of the USSR*" as part of the series of roundtables and public events "*USSR: Thirty Years After*" devoted to the 30 years anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The speakers and discussants were from the European University at St. Petersburg, the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, Uppsala University, Umeå University, and Södertörn University. I gave a presentation *To Heal or to Heat the Past? Rediscovery of the Soviet and Recovery of the Pre-Soviet Architectural Heritage After the Collapse of the USSR*. The format of the roundtable was hybrid and the presentations were given both in-person and via zoom.

To further developing academic networks, I submitted an application to the Swedish institute for the Seed Collaboration Project within the Baltic region and received funding of 150 000 SEK to prepare applications for a larger networking and collaboration project. The project is called *HSUD – Heritage for the Sustainable Urban Development* and includes partner institutions: Jönköping University; Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg, European University at St. Petersburg.

I am also an applicant for a networking and communication project to Formas "*Grey Belt: From shadow to light*," which, in case approval for funding (results expected in February), will result in an interactive exhibition about sustainable adaptation of industrial spaces of the Baltic region (in Sweden, Russia and Estonia) that were produced by the Swedish Entrepreneurs on the Baltic waterfronts.

#### **4. New research questions that the project has led to**

The project addresses various issues related to the Swedish urban heritage in St. Petersburg, those of its identification, historical background, the destiny during the Soviet period, its current vulnerability, and low visibility in the contemporary urban space of the city.



During my work on the project, while all the problems remain acute, a few new research questions arose, which encouraged me to continue working on the main themes of the project. Among those is the problem of communication of the vulnerable endangered conditions of industrial heritage in the Baltic region both to the academic community and beyond as well as of its continuous neglect due to historical and contemporary political and social circumstances within the Baltic region that lead to the fast dilapidation of architectural objects of industrial heritage.

Another urgent question is the search for strategies of preservation and adaptation of neglected industrial heritage to the demands of a contemporary city, of integration of this heritage into the public spaces.

At the same time, this adaptation should not be considered as entirely ‘mechanical’ and reconstructive. It is important to reflect on what makes this heritage, which at first glance may look as merely some outdated and worn out ruins, a valuable part of cultural and historical heritage, and to understand what makes it attractive and fascinating in the contemporary city landscapes. One of the specific features of industrial heritage of the past, and of the Swedish industrial heritage in St. Petersburg in particular, is its close connection to water, since industrial architecture of historic cities usually occupies their waterfronts, contributing to the creation of their urban images and skylines. These aesthetic connections between water and industrial sites are largely overlooked, while their potential for the sustainable city development is underestimated from various points, which lowers the cities’ urban ecology.

Another problem is the variety of actors who engage in the struggle for appropriation of the territories that are now occupied by the old industrial quarters and their contradicting interests. On one side, there is a lack of appreciation and awareness about rich historical backgrounds of these sites among general public, and a continuous negligence towards industrial heritage in academic communities that allow for the extinction of this heritage from the cities’ urban landscapes. On the other, there is a notably raising activism to protect and preserve this heritage by the locals, young architects, and urbanists in different parts of the Baltic region.

Hence I intend to continue working on the topic of the Swedish industrial heritage in Russia and other countries of the region to address issues that are common to all international industrial heritage in various parts of the world.



Some of these newly raised research questions have already been addressed in the approved and pending applications to the Swedish Institute and Formas that I have mentioned above.

#### **5. The contribution of the research to the knowledge of the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe**

The project is entirely devoted to the Baltic Sea Region. I study shared Swedish-Russian heritage that bridges various cultures within the Baltic area hence exploring the region from various perspectives: historical, aesthetical, ideological, urbanistic, and social.

The publications that are crucial part of this project bring knowledge of the Baltic Sea Region and of its complex urban heritage to the pages of various international editions.

I have been reached out with invitations to give public talks on the theme of my project which demonstrates interest to the issues related to the history of the Baltic Sea region.



## **6. Dissemination of the results of the project within and outside the research community**

Even though the dissemination of the project's results within and beyond the research community was severely limited by the pandemic, the large number of published articles (six in total), as well as given public talks and presentations (both in Sweden and abroad), allowed for a rather high visibility and outreach of the project's results. I receive feedback to my research and observe interest in the topic of the Swedish heritage outside Sweden not only from the researchers from similar fields, but from the policy makers and business representatives on both Russian and Swedish sides as well as from locals who often 'discover' the new valuable sites that were previously 'invisible' to them.

During the course of my project, in June 2021, I was invited to present my project at the General Consulate of Sweden in St. Petersburg, at the reception for the representatives of the Swedish businesses in St. Petersburg during the World Economic Forum 2021, which led to a discussion of potential projects and strategies towards preservation of the Swedish heritage, precisely of the Mechanical Plant 'Ludvig Nobel' ('Russian Diesel'), of the mansion of the Nobels on Pirogovskaya embankment, and the Nyehschantz Fortress Excavation site. The new developed networks brought me to cooperation with some potential policy makers, investors as well as architects and urban activists.

I received an invitation from the General Council of Sweden to present my project and an offer of cooperation on the matters of the urban Swedish heritage in St. Petersburg. I participated in the roundtables and discussions during the activist groups gathering for the protection of the Nyenschants Fortress during the spring and summer 2021.

In the fall 2021, due to my activities and my research, I was promoted for the members of the ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) and was approved for the membership at the council, which provides me with more tools to promote knowledge on the Baltic Sea Region and Swedish heritage on international level and beyond the research community.





In February 2022 I am invited to give a public lecture on the theme of my project as well as on the history of industrial architecture in early Soviet Russia at the Uppsala Museum, which will be a public event to accompany the ongoing *Promzona* exhibition by the Russian artist Pavel Otdelnov.

### List of Publications during the project (2020-2021)

#### *Peer-reviewed articles (open access)*

1. Seits, Irina (2021). *Forthcoming*. "The Foundation Myth of St. Petersburg in the City Guidebooks: Creating Heritage Through Mind and Emotions." *Creating Through Mind and Emotions*. London: CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group.
2. Seits, Irina (2021). "Renaming the Industrial Heritage in Post-Revolutionary Petrograd: Innovative Use of an Old Tradition." In: Maria do Rosário Monteiro & Mário S. Ming Kong (Eds.) *Tradition and Innovation*. London: CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 49-56.  
<http://sh.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:1634446>
3. Seits, I. (2020). "The Ruined Fantasies of Intelligent minds: 'the Nobel's town' and Neglected Swedish Heritage in St. Petersburg." *Intelligence, Creativity, Fantasy*. London: CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 190-196.  
<http://sh.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1577169&dswid=6696>

#### *Feature articles, essays*

1. Seits, I. (2021). "Muted histories and re-united memories: Swedish industrial heritage in St. Petersburg." *Site Zones*.  
<https://www.sitezones.net/articles/muted-histories>
2. Seits, I. (2021). "Swedish Heritage in St. Petersburg: The Policies of Remembering and the Practices of Oblivion." *Site Zones*. <https://www.sitezones.net/articles/seits>
3. Seits, I. (2020). What is the Aesthetics of the Everyday? Some Thoughts on a Journey to the IKEA Museum in Älmhult. In: Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback; Helena Mattsson; Kristina Riegert; Hans Ruin (Eds.) *Material: Filosofi, Estetik, Arkitektur: Festschrift till Sven-Olov Wallenstein*. Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, pp. 111-124.



<http://sh.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1439462&dswid=-9535>

**Presentation at the Conferences, public talks, and lectures (5 selected)**

**November 25-26, 2021**

**CBEES Annual Conference 2021 - With and After Empire: Enduring Pasts Across the Local and the Global**

Presentation: *Breaking (with) the Empire: renaming industrial heritage in the post-revolutionary Petrograd*

**November 15, 2021**

**CBEES Advanced Seminar**

Project report: *Muted histories and re-united memories: neglected Swedish architectural heritage in St. Petersburg.*

**September 21, 2021**

**International Roundtable “Urban space in transition after the collapse of the USSR,” Södertörn University (CBEES):**

Presentation: *To Heal or to Heat the Past? Rediscovery of the Soviet and Recovery of the Pre-Soviet Architectural Heritage After the Collapse of the USSR*

**April 5, 2021**

**European University at St. Petersburg, Department of the History of Fine Arts, public lecture**

*Practices of Life-building and Mechanisms of Oblivion: The Nobel Town and Swedish industrial heritage in St. Petersburg*

**November 8, 2020**

**Uppsala University, Department of Modern Languages**

Public Lecture: *The Swedish St. Petersburg*