

Master of Science in Geography

Mega-events and Urban Entrepreneurialism in an Authoritarian Regime: The Case of Astana EXPO-2017 in the Capital City of Kazakhstan

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Abstract

Since Nur-Sultan was designated as the capital city of Kazakhstan in 1997, the city underwent immense urban transformation. The left bank of the river Ishim has witnessed the emergence of government led spectacular urban development and city beautification to promote the image of Nur-Sultan as an attractive city for investment, eventually leading to the hosting of Central Asia's first mega-event: EXPO-2017. This master's thesis attempts to better theorize what happens when the concept of urban entrepreneurialism travels the capital city of an authoritarian state. Furthermore, it tries to determine the impacts of the mega-event EXPO-2017 and how this contributed to the concept of urban entrepreneurialism.

The research uses qualitative data obtained through ethnographic methods. The study identifies how EXPO-2017 contributed to the urban development of Nur-Sultan, particularly with the development of transport infrastructure and the development of residential and commercial complexes that go beyond the 'expo site'. Further, the study also highlights the government's lack of solid institutional framework in order to implement public-private partnership which is key to urban entrepreneurialism.

Key Words

Mega-Events; Impacts; World's fair; Urban Entrepreneurialism; Urban Boosterism; Astana; Spectacular Urbanization; Authoritarianism

Résumé

Depuis que Nur-Sultan a été désignée comme la capitale du Kazakhstan en 1997, la ville a connu une immense transformation urbaine. La rive gauche du fleuve Ishim a été le témoin de l'émergence d'un développement urbain spectaculaire et d'un embellissement de la ville menés par le gouvernement afin de promouvoir l'image de Nur-Sultan comme une ville attrayante pour les investissements, ce qui a finalement conduit à l'organisation du premier méga-événement d'Asie centrale : EXPO-2017. Ce mémoire tente de mieux théoriser ce qui se passe lorsque le concept d'entrepreneuriat urbain se déplace dans la capitale d'un État autoritaire. De plus, il tente de déterminer les impacts du méga-événement EXPO-2017 et comment celui-ci a contribué au concept de l'entrepreneuriat urbain.

Cette recherche utilise des données qualitatives obtenues par des méthodes ethnographiques. L'étude identifie comment l'EXPO-2017 a contribué au développement urbain de Nur-Sultan, en particulier avec le développement de l'infrastructure de transport et le développement de complexes résidentiels et commerciaux qui vont au-delà du " site de l'exposition ". En outre, l'étude souligne également le manque de cadre institutionnel solide au sein du gouvernement pour mettre en œuvre le partenariat public-privé, qui est la clé de l'entrepreneuriat urbain.

Mots Clés

Méga-Evénements; Impacts; Exposition Internationale ; Entrepreneuriat Urbain ; Boosterisme Urbain ; Astana ; Urbanisation Spectaculaire ; Autoritarisme

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, new economic, social, and political necessities have caused cities to undergo intense transformations. Pow (2002) claims that it has been widely theorized that globalization and urban restructuring have seen the emergence of new mode of ‘entrepreneurial’ governance where the main duty of city officials is: ‘to lure highly mobile and flexible production, financial and consumption flows into its space’ (Harvey 1989, 11). Within this entrepreneurial regime, the key strategy in urban regeneration programs is the public-private partnership, as witnessed more dramatically through the construction of prestigious ‘flagship projects’, or ‘mega-projects’, such as spectacular monuments, buildings, shopping centers, and various international events where governments and the private sector have done immense investments (Smyth 1994; Olds 1995).

Up until this day, the literature concerning urban entrepreneurialism has mainly focused on Western cities such as Sheffield (Lawless 1994), Manchester (Peck and Tickell 1995), Birmingham (Hubbard 1996; Loftman and Nevin 1998), New York (Roberts and Schein 1993), and Singapore (Pow 2002). These studies claim that the cities have witnessed the emergence of ambitious, government-led urban development projects intended at promoting these cities internationally and opening up opportunities for private investment (Dixon 2010; Argenbright 2011; Müller 2011). By favoring the question of how and why urban entrepreneurialism has become such a hegemonic approach to contemporary urban planning and geography, scholars and researchers have given comparatively less attention given to the questions of how and why urban entrepreneurialism logics are negated in authoritarian settings. In comparison to Western cities, relatively little research has attempted to understand urban development and the influence of various forces in the context of authoritarian states, especially in Central Asia. For obvious reasons, conducting research is rather troublesome in authoritarian countries as they are not always accessible. Nevertheless, the cities of Ashgabat and Nur-Sultan have not entirely been neglected in the urban entrepreneurialism query of Central Asia. Prominent scholars who’ve conducted research are Natalie Koch, Mateusz Laszczkowski, Alima Bissenova, Brade and Neugebauer, Adrien Fauve, Anar Valiyev amongst a few.

Following the demise of the Soviet Union, the transition from a communist socialist system to a market economy has transformed the structure and image of Post-Soviet cities. After land and

building became market commodities through privatization, post-soviet cities have started functioning and resembling more like Western cities (Brade and Neugebauer 2017).

In order to achieve these urban entrepreneurial strategies, governments focused on strategies such as ‘urban boosterism’ which are key urban development schemes aiming at promoting the and creating an attractive image of the city (Koch and Valiyev 2015). Indeed, Koch (2016) defines urban boosterism as ‘the active promotion of a city, and it typically involves large-scale urban development schemes, including constructing iconic new buildings, revamping local infrastructure, and creating a new image for the city’ (575). Market reforms and globalization brought the imperative of competitiveness into urban planning and government agendas. In sum, the idea is: city branding and image boosting will help cities to compete for investment, tourists, and mega-events. Local policy makers, investors and businessmen perceive the role of city image as instrumental for economic development (Brade and Neugebauer 2017, 263). Thus, as a set of policies, urban boosterism is increasingly being used in countries that are neither democratic nor firmly devoted to neoliberalism. Given that the logic of urban boosterism centers on freedom of movement, both for capital and individuals, then this raises a number of important questions about the political implications of how urban boosterism works in these authoritarian states (Koch and Valiyev 2015). While the emergence of entrepreneurial city may be seen as a common trend in many late capitalist societies, its shape and nature are reliant upon varying local factors, conditions, and institutions (formal and informal) such as different national regulation and local political systems. Researchers should, therefore, be wary of viewing ‘a homogenous entrepreneurial its emerging mechanistically from economic forces’ (Short and Kim 1999, 117).

In this master’s thesis, I consider the capital city of Kazakhstan, Nur-Sultan, which the country ranks among the non-free countries in Freedom House’s classification system (Freedom House Index, 2019), as a capital city undergoing immense urban transformation in a country considered authoritarian. Aiming to better theorize what happens when the concept of urban entrepreneurialism travels to an authoritarian state, I attempt to complement the gap in the literature as I take the approach of examining EXPO-2017 as tool of urban entrepreneurialism. In essence, I try to demonstrate how the government in authoritarian Kazakhstan use spectacular urban development and city beautification to promote the image Nur-Sultan as an attractive city for investment, eventually leading to the hosting of Central Asia’s first mega-event: EXPO-2017 in Nur-Sultan (Astana at the time). Additionally, the case of Nur-Sultan is fascinating and ideal to examine – ‘an increasing number of urban planners in authoritarian

countries all around the world are seeking to position their cities as “world class” hubs for international events, business, and entertainment, set in suitably spectacular urban landscapes’ (Koch and Valiyev 2015, 576). Therefore, I consider the usefulness to also explain the urban transformation in Nur-Sultan as a consequence of EXPO-2017 represents an important research question. Very little is known about the situation in Kazakh cities, and about the ‘Kazakh variety’ of urban entrepreneurialism and mega-events. As I attempt to demonstrate in Part 1, Nur-Sultan, a young and dynamic capital, symbolizes the renewing introduced and initiated since 1991 by the political change in regime. Kazakhstan works actively on its visibility and image on the international scene through a communication campaign as a ‘new’ stable and attractive country for investment and tourism (Kudaibergenova 2015). The capital city seems to be the major tool in this strategy of insertion in achieving the government’s objectives. At the outset, it is important to qualify that EXPO-2017 case study is not solely representative of urban development in Nur-Sultan. Rather, the aim here is to employ EXPO-2017 as an instrument to investigate the role of the government in the production of new entrepreneurial landscape.

Research Questions

How has EXPO2017 contributed to the process of urban entrepreneurialism in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan?

Through the case study of Nur-Sultan which the city is undergoing what Mohammad and Sidaway (2012) have termed ‘spectacular urbanization’ – using existing literature, I examine the urban development of the new capital city of Kazakhstan. Spectacular urban developments are often legitimated through the hosting of mega-events - in which I attempt to demonstrate that Nur-Sultan has followed that exact logic. This pertains to many contradictions as non-democratic settings come to adopt the strategies and rhetoric of urban boosterism while simultaneously maintaining strict grip on the actual flows of people, goods, and ideas in a manner that baldly negates its liberalist logic.

And second, **what is the rational for Kazakhstan to host mega-events?** Since hosting mega-events are ideas promoted by elite segments, which ultimately become political initiatives, a rational must be developed to mobilize public support.

What links these two questions is the fact that the city provides resources for spectacular urban projects as well as to facilitate the mega-event and therefore it is appropriate to ask what the urban outcome will be. Whatever the objectives of national political leaders, local urban residents need to know what difference the mega-event will make to their city.

Third: How has the EXPO-2017 as a mega-event contributed to the urban regeneration and renewal of the city?

Fourth: What are the local costs and benefits EXPO-2017? E.g as a city that has witnessed strong inward migration, have the resources been allocated to tackle issues of access healthcare, housing, and basic infrastructure (e.g transport)?

Theoretical Framework: Urban Entrepreneurialism and City Transformation - A conceptual Overview

Recent interest in urban studies has been preoccupied with the emergence of an entrepreneurial mode of governance (Harvey 1989; Hall & Hubbard 1996; 1998). Harvey (1989) first termed this new mode of entrepreneurial governance as ‘urban entrepreneurialism’ as he attempted to characterize what he noticed as a shift in urban governance processes from mainly with the provision of services to those concerned with economic development. Indeed, according to Harvey (1989) such an entrepreneurial stance: ‘contrasts with the managerial practices of earlier decades (pre-1970s), which had focused primarily on the local provision of services, facilities and benefits to urban population’ (3). Consequently, urban planning turned from regulating urban growth to an obsession with encouraging growth ‘by any and every possible means’ (Hall 1988, 343; Phillipot 2013, 2). City officials now focus on ‘the speculative deployment of local resources in order to attract private investments to stimulate local economic regeneration in cities’ (Hall 1988, Leitner & Garner 1993). This meaning that cities now increasingly pursue policies that are aimed at enhancing local economic growth through the construction and regeneration of urban spaces as well as promoting city images (Harvey 1989, 7-8; Cox 1993; Judd & Kantor 1998; DeFilippis 1999).

Consequently, city governments have introduced a range of entrepreneurial policies that are designed to attract many investors creating an intensification of inter-urban competition. ‘This involves the setting up of enterprise zones, urban development corporations, attractive financing packages (e.g investing pension funds, providing low interest loans), as well as providing urban subsidies and tax incentives’ (Pow 2002, 56). Additionally, Wood (1998) claims that these urban entrepreneurialism strategies are put into place to demark particular cities, in the attempt to attract as much investment as possible.

Urban entrepreneurialism has thus become a dominant feature of urban development in contemporary capitalism as cities of varying sizes and positions in their national urban hierarchies have become involved in development strategies that reach beyond the urban scale (Wood, 2015). Certainly, Wood (1998) ascertains that: ‘The effects of the projects associated with these activities, can no longer be conflated with the territories in which they are located. Here, Harvey seems to have in mind flagship developments.’ (120). Flagship projects are often

seen through urban redevelopment to make the city look attractive to people beyond the territory the city is located. Harvey (1989;9) further complements this by stating: 'The city has to appear as innovation, exciting, creative and safe place to visit, to play and consume in. Some cities may change their image through urban redevelopment.' A beautification of the city, facilities, and infrastructure which are designed to attract tourists, citizens, and investments may also improve the quality of life in the city that is going through urban redevelopment. Indeed, this may entice economic development and living standards by attracting new industries which will create jobs and generate income. Urban governance has thus become much more oriented to the provision of a 'good business climate' and to the construction of all sorts of enticements to bring capital into the city. 'The emphasis on the production of a good local business climate has emphasized the importance of the locality as a site of regulation of infrastructural provision' (Harvey 2002, 360). To begin with, the promotion of the city as a location for activity depends heavily upon the creation for activity and an attractive urban imagery. In a more dramatic fashion the construction of new, spectacular landscapes with revenue-generating facilities such as convention centers, shopping malls, exhibition sites, spectacular infrastructure is a sought-after strategy in attracting potential investors and businesses (Hubbard, 1996). In sum, urban imaging strategies have become key generators of symbolic capital, enabling cities to market themselves as they enter the global competition for visitors and capital. City marketers have thus learned to renew the urban landscape for visual consumption, exploiting spectacular architectural infrastructure and urban iconography in the anticipation of producing economic value (Hall 1998; Zukin 1995). Thus, we have now entered a society where the image and the spectacle dominate (Debord, 1967; 1988; Baudrillard, 1970). The urban experience has been reinvented and transformed into a place of performance, entertainment, and symbolic consumption.

The urban entrepreneurialism has, however, political and social consequences. Harvey (1989) for example, 'criticized the often-uneven distribution of costs and benefits in entrepreneurial partnerships, as the public sector assumes most of the risk while the private sector reaps the benefits' (Pow 2002, 57). Judd (1998) further noted that the construction of infrastructure, conference halls, and entertainment centers require government subsidies for the payment of operating costs, maintenance, and promotion costs, which in some cases may lead to 'white elephants'. White elephants are possessions that the owner (in this case the government) cannot dispose of and whose costs, particularly maintenance, is out of proportion to its usefulness. Additionally, Logan and Molotch (1987) claim that the weak bargaining powers of city

officials have often found themselves being disadvantaged by private capital. 'In particular, it has been argued that the convergence of private sector interests and the public sector in the speculative real estate development has seriously undermined the interests of local urban communities' (Brunnell, Dummond, Ho, 2002, 159) Ultimately, this leads to state capture, as entrepreneurs or firms shape regulations and policies to their own advantage - neglecting the interests of the local urban population.

The master's thesis attempts to examine the nature of urban entrepreneurialism and how it has been mediated through political factors in an authoritarian regime. 'City governments are often seen as passive economic actors responding to the intensifying inter-urban competition which left them with no choice but to engage in high-risk speculative partnership with private capital' (Pow 2002, 58). Although this may seem correct in many cases, we should not neglect the capability of the state of an authoritarian regime in shaping the urban system and competitiveness. The interventionist regime in Kazakhstan has long played the proactive role in the urban system.

Inclusion of Mega-Events in urban entrepreneurialism

What are mega events?

A mega-event is a very complicated and challenging occurrence that happens in the history of the nation. A definition presented by Hiller (2000) states that mega-events are short-term, one-time, high profile event it can be called a mega-event that always have a significant urban impact. Additionally, Müller (2015) ascertains there are various definitions to mega-events by many scholars, however they lack clear distinction of measurable characteristic. ‘Events such as pilgrimage, political summits, international exhibitions, festivals or convention and sport events can be all listed under this terminology’ (Müller 2015, 627). The main characteristic marking the difference between event and a mega-event is fundamentally the size (Müller 2015). Müller (2015) concludes that there are four key dimensions of the size; number of visitors, the mediated reach, the cost and transformative impact of the event. The definition justifies the terminology for EXPO-2017 1) it is a large event in the size of participants and visitors; 2) it has been discussed by the media and news platforms; 3) the investment by the private and public sectors in its inherently colossal; and finally, 4) it has impacted the city and its shape (Müller 2015, 634).

Rationale for hosting mega-events

As mentioned previously, city marketers have learned to renew the urban landscape for visual consumption, exploiting spectacular architectural projects and urban iconography in the anticipation of producing economic value (Hall 1998; Zukin 1995). The nature of spectacular architecture is for it to be unique, and to have symbolic and esthetic qualities (Sklair 2006). Elite actors employ and draw on the reputation of world-renowned architects to deliver spectacular projects to convey a positive image of the city to other places (King 1996). This situation is desirable for the architects and the elite employing them. On the one hand the architect builds his reputation through his designed international projects. On the other hand, the architects fame offers prestige to the iconic building which is ideal for the marketing of the city (Kanna 2011; McNeill 2009). The development of iconic and spectacular architecture is frequently legitimated through the hosting of mega-events such as football World Cup, World’s Fairs, and the Olympics, which are then used to legitimate these lavish urban developments (Boyle 1997; Broudehoux 2007; Koch and Valiyev 2015; Lauermann and Davidson 2013; Modrey 2008; Müller 2011; Raco 2014; Sklair 2005). The spectacle is now so central to the

new urban economy that one of the most effective ways for cities to enhance their world image is by hosting mega-events (Koch and Valiyev, 2015). ‘Hosting high profile events not only enhances global visibility by promoting the image of the city as a vital and dynamic place, but it also acts, locally, as a catalyst for urban development and a way to legitimize large scale transformation, giving local governments permission to reprioritize the urban agenda without the public scrutiny they normally receive’ (Broudehoux 2007, 384). Staging a mega-event represent the ultimate prize in the ‘place wars’ mentioned previously.

In sum, Mega-events result in the fast-tracked transformation of urban space through the erection of landmark structures, the renewal of urban space, and infrastructure such as the development of hotels, parks, new housing/retail developments, new communication systems etc. The mega-event may be of short duration, but the impacts go far beyond the event itself for the host city and country. Moreover, as part of the urban entrepreneurialism, mega-events are used as a promotional tool to enhance a form of place marketing for inward investment, facilitated through attractive investment schemes (Baade 1996; Essex & Chalkey 1998; Chalkey & Essex 1999; Hiller 2000; Müller 2015).

Finally, hosting a mega-event demonstrates the intentions and the ideology-ies promoted by the elite of the host country (Hiller, 2000). Public support stems from the promised outcomes of the event. Whatever the objectives established the political elites of the host country, local residents need to know what difference the mega-event will make to their city (Hiller 2000).

History of the World’s fairs

This master’s thesis is concerned with EXPO-2017 as a tool of urban entrepreneurialism in Nur-Sultan. In Central Asia, Nur-Sultan is the first city to have won a bid for a first-tier event. In order to proceed further into this work, I consider it to be important to provide a brief history of the World’s fairs. It is imperative to highlight that Nur-Sultan hosted a specialized Expo: a small, shorter version of the World’s Fairs.

The history of World’s fairs commenced with the ‘The great exhibitions of the Works of Industry of All Nations’ held in London in 1851 and continues up to this day. In 1928, the International Exhibitions Bureau (BIE) was founded in Paris to oversee the exhibitions activity. The International Exhibitions Bureau monitors compliance with the principles and objectives of the Universal Expositions; in the framework of international cooperation it holds events in

education and innovation fields and conducts meetings to exchange viewpoints and develop a global dialogue on mankind problems. Venues of the World's Fairs and themes are chosen by taking into account political, economic, geographical and cultural contexts. The BIE attempts to make World's fairs not only a 'showcase' event by a nation, but a manifestation of solidarity among nations when forums of discussion related to issues are created for the progress of mankind.

According to Kulsariyeva et al. (2014) each exhibition is a phenomenon of cultural and political life. Any kind of exhibition stirs cultural traditions of the host nation and the aim is to demonstrate innovation (*Ibid.* 2014). A famous example is the creation of the Eiffel Tower for the Paris Exhibition in 1889 – the most famous architectural structure of the city. After that, major cities have started to show interest to entrepreneurs and masters in the field. For long, people have tried to show their national achievements and lived in the spirit of world competition (*Ibid.* 2014).

Additionally, the international exhibition is a special tool that is based to create dialogue with the community. Expos held in recent years, affecting global problems of humanity, such as the communication boom, the elimination of the division between the rich and the poor, the growth of mega-cities, the prevention of environmental disasters etc. they are also transformed to solve these problems effectively. Moreover, Expos are also a place of culture and dialogue where visitors as well as exhibitors get the chance to discover values and traditions of different people. Expo exhibitions are held every five years and it is the most prestigious exhibition. As a consequence, expo exhibitions are regarded as a worldwide event generating the opportunity to review the economic, scientific, technological and cultural achievements. The experience has a temporal feel where past historical experience is presented, pertaining to current issues are discussed through platforms attempting to find solution with a gaze to the future.

A typical World's fair is held for six months and takes place every 5 years, there are no restrictions in the area. International Recognized/specialized Expos takes place between two exhibitions and lasts for 3 months. The expo area must not exceed 25 hectares. Usually, the topics involve advances in precision industries like humanities, social and environmental aspects as well as scientific, technological and economic. An example of this is Zaragoza in 2008 which the city held the theme of 'Water and Sustainable Development'. Here, the theme of the exhibition is mandatory to confirm not only the International Exhibitions Bureau, but also other global organizations, including those agreed at the UN.

The country that is now a candidate for the successful implementation of the goals of the exhibition must possess an advanced communication strategy. The city where the exhibition is held must have a convenient geopolitical and geographical location, developed transport links both within the country and also with neighboring countries, as well as the pre-show to have a place of development of the transport system. To carry out a certain type of show, also must have appropriate boundary of the city, infrastructure and public transport system. In the city for guests and exhibitors should be an appropriate number of hotels, conference centers, etc... Of course, the exhibition site should be easy and convenient to access.

Choice of topic, methodology, and limits of data collection

The choice of topic and the methodology of this work has known many transformations over the past three years. My interest in Post-Socialist states, notably the geopolitics of Russia and Kazakhstan was a starting point that led me to develop an interest in the hosting of mega-events across the region.

Certain authors such as Bissenova, Bekus, Hiller, Hall, Karatayev, Koch, Laszczkowski, and Müller were my inspirations for the construction of this work, ultimately enabling me to discover the works of Debord, Harvey, and Wood ‘urban entrepreneurialism’ and the ‘society of spectacle’.

My first step was to gather enough information on the urban transformation of Nur-Sultan in order to formulate an adequate framework. This allowed me to find links between my main theoretical framework and the study of mega-events.

I was able to visit Kazakhstan for the final week of the EXPO-2017. I established contact with a couple of students who have been able to provide me with general knowledge of Kazakhstan and the capital city. During that week, I pursued ethnographic techniques, more particularly through observation, photography, and field notes. By embedding myself in the host city, I was able to gain a perspective by ‘living’ the experience of being in a rather unique city and attending a mega-event.

As mentioned previously, I am interested in the costs and benefits of such a mega-event. As it will be stated in my limitations, the lack of available and reliable data in Nur-Sultan Kazakhstan, especially concerning EXPO-2017 make it rather troublesome to examine the costs and benefits in quantitative terms. I employ a qualitative evaluation method to identify the local costs and benefits without utilizing quantitative values. The qualitative method I used is on the basis of Ziller and Phibbs (2003)’s cost-benefit assessment approach. I utilize Ziller and Phibbs cost-benefit table, allowing mixed assessment of quantitative data about financial expenses with qualitative findings on the impacts of EXPO-2017. For the purpose of this study, I have adjusted and modified the table: I have replaced the ‘y’ axis: Non-financial benefits, financial benefits, Non-Financial costs, financial costs *by* a ‘time frame’: long-term benefits, short-term benefits, long-term costs, short-term costs. I have also replaced the ‘x’ axis of costs and benefits to

individuals and costs and benefits to groups *by* costs and benefits on a local scale (Nur-Sultan) and costs and benefits for international Scale (Kazakhstan).

Tableau 1 Ziller and Phibbs (2003) integrated cost-benefit matrix

	Non-financial benefits	Financial benefits	Non-financial costs	Financial costs
Costs and benefits to individuals				
Costs and benefits to groups (eg residents, parents, ratepayers)				

Tableau 2 Authors' adjusted cost-benefit matrix

	Long-term benefits	Short-term Benefits	Long-term Costs	Long-Term Costs
Costs and benefits on a local scale (Nur-Sultan)				
Costs and Benefits for international scale (Kazakhstan)				

Limitations

Unfortunately, my research was confronted to many barriers and severe limitations greatly affecting the quality of my work. This, mainly as a consequence of attempting to do my master's thesis pertaining to a country classified as an authoritarian state. First of all, I encountered issues in gaining access to interviews, particularly government officials and other research participants. My lack of experience and naivety left me often unanswered when I requested meetings and interviews. I assume that sensitivity played an immense role. In a highly politicized environment such as Kazakhstan, any criticism on the policies and strategies has negative consequences for the government official, therefore when I attempted to contact, maybe (this is just an assumption) they didn't want to 'waste their time' with a master's student putting themselves at risk by providing me with sensitive information. The problem of gaining access to government officials represented a serious barrier in securing research participants and data. Additionally, securing research participants was a lot more challenging than expected, as again, I was left unanswered practically every single time.

Furthermore, the extensive use of statistical data sets has serious methodological limitations in the context of a non-democratic country. The statistical data in Kazakhstan can be unreliable or even unavailable, as the government officials tend to portray a 'better picture' to suit the political leadership and international community. Open data are available for research, but it is of poor reliability and quality. This issue, obviously, is not only limited to Kazakhstan, but it is a barrier worth mentioning, nonetheless.

Knowledge of Russian and/or Kazakh would have been very helpful in collecting and analyzing data. English is not the first language of the Kazakh population, who predominantly speak Kazakh and/or Russian. I do not have the arrogance of stating that they should speak English, I am simply stating that this was a barrier when attempting to secure participants for interviews. The students I met, who spoke very well English, were unreachable after 2018. This was rather troublesome as I was promised help and names for interviews and translations. The dwellers living in the low-income areas refused to talk because of the language barrier. A lesson I have clearly learned is the importance of hiring an interpreter. An interpreter is useful in breaking the language barrier, one can also be of use in decoding certain societal codes that I missed during my field research. I mentioned previously that I attempted to immerse myself in the event, but an interpreter would have pushed the immersion even more.

As I found out during my research, mega-events require temporal perspective to assess the socio-economic impacts. Less than three years have passed since EXPO-2017 - the economic and political impacts are not measurable yet as the event has occurred only recently.

It can be noted that there is insufficient information about the assessment of the impact of the Astana EXPO-2017 on the socio-economic development of the city of Astana. Nowadays, publication of scientific studies or articles pertaining to the exposition are lacking. Again, this could be due to the fact that the event occurred recently

Finally, if I had the opportunity to stay longer, it would have helped me to establish a more trusted contact base with some locals enabling me to gain more precise information and a better understanding of the topic.

Part 1

Nur-Sultan

In 1994, three years after Kazakhstan became an independent state following the demise of the Soviet Union, president Nursultan Nazarbayev announced his decision to move the country's capital from the southern city of Almaty to a small town in the agricultural north, Akmola. Almaty has been the capital since the 1929 (from 1929 to 1936: Kazakh Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic; from 1936 to 1991: Kazakh Socialist Soviet Republic; from 1991 to 1997: Republic of Kazakhstan). The newly selected capital, in contrast, used to be a provincial town in the centre of an agricultural region. Formerly known as Tselinograd during the Soviet period, the city of Akmola was renamed 'Astana' (literally meaning 'capital' in the Kazakh language) in December 1998, when it officially took over the status of capital (Laszczkowski 2011). Since the resignation of president Nazarbayev in March 2019, the capital was renamed Nur-Sultan by the newly elected president Tokayev as an homage to the former president and 'father of the nation': Nursultan Nazarbayev.



Figure 1 CIA, 2019, *Central Asia: Kazakhstan*

The reasons why the capital moved from Almaty to Astana are manifold. Ivanov and Volovoj (2014) claim that the move was strategic in order to be in the 'middle' of the country and somewhere in the middle of Moscow and Beijing. President Nazarbayev states:

‘Almaty’s lack of space for government expansion, it’s dangerous location along seismological fault line and environmental problems, the relative depopulation of Kazakhstan’s northern territory, and the fact that as capital should be far from external borders and in the heart or centre of the country’ (Koch 2013, 119).

The official discourse in the aforementioned quote signals Nazarbayev’s concern with the urban geography in Almaty as a risky environment for a capital city. However, scholarly efforts provide different answers. The issues discussed most often in this context were related to elite formation, remapping and redefining of the country and its borders as well as possible changes to the geopolitical branding of the nation (Schatz 2004; Bekus 2017; Bissenova 2013; Koch 2013; Fauve 2015). Astana also became a symbolic migration of ethnic Kazakhs to a northern region predominantly composed of Russian decent - as it initiated direct migration of ethnic Kazakhs from the south to the new capital (Peyrouse 2007).

In addition, Bekus (2017) claims the moving of the capital city appeared to mark a symbolic break with Kazakhstan’s Soviet legacy: ‘The social and cultural capital accumulated by Almaty in the Soviet past seemed irrelevant to a forward-looking national project with clear international ambitions’ (Bekus 2017, 806). Indeed, the relocation symbolizes change and new beginning; by relocating the capital and constructing Nur-Sultan, the state has alienated the country from its Soviet past and symbolically led it to its independent future (Yacher 2011, 1003). Thus, the transfer of the capital was a way of addressing state and nation building challenges related to the past and to the future.

Thence, the provincial town had to be transformed into a capital city. According to the Astana General Plan website (Akimat 2019), in 1998, an international competition was organized for the design of the new capital. ‘This competition caught serious interest of the leading regional and world architectural centres. Architects from Europe, Asia, America and Australia, creative teams from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) including Kazakhstan took part in this competition’ (Akimat 2019, n.p). Amongst the many projects submitted to the international competition for the master plan and design of the new city of Astana, the famous Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa won the competition by ‘proposing the construction of the new city centre to the left bank of the river’ (Bekus, 2017, 806). According to Bekus (2017) most other projects submitted to the competition sought to ‘develop the existing urban layout on the right

bank of the Ishim river, preserving the terrain on the left bank for green spaces (due to its fertile soil), private housing and a contemporary university campuses' (Bekus 2017, 806). Additionally, the scholar (2017) further states that Kurokawa's concept of developing the left riverbank permitted the preservation of the 'old city' and its consequent incorporation into the new capital.

Consequently, in the early 2000s, the government led vast building projects that would quickly transform the urban landscape of Nur-Sultan (Laszczkowski 2011, 2014). The left bank witnessed the construction of new government buildings, residential areas, commercial venues and symbolic monuments. The speed and expansion of the construction were (and still are) rather remarkable, and the architectural style considerably different and unseen before in Kazakhstan (Koch and Valiyev 2015; Laszczkowski 2011). The new emerging buildings were architecturally spectacular and utterly different to the previously known 'Soviet' architectural forms of building blocks that encompass the majority of the urban environment of the country, this including the 'old city' of the right bank of Nur-Sultan. The result of this is the emergence of a contrast between the two banks: the left bank of the river being architecturally 'spectacular' and the right bank being 'ordinary' Soviet architecture.



Figure 2 'Old City Meets New City' Adobe Stock (n.d)

In terms of urban planning, the difference between both banks can be observed with a map or satellite images. The ‘left bank’ stands out with its linear arrangement, right angles, and relatively sparse street grid. A main pedestrianized boulevard named: Nur Zhol, marking a symmetrical axis of the spatial composition. On the other hand, the ‘right bank’ has been developing in a less controlled manner.

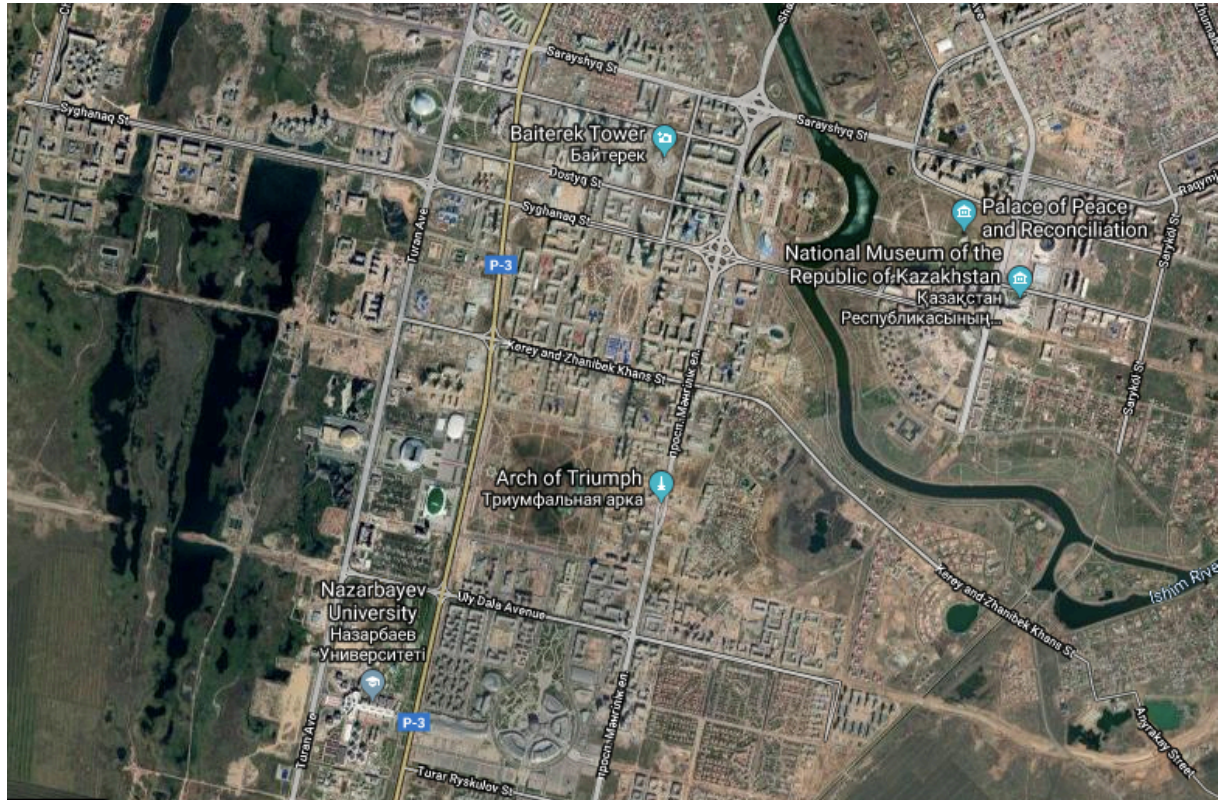


Figure 3 Satellite image of the left bank

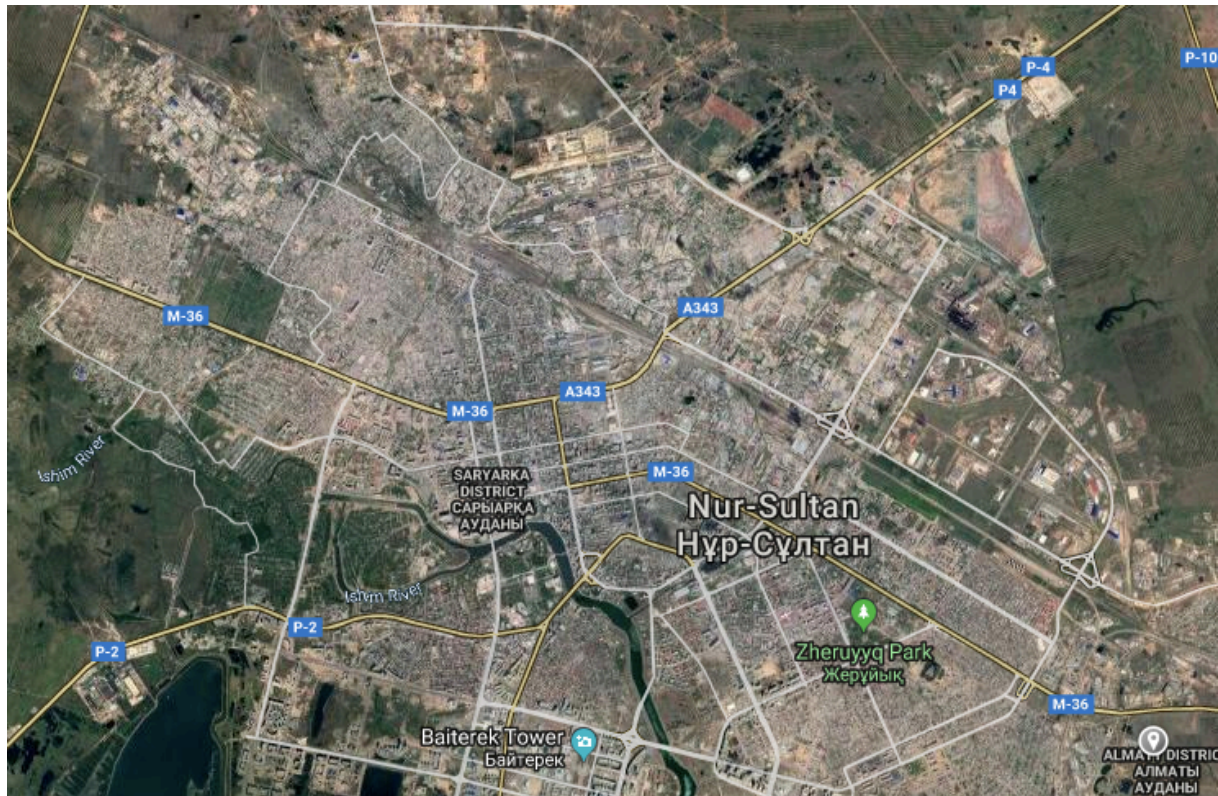


Figure 4 Satellite image of the right bank:

Certainly, governmental and the entrepreneurial elite actors have a privileged position in the urban development, as is the case in much of the world. This is nevertheless evident in Kazakhstan because of the country's authoritarian political system, in which the state's control is far reaching (Koch 2013). 'Kazakhstan is a presidential republic, and a series of constitutional amendments, referendums and elections, none of which have been recognized by international monitoring bodies as fair, has allowed Nazarbayev to occupy the position of president continuously since its independence in 1991' (Laszczkowski 2011, 8) - up until March 20, 2019. The regime in Kazakhstan governs through the rule *by* law as opposed to governing through the rule *of* law. The government can be characterized as a neopatrimonialism regime.¹ The formal laws reflect the interest of a small group of elites that control the government institutions in order to promote their personal interests, rather than public goods. In this system of

¹ Neopatrimonialism refers to a system of governance where the formal rational-legal state apparatus co-exists and is supplanted by an informal patrimonial system of governance. Patrimonialism is defined as a social and political order where the patrons secure the loyalty and support of the clients by bestowing benefits to them from own or state resources. Neopatrimonialism gives rise to a state where real decision-making power about that functions, such as resource distribution, lies outside of the formal institutions. Instead, decisions about resources are made by powerful politicians and their cronies who are linked by informal, personal and clientelist networks that exist outside of the state structure. (Nawaz 2008, 2)

governance, the law is manipulated and becomes an instrument used by the political regime to advance limited personal interests and to exempt the regime from its own set of regulations. Kazakhstan is a state where the uncertainty of law deemed Nazarbayev a strong grip on power and to arbitrate and enforce regulations (Tutumlu 2016, 3). By using the law to its own advantage, the regime is able to reward loyalists and punish those who attempt to defy the regime. President Nazarbayev and his family have practically monopolized many sectors of the country endangering the interests of other economic and political elite (Ozturk 2015). Nazarbayev's family, son in laws and daughters monopolized the country's largest businesses, banks, media, tax police and customs (*Ibid.* 2015). President Nazarbayev holds the title of 'Leader of the Nation' and during his tenure, was the main promoter, decision maker, and financier in the Nur-Sultan city planning (Molotch and Ponzini, 2019). Nazarbayev is centrally involved in the planning of the city and of individual landmarks, the city's development formula can be summarized as 'diversity design but under one decision maker' (Aitken 2009, 222). In his inner circle, the urban entrepreneurial elite refers to the officials at the AstanaGenPlan which is a governmental research institute (a branch of the municipal government) which is charged with developing and implementing urban-planning policies, regulations, and norms in Nur-Sultan (Bissenova 2012). The AstanaGenPlan is high standing in the bureaucratic hierarchy. Several leading architects and urban planners from this office are members of the Architectural Council under President Nazarbayev (*Ibid.* 2012). Bissenova (2012) states that the AstanaGenPlan has been a seat of the City Urban Planning Council, headed by the mayor. The council makes decisions about land allocation for development projects, zoning etc.

Moreover, Koch (2013) further adds that despite the country being anything but democratic, during his tenure, president Nazarbayev apparently enjoyed great popular support, as seen in his last presidential election, in which he received 97.7% of the vote in 2015. After Nazarbayev's abrupt resignation in March 2019, in the new election (June 9), president Kassym-Jomart Tokayev was officially elected Kazakhstan's president with 70.96 percent of the vote (Zhussupova, 2019, n.p). The two chambers' parliament are monopolized by the former and current president's party, 'Nur Otan'. 'Opposition is weak and fragmented. It is thus hardly a participatory polity in the sense if a pluralistic formal political system' (Reeves, Rasanayagam, Beyer, 2014, 151). The transformation of Astana is primarily driven by state revenues from hydrocarbon and oil resources. While such extensive natural resources led to major economic growth, it also strengthened the authoritarian regime (Freedom House Index 2019, Transparency International

2019) Although Astana is governed by a mayor and by municipal heads (Akimats), they are appointed by and answerable to the president, leading to the concentration of power to the latter.

As mentioned previously, Economically, Kazakhstan is doing relatively well compared to other Central Asian countries. There is an abundance in natural resources, notably oil and gas. As a consequence, Kazakhstan attracted ‘major foreign companies from the United States, Europe, and China who’ve invested in the exploitation of Kazakhstan’s oil deposits’ (Laszczkowski 2011, 9). Between 2000 and 2007, which concurred with the primary phase of the urban development of Astana (Which the General Plan established it being between 1998 and 2007) – Kazakhstan’s economy growth rate was 9 per cent per year (*Ibid.* 2011). Nur-Sultan is a city that has been able to enjoy the fruits of the economic growth, but residents in many rural areas and mono-cities have still not profited from the economic growth ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

‘This is common practice that resource-rich states accentuate infrastructure projects which are funded with resource rents or side deals with local and international economic elites. Astana’s history is tied to the situation from the very beginning of its development as Kazakhstan’s capital in the 1990s, intertwined with a set of extra-legal economic patronage linked to oil, gas, uranium and metals’ (Koch 2018, 19).

Most of Nur-Sultan’s iconic new structures and infrastructures have been officially funded by the government through the vast wealth accumulated from resource rents. Additionally, Koch (2018) states that it is widely understood to be a common business practice in Kazakhstan for private companies to develop local infrastructure, on their own initiative or at the request of the government officials. Indeed, ‘Nazarbayev has thanked the government of friendly countries and CEOs of foreign domestic companies for contributing grants (at his personal request) to fund for the new capital’ (Koch 2018, 19). Much of Astana’s first phase of construction was sponsored by the government, but not entirely: contributions were also solicited from energy companies, or in some cases volunteered by them in order to gain favourable terms in oil contracts with the government (*Ibid.* 2018).

So far, the cost of building Astana is officially unknown. ‘By the end of the first phase in 2007, it was estimated at fifteen billion U.S dollars while independent scholars believed the actual cost must have been a lot more’ (Dave 2007, 168). However, it is safe to say that immense financial resources have been put into place for construction of the new capital.

Moreover, alongside the urban development, Astana also underwent impressive demographic change. The population rose from 326'939 people in 1998 to 872'619 people in 2015, and in 2016: 1'000'000 residents (Kazinform, 2017), this as a result of an important migration from all corners of the country (Laszczkowski 2011).

In sum, new sovereign states seek symbolic representation, for example, by building a new capital, or by elevating the status of existing capitals by architectural means. In Kazakhstan: 'The government's decision in the 1990's to develop a new capital city has been the centre of its political leader's effort to institutionalize their power as well as to materially inscribe their vision of modernity in the post-Soviet period' (Koch 2018, 3). In doing so, the entrepreneurial regime in Nur-Sultan has deployed urban generation programs in a rather dramatic fashion. Nur-Sultan is a city specifically developed to be a capital, just like Brasilia and Ankara, amongst many, built from practically nothing. Internationally known architects were hired by the government for the construction of prestigious 'flagship' projects, such as spectacular monuments and buildings where the government as well as the private sector have done enormous investments. Thence, following Harvey's (1989) key strategy in urban regeneration programs of public-private partnership.

Nur-Sultan: The imagery

The former president Nazarbayev deemed that Nur-Sultan's symbolic representation exceeded its physical structures. Indeed, 'Spatial renewal, especially in the capital cities, appealed to leaders of the newly independent states as an attractive way to perform statehood, promote new national identities and induce new political-economic relations' (Laszczkowski 2016, 8). Furthermore, Fauve and Gintrac (2009) assert that the change in capital is to affirm power, to legitimize and concentrate power spatially. In many ways, Astana represents Nazarbayev's ambitions and desires of how the president would like the world to see Astana and Kazakhstan. Thus, the central image and symbolic face desired into Astana's design is Kazakhstan as a legitimate member of the international community: post-modern, internationally oriented political and cultural centre (Fauve, 2015). To enact this vision, the government spend extravagant amounts of money to turn it into one of 'the most attractive and competitive capitals in the world' and 'a bright, strong, prosperous city which unites all Kazakhstan's people' (Nazarbayev 2010, 53; Sullivan 2017). The aforementioned quote from Nazarbayev pertains to the topic of performance legitimacy of the ruling regime and needs to be regarded as socio-economic which forms the leitmotif of his speech.

For ordinary Kazakhs, the spaces of Nur-Sultan provide an opportunity for realizing their aspirations (Koch 2012). The aspirations pertain to 'prospects of employment and better lives that the new capital seems to offer' (Koch and Valiyev 2015, 77). Speaking of contemporary Nur-Sultan as a pinnacle of modernity, President Nazarbayev has argued that 'our young capital has become an example for all cities in Kazakhstan and Central Asia' (Nazarbayev 2010, 53). Again, Nazarbayev draws on performance legitimacy by claiming that Nur-Sultan is an example for other cities. In the last quote, the president draws on comparisons by putting the city's accomplishments forward in the area of modernization and economic performance providing opportunities for foreigners and the ordinary Kazakh citizen.

Political elites use architectural monuments 'as instrumental tools in the political battle for hearts and minds' and engage in a symbolic dialogue with each other and with the public in an attempt to gain symbolic capital: prestige, legitimacy, and influence' (Brade and Neugebauer, 2017, 253). Moreover, despite the ideas in Kurokawa's master plan, from the very beginning, 'there were clear official statements on the architectural appearance and symbolic content of Astana' (Köppen 2013, 597). Indeed, 'the new capital should be a symbol of Kazakhstan's

resurrection and the rebirth of an authentic spirituality. The city was also envisioned as a trend setter in architectural style for the whole country, where the last designs, trends, and concepts in global architecture would be on display' (Köppen, 2013, 597). The aforementioned quotes assume that Nur-Sultan's new cityscape, to some extent, exerts an ideological effect. In the capital, the buildings and monument may be seen as a form of political action, with the aim of shaping subjectivities and legitimacy.

Additionally, in the official rhetoric concerning Nur-Sultan, Nazarbayev was not just overseeing the city's development, he vigorously participated in it. Koch and Valiyev (2015) claim that in official outlets, 'Nazarbayev is described as having a unique architectural vision and a special hand in shaping the development of Astana, frequently pictures on construction sites, with architectural models, and otherwise overseeing planning in Astana' (Koch and Valiyev 2015, 578). In doing so, the former president sets a particular economy of prestige promoting his own presidential persona, reinforcing the 'cult of personality'.

Finally, in an email exchange between Natalie Koch and I – she stated that 'The whole Astana scheme, is about economic development. It was from day 1'.² This meaning that from the very beginning, Nazarbayev sought to position Astana as means of attracting international capital. For foreign audiences in particular, his government has tried to craft an image of Kazakhstan as market oriented. 'the regime has facilitated the semi-ideological paradigm of 'stability' following the discursive field of 'stable Kazakhstan = stable development'' (Kudaibergenova 2015, 443). The image of Astana as a site of stability and economic opportunity is central to this effort to narrate the country as politically and economically reformed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. 'Shifting the status of the capital city from Almaty to the new city that is open to the wind of changes has given powerful impetus to the overall development of the country. The new capital should become the symbol of changes.' (Koch 2018, 62). Thus, Nur-Sultan became the new poster of a modern Kazakhstan that Nazarbayev desired to put into place (Koch and Valiyev, 2015). In sum, Kazakhstan pertains to grandiose aspiration and the Kazakh government envisions that its newly established capital will lead the country to a prosperous future.

² Koch, N 'Re: Master's thesis' Received by David Sheldon on the 19th of December 2019

Flagship projects: Nur-Sultan Urban Redevelopment

Tableau 3 EXAMPLES OF ICONIC STRUCTURES NUR-SULTAN

Cultural/entertainment/educational	Business/Commercial
Palace of Peace and Reconciliation	KazMunayGaz Complex
Nur Astana Mosque	Astana Airport
Nazarbayev University	Nur Alem
Khan Shatyr Entertainment Centre	
Bayterek Tower	

According to the official website of the first president of the republic of Kazakhstan (Elbasy n.d, n.p), the main symbol of the new capital desired by the government is the ‘Bayterek’ tower. The tall and imposing tower positions itself in the middle of the monumental urban space in the central avenue of Nur Zhol (Picture provided below) (Köppen 2013).

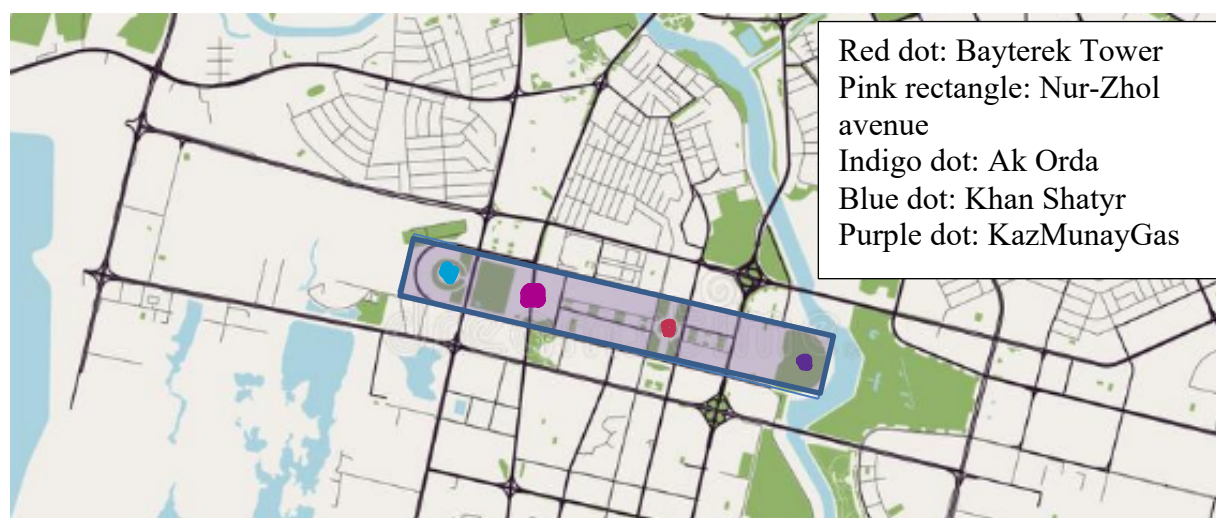


Figure 5 Dreamstime: Map of the City of Nur-Sultan – the governmental district

If we commence the Nur-Zhol avenue (pink zone in figure 5) with the presidential palace called Ak Orda in Kazakhstan, we notice a resemblance with the Washington Capitol Hill. Köppen (2013) pushed the symbolism claiming that the architectural style is aimed and conveying the message of Kazakhstan being a democratic nation. Other buildings alongside the Nur-Zhol main axis include centres of Kazakhstan’s political power with various ministries and economic power with the state-owned energy company building KazMunayGas complex (600)

Bayterek Tower



Figure 6 Bayterek, source: author

As mentioned previously, ‘Astana’s most important architectural icon is one of the first buildings with a distinct figurative symbol is the independence monument named ‘Bayterek’ (Manasova et al. 2013, n.p). Erected in 2002, Bayterek is part of the president’s image building project, through this monument, the government aims to raise Kazakhstan’s prestige in the world (Ivanainen, 2015). Bayterek literally translates to ‘tall poplar’, meaning the tree (Ugc, 2017, n.p). The tower has every element of symbolism to locals and tourists. For instance, the height of the tower which stands at 97 meters tall represent 1997, the year in which Nur-Sultan was named the capital city of Kazakhstan (Ugc, 2017). The golden sphere, known as the golden ‘egg’, symbolizes a local Turkic folktale: the story of a bird (Samruk) who laid a golden egg in the sacred tree of life (*Ibid*, 2017).

Since Bayterek is the official symbol of Astana and thus the new Kazakhstan, it produces the image and the new scene of Kazakhstan pursued by president Nazarbayev and his

administration: new, independent, future-oriented, and prosperous Kazakhstan (Ivanainen, 2015). The tower is also a main tourist site for the visitors of Nur-Sultan (Koch 2010).

Khan Shatyr Entertainment Centre



Figure 7 Khan Shatyr Entertainment Centre, source: author

After Bayterek was completed in 2002, in less than 10 years, Astana's other two pieces of architecture, Khan Shatyr entertainment and shopping centre was completed (Koch, 2013). Designed by the world-famous Foster + Partners, Khan Shatyr encompasses brand shops, offices, supermarkets, cafés, restaurants, cinemas, an artificial beach with a swimming pool on the top of the building (Personal observation). This is an example of the construction of new spectacular revenue-generating facility as a strategy in attracting potential investors and businesses. Khan Shatyr is the largest tent shaped building ever built. 'Post-modern, not pure functionalism and the recourse to historical paragons citations of and references to tradition' (Köppen 2013, 601). Khan Shatyr has focused on the symbolic of tradition and luxury consumerism.

Nazarbayev University



Figure 8 Source: Author

The flagship of the national education is also located in Nur-Sultan: Nazarbayev University. Nazarbayev University is an impressive building in itself, however I decided to include this in the ‘flagship’ projects because this university established by president Nazarbayev is the first country’s academic institution with aspirations to become a global-level research university. The university was established in 2010 and is the first university in Kazakhstan that is guided by the principles of autonomy and academic freedom. This, in compliance with international standards. It is located right next to the newly constructed Expo site.

Kazmunaygaz Complex



Figure 9 KazMunayGas Complex, source: Author

Another recognizable building in the middle of Nur-Sultan is the KazMunayGas complex composed of administrative buildings. It is one the first building constructed on the left bank of the Yessil river (Inform.kz, n.d). The building is in the shape of an 'arch' in which the Nur-Zhol boulevard goes through. The boulevard connects the Khan Shatyr entertainment centre all the way to the Ak Orda presidential palace. KazMunayGas is the state-owned oil and gas company of Kazakhstan. The company is born from Kazakhstan's concern with strengthening the country's own national oil company and its presence in the industry (Hardin 2012). In 2002, KazMunayGas was founded, uniting the previously distinct companies responsible for oil and gas production in Kazakhstan (*Ibid*, 2012).

Ak Orda



Figure 10 Ak Orda Presidential Palace Source Author

Completed in 2003, Ak Orda is the presidential palace where the most important decisions of the country are made. None of the capitals in the world is not complete without the President's Residence, and Astana is no exception.

Nur-Sultan can be recognized for its architecture symbols such as the Ak Orda, Bayterek, Khan Shatyr, KazMunayGas Complex. These are just a select few that make the city recognizable, attracting people and making Nur-Sultan a city brand (Low and Yermekbayeva, 2012).

Conclusion of Part 1

Nur-Sultan stands out as a regional exception in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. What sets the country of Kazakhstan apart from its Central Asian neighbors is that the state draws on the wealth afforded by its natural resources. As a consequence, the government and urban planners were able to oversee and conduct aspiring urban development agendas in the new capital city. Since becoming the capital city, Nur-Sultan's transformation has been immense and costly. New spectacular buildings designed by world renowned architects have erected on the basis that it will attract investment to the capital. The government sought this to position the city in the space of consumption. Indeed, 'Framing their capital city developments as advertisements of their newly capitalistic orientations in the post-Soviet era, planners have strategically used urban landscapes to broadcast to the world an image of these states as "reformed," "modern," "engaged," and "open for business" (Koch 2012, 2449). Nur-Sultan has followed that strategy of other aspiring world city by using the power of iconic architecture as cultural capital. 'Long used as a mark of distinction, helping cities capture the semiotic advantage over rival destinations, iconic architecture now plays a major role in the new political economy of signs' (Broudehoux 2007, 384). Urban planning and architecture have been adapted in subservience to these various demands (Köppen 2012). Hence, the built environment shows various codes referring to (official) Kazakh symbols, statues, myths, stories, and tradition. Architectural symbolism is very strong on the left bank of the river.

'Construction is a particularly convenient metaphor for directed, allegedly positive social change, a process that requires collective effort, discipline, and often sacrifice over a period of time, just like the ideology of 'transition', designed by western neoliberal economists but so readily embraced by authoritarian regimes across the former socialist world. This section presents a compelling example of the ideological use of the construction metaphor by the Kazakhstani ruling elite. (Laszczkowski 2011, 81)

In order to justify the astounding costs of the new governmental and economic district, the spectacular agenda was vindicated on the basis of developmentalist thinking, often referenced as 'modern' with economic development, defined for policy purposes in terms of growth, productivity, and competitiveness.

Part 2

Nur-Sultan and the Global Industry of Mega Events

In a post-industrial era where cities across the globe have taken an entrepreneurial approach to urban territorial management, mega-events have become a prominent part of urban policies (Harvey, 1989). Koch and Valiyev (2015) add that spectacular urban projects are frequently legitimated through the imperatives of hosting mega-events. Incentives for hosting mega events can be manifold. On the international scale, the main motive for hosting mega-events is grand exposure, enhancing the world image of the host nation: these pertain to world exhibitions, international conferences, or sports competitions such as the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup. These events are typically associated with an abundance of foreign tourists, visitors, and global media coverage. Mega-events possess a character of spectacle, making them central to the new urban economy (Koch and Valiyev, 2015; Gogishvili, 2017). This form of place marketing as site of entertainment, spectacle, innovation is a prerequisite for successful tourism, export or investment promotion (Anholt 2010).

On a local scale, government host mega-events as a catalyst for development as well as a strategy to legitimize large-scale urban transformations, giving the host government permission to reprioritize the urban agenda without public scrutiny they normally receive (Koch and Valiyev, 2015). Moreover, mega-events enable existing plans to accelerate through the planning and development stages – facilitating investors to finance those projects (Baade 1996; Essex and Chalkley 1998, 1999). Although, traditionally, it was largely the exclusive domain of ‘Western’ cities to host mega-events, recently, event geography has expanded (Gogishvili 2017). Indeed, mega-events are considered desirable in Post-Socialist countries for the potential to spotlight and facilitate the diffusion of the country’s most iconic new urban development ultimately for legitimacy and, again, to market the city (Koch and Valiyev, 2015). Certainly, Clark (2008) argues that mega events add certain positive value to the physical development of the host city. For example, some buildings with exceptional architecture, such as the Eiffel Tower, Sydney Opera House, Sapporo Dome Stadium, China Pavilion, amongst many. originally constructed to host international events (Exposition Universelle 1989 Paris, Sydney 2000 Summer Olympic Games, 2002 FIFA World Cup in Japan and South Korea, and Shanghai World’s fair in 2010), became iconic parts of the city, subsequently attracting tourists.

Ultimately, following the urban entrepreneurialism logic that cities now increasingly pursue policies that are aimed at enhancing local economic growth through the construction and regeneration of urban spaces as well as promoting city images (Harvey 1989, 7-8; Cox 1993; Judd & Kantor 1998; DeFilippis 1999).

Tableau 4 Select Mega-Events in Eurasian post-socialist countries from 2010-2020

ASIAN WINTER GAMES 2011	Almaty/Astana – Kazakhstan
EUROPEAN FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS 2012	Poland and Ukraine
EUROVISION SONG CONTEST 2012	Baku – Azerbaijan
WINTER OLYMPICS 2014	Sochi – Russia
EUROPEAN GAMES 2015	Baku – Azerbaijan
EXPO-2017	Astana – Kazakhstan
ASIAN INDOOR AND MARTIAL ARTS GAMES 2017	Ashgabat – Turkmenistan
WINTER UNIVERSIADE 2017	Almaty – Kazakhstan
FORMULA 1	Baku – Azerbaijan

Kazakhstan in the Realm of Mega-Events

Kazakhstan pursues the hosting of mega-events to develop the country's international prestige – the regime's 'image project', which has been tied to the development of Astana as the country's new capital (Koch, 2012). 'This agenda is explicitly referenced when officials prioritize large, symbolic, and attention grabbing projects, and they called on the 'stepping-stone' narrative to justify the government's astounding investments in new facilities, as seen with the with EXPO-2017 and the Asian Winter Games, co-hosted by Astana and Almaty' (Koch and Valiyev 2015, 582). The government has been committed to diversifying Kazakhstan's natural resource dependent economy by turning Kazakhstan into a primary tourist destination. Notably, the government of Kazakhstan has developed several strategies and programs such as legislation 'on tourist activity in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the concept of development of tourism industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2023' (Department of Tourism in Akmola 2018). The focal objective of this is to promote the development of a competitive tourism industry, integrated into the international tourism market, with significant spending generated from the industry. Additionally, in an interview with Al Jazeera (2015), the vice minister of industry and development Yerlan Sagadiyev claims: 'We want to bring in Expo, we want to bring in Olympic games, Formula 1, so people have a clear purpose to come in the

first place' (Al Jazeera 2015, 13:48). This quote demonstrates the intentions of the Kazakh government to use prestigious events in order to attract visitors and brand the cities as a source of attraction. In addition, the goal for the Kazakhstan government is to lure luxury tourism because it brings more capital to the country: 'We know the Chinese love luxury, tourism luxury items and everything associated with luxury, so there is definitely a thought along those lines. We have Russia who is also, although not look at East, but you can make them get interested in luxury tourism in Kazakhstan' (Al Jazeera 2015, 22:27). Getz explains that events are an important motivator of tourism, and figure prominently in the development marketing plans of most destinations (Getz, 2007, 403). The roles and impacts of planned events within the tourism have been well documented and are of increasing importance for destination competitiveness (*Ibid.* 2007, 403).

The first international event organized in Kazakhstan is the 7th Winter Asian Games in 2011 that took place in Astana and Almaty. It was followed by the 233.5 billion tenge (620'285'091.20 Billion US in January 2020's exchange rate) of state funding spent into infrastructure and venue construction to improve the 'urban portfolio' of Astana and Almaty, primarily for one day (unsuccessful) win the Winter Olympic bid (lost to Beijing for the 2022 bid).

Infrastructure developed for the 7th Winter Asian Games in 2011 (venues in Astana only):

- Astana Arena, a 30'000-seat stadium with the final cost of (estimated) 185 million \$
- Alau Ice Palace, a 7'500-seat ice arena with the final cost of (estimated) 140 million \$
- Saryarka Velodrome, a 8'000-seat cycling dome with the final cost of (estimated) 148 million \$

While domestically the government engaged in the patriotic rhetoric and set abstract image-building goals, it also employed reasoning that the 7th Winter Asian Games would give an additional impulse to the national economy and help develop tourism. 'In order to attract visitors to the country, Kazakh's top priority is the creation of a competitive and distinctive tourism industry. According to Ms. Karlygash Kaken, the head of the Kazakh Tourism Authority, the Asian Games are a great opportunity for Kazakhstan to attract the attention as a brand-new tourism destination. Generally, the Games are a significant project for Kazakhstan as they will take place in two main cities, Astana and Almaty' (Tourism Review 2015, np).

This failed as the prospects for commercial after use of new sport facilities were hit by the failure to attract tourists (Nurmakov 2016, 115). The failure was primarily down to the fact that the procedure for obtaining visas for Kazakhstan remained very expensive and adverse to the aim of enhancing the tourism sector. Yet, even if the expected number of tourists were to visit Almaty and Astana, the hospitality sector would have failed to live up to such influx of tourists because of the city hospitality services – lack of hotel rooms and tourist friendly navigation in cities (Nurmakov 2016, 115).

EXPO-2017

In 2010, 1st of July at the headquarters of the International Exhibitions Bureau in Paris at the General Session of the 147th Assembly, Kazakhstan expressed its application to host the exhibition in 2017 in Astana (Kulsariyeva et al. 2014)

On the 22nd of November 2012, 156 member nations of the International Bureau (BIE) met in Paris and decided by a strong majority vote of 103 countries that Expo2017 will be held in then called Astana. Kazakhstan chose the theme ‘Future Energy’ to promote sustainable world energy solutions. Astana and Liège, Belgium, were candidates to host EXPO 2017. Belgium proposed the theme ‘Connecting people’ (*Ibid* 2014). Hosting a specialized expo, or a World’s Fair, football world cup, Olympics, is a major coup for any nation.

Kazakhstan introduced the nation’s pavilion at the EXPO 2012. The pavilion was built to project its traditions and innovations in culture and science, business and tourism. The pavilion was dedicated to the theme of water, and narrated the history and traditions of Kazakhstan, its modern life and its prospects for the future. The objective was for the visitors to participate in interactive shows, broadcasted around the pavilion. Kazakhstan was able to gain experience in hosting a show of that stature, developing tourism and raising the image of the country.

The theme of the specialized exhibition coincides with Kazakhstan’s new agenda pertain to reducing the amount of harmful emissions into the environment and the atmosphere. ‘The accepted Strategy “Kazakhstan– 2050”: a new policy of the established state sets clear objectives for the construction of a sustainable and efficient economic model based on country’s transition to a “green” way of development’ (Syzydykova and Abilov 2014, n.p).

The main argument was that according to the UN – 1.6 Billion people are not provided with electricity. Therefore, the power is a major factor, which impacts to development of worldwide

environmental and economic problems. Kazakhstan aimed to make its own contribution to solve this problem and aimed to collect projects and the best thinkers in the power sphere in Nur-Sultan. Moreover, the theme generated widely energy saving selected global new technologies, also using the alternative energy of the sun, the wind, the ocean and thermal projects worldwide.

In this sense, the EXPO-2017 is an attempt to finding solutions to economic, environmental, and energy problems in Kazakhstan and the world. According to the official discourse 'That is, holding the International specialized exhibition 'Astana EXPO-2017' has not only political, economic and environmental backgrounds, but also the ambition of Kazakhstan for the development of effective energy. International specialized exhibition 'Astana EXPO-2017' is an opportunity of transition to «green» economy, which in turn allows us to achieve the strategic goal of Kazakhstan i.e. to become one of 30 countries with the most developed economy' (Syzdykova and Abilov 2014, n.p).

National Company Astana EXPO-2017

The EXPO-2017 was under direct supervision of the national government. In January 2013, The Astana EXPO-2017 National Company JSC was created – the unique shareholder of the company: The Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Expo 2017, 2017, 30-31).

The board of directors of the Astana EXPO-2017 National Company JSC:

- Head: First Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan (*Ibid*, 2017, 31)
- Board of Directors: Vice-Minister of National Economy, Chairman of the State Committee of State-owned Property and Privatization of the Ministry of Finance, independent directors and the Chairman of the Management Board of the Organizers.
- Chairman of the Management Board of the Organizers: Akhmetzhan Yessimov (*Ibid*, 31)

The Expo

The International specialized exhibition EXPO-2017 was held in Astana from the 10th of June to the 10th of September 2017. 115 countries, 22 International Organizations and technology firms participated in the event. More than three million people visited the exhibition. Two

hundred local companies took part in the construction of the exhibition facilities. No verified costs were disclosed, speculation, however, suggests that the expo cost between 1.3 to 5 billion USD (Wei 2017, n.p).

Expo-2017 Impacts

Legal Exception

The government of Kazakhstan introduced a range of entrepreneurial policies that are designed to attract many investors creating an intensification of inter-urban competition. ‘This involves the setting up of enterprise zones, urban development corporations, attractive financing packages (e.g investing pension funds, providing low interest loans), as well as providing urban subsidies and tax incentives’ (Pow 2002, 56). Additionally, Wood (1998) claims that these urban entrepreneurialism strategies are put into place to demark particular cities, in the attempt to attract as much investment as possible. It is important to note that prior to the EXPO-2017, Nur-Sultan already enjoys the status of being in a ‘Special Economic Zone’ (SEZ). The term of functioning is from 2001 – 2027 and the purpose of the creation of an SEZ is to accelerate the construction of new administrative and business centers of the capital; opening new production in an industrial park (Kazakh Invest 2019, n.p). Essentially, the SEZ are specialized territories of Kazakhstan with defined boundaries and with special legal regulatory regime in order to support priority activities (Ernst and Young 2019, 18).

Ernst and Young (2019, 19) on the legal policies of the SEZ territory:

- SEZ territory is categorized as a free customs zone
- Free-of-charge land lease rights
- Tax incentives, specifically: a reduction of land tax by 100%
- A reduction of property tax by 100%
- A reduction of corporate income tax by 100%
- A reduction of social tax by 100% (only for the park of innovational technology)
- A simplified procedure for hiring foreign labor.

To achieve the countless responsibilities associated with organizing a mega-event under a very specific timeframe, Kazakh government introduced event-related legislation. A number of

scholars have pointed to these ‘Laws of Exception’ as a defining characteristic of mega-events, facilitating expropriation and accelerating planning approval processes, regulating commerce, as well as facilitating entry to the host country (or tourists) (Coaffee 2015; Sánchez & Broudehoux, 2013).

For the EXPO-2017, the national government established exceptional legal conditions. Firstly, Junussova (2017) states that ‘the Budget Code (2008) was corrected to allow direct financing of the national company Astana EXPO-2017 JSC, approximately USD 3 billion of public money bypassed Astana’s city budget’ (84). Additionally, several other changes in the law have been made introducing a range of entrepreneurial policies (Syzykova and Abilov 2014, n.p):

- The law related to Migration (simplified procedure for obtaining visas for individuals arriving in the organization and conduction of EXPO-2017)
- the law ‘on architecture, urban planning and construction’ (design and project documentation in relation to EXPO-2017 objects)
- The law ‘on regulation of commerce’ (definitions of «International Specialized Exhibition», «objects of the International exhibition», «member of the International exhibition» consolidation of functions and rights of the national company «Astana EXPO2017»)
- The law ‘on special economic zones’ (the status of Special Economic Zone for the participating organizations carrying out the construction of exhibition)
- The law ‘on Employment’ (attracting foreign specialists with the knowledge of energy saving technologies and experience in design and construction out of quotas and permits)

Through the law related to Migration mentioned above, the government of Kazakhstan seems to learn its lesson from the Asian Winter Games 2011 and moved on to lift the visa requirements for citizens of the developed countries tentatively in 2014 (Nurmakov 2016, 120) and introduced a permanent visa-free entry for citizens of 26 nations in 2015 (*Ibid*, 2016, 120).

For the preparation of the mega event, the Kazakh government and its legal institutions have authorized, consolidated and legalized practices of legal exception in order to meet the demands of the organizing committee, construction companies, and tourist.

Urban Transformation

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, urban transformation is one of the key attractions of hosting mega-events. Preuss (2004) argues that an Olympic Games ‘accelerates infrastructural development by up to 10 years’ (p. 234). While many Western Cities hosted mega-events as part of the urban regeneration and renewal programs for disadvantaged urban areas with degraded infrastructure, instead, Kazakhstan has tended to focus on constructing entirely new infrastructural capacities: new transport systems, event venues, and service infrastructure. Urban change is more evident in emerging countries (Hall, 2006), such as Kazakhstan where effects are greater due to the lack of quality event infrastructure. ‘Preparation for international events in Astana has also fast-tracked the urban transformation of the central parts of Astana. In some cases, these changes were part of the larger modernization and renewal efforts orchestrated by the government, but the event augmented the process’ (Medeuova, personal communication, 3rd of January 2020). The government of Kazakhstan has spent billions of dollars on the delivery of event venues, particularly for EXPO-2017. This not only includes the exhibition site limited to 25 hectares but also transport infrastructure and service infrastructure for the specialized exhibition. A new district of a total area of 174 hectares was built to hold EXPO-2017, the 25 hectares mentioned included (EXPO 2017, 2017). The complex includes 4000 apartments, a new hotel, a congress Hall, and a shopping mall (Zussupbekov, A. Iwasaki, Y. Omarov, 2018, 158). The exhibition area involved the national pavilion of Kazakhstan, as well as international, thematic, and corporate pavilions. Shops, entertainment centers and service facilities were constructed in the event complex. ‘I estimate EXPO’s contribution to the development of Astana as a capital city quite highly – 60% of possible 100%. The new area of the city has been activated, there is a perspective along the town-planning axis connecting the center of the Left Bank (Bayterek) and constructions of the EXPO town and further for the development of the city in this direction’. (Medeuova, personal communication, 3rd of January 2020)

Tableau 5 Built legacies table

Built Legacies	Types	Sub-Types	Examples
Standalone	<i>Symbolic</i>	Culture	Nur Alem Museum
	<i>Landmarks and</i>	Congress Center	Energy Hall
	<i>flagship building</i>	Mall	Culture and Recreational Hall Art Center Mega Silk Way Mall
	<i>Transport</i>	Roads	New Railway Station
		Highways	New Airport Terminal New Roads Light Railway Project
Area-Based	<i>Central business</i>	Entrepreneurial	The International Technology Park for IT startups. AIFC (Astana international Financial centre)
	<i>District</i>	Zone	
	<i>Science and</i>		
	<i>Technology park</i>		
	<i>Residential/New-</i>	Residential Blocks	1118'620m2 of exhibition and cultural pavilions.
	<i>town</i>	Exposition site	686'000 m2 of residential development
	<i>Developments</i>	Commercial Zone	72'000 m2 of retail, socio-cultural, educational and civic spaces.



Fig. General layout of the Exhibition.

Figure 11 Expo site, courtesy of EXPO 2017 (2017) participation guide 3rd edition (p.38)



Figure 12 Expo site and surroundings, courtesy of EXPO 2017 (2016) participation guide 2nd edition (p.49)

Infrastructure related to the EXPO-2017

Railway

- *Nur-Sultan-1*

The bus station was put into operation in 1989. In 2009-2013, the façade was reconstructed, and interior decoration of the building was carried out (EXPO 2017 2016). The bus station serves over 60 inter-cities, inter regional, and international routes on a daily basis, enabling transportation of about 1 million per year (*Ibid 2016*).

- *Nurly Zhol Railway Station*

In 2015, construction of a new railway station in Astana started for the convenience of exhibition participants and visitors. The capacity of the new station is up to 35'000 passengers per day, which relieves the other, existing station of Astana, with a capacity of 12'000 passengers per day (*Ibid 2017*). The new station provides services for adjoining areas including Tobol, Kokshetau, Karaganda and Pavlodar (Railways Technology 2017).

Airport Terminal

As mentioned previously, to facilitate the entry of foreign guests, visa-free travel was introduced for 48 countries. Consequently, the opening of a new terminal with the participation of head of state Nursultan Nazarbayev took place on May 31st, 2017. The terminal intended to accept international flights (up until then, only very few airlines, mostly from Russia, flew to Astana). Over one year of operation the terminal served two million passengers, it is worth noting that the terminal contributed to the EXPO-2017 international specialized exhibition ensuring the arrival and departure of guests and exhibitors (EXPO 2017, 2017).

In order to do so, the city had to expand its the international aerial circulation. Today, the airport attracts many European (Lufthansa, Turkish Airlines, Finnair, LOT), Asian (Air China, China Southern), and Middle Eastern (Etihad Airways, Air Arabia, Fly Dubai) airlines causing the airport to intensely grow its international network (Thorez 2019). This airport responds to the market, despite the airport being rather modest compared to the other great airport platforms in

the world, the EXPO-2017 permitted the airport traffic to surpass for the first time 4 million passengers, 1.5 million of them coming from international airlines (Thorez 2019).



Figure 13 Thorez 2019, airport network in 2002



Figure 14 Thorez 2019, airport network in 2018

The aerial network provided by the Nazarbayev airport desires to expand even more. Indeed, president Tokayev claims ‘currently, direct flights from the city of Nur Sultan are operated in less than 30 international destinations. This is not enough, because the capital reasonably positions itself as an international center. To become such, it is important to connect the capital

by direct flights with the leading cities of the world and international financial centers. One must, in other words, open the sky' (Vlast 2019, n.p). These objectives are typically associated in the hope of the airport to become an international hub. The benefit of an international hub is to increase greatly the number of city pair markets that an airline can serve for a given volume of output. Combining many different traffic flows together through an international hub can thus offer a very efficient means of relating supply to demand.

Light Rail Transport (LRT)

A light rail transport was set to commence its operation for the start of the EXPO-2017. The LRT is a public transport resembling that of a metro system capable of transport 500 passengers over 18 stations. The objective was to provide a high passenger capacity and reduce travel time. After many delays, the construction works started in the spring of 2017 (Zussupbekov, A. Iwasaki, Y. Omarov, 2018). The cost of the project will be about 1.9 billion dollars. Up until this day, the project is still not complete.



Figure 15 (Zussupbekov, A. Iwasaki, Y. Omarov, 2018, 160) Map of the LRT Line

‘There is still no LRT (light rail) built in Nur-Sultan. The transport network is still not functional, and this is a very big problem for the city’ (Medeuova, personal communication, 3rd of January 2020). Additionally, the current president of Kazakhstan Tokayev addressed the issue at a meeting on the development of the capital: ‘Now about the construction of LRT. The ill-fated LRT. The government and the Akimat (municipality) still decided to work on putting into effect this, to put it mildly, controversial project’ (Vlast 2019, n.p). The president reported that the project has gone too far to find a way out and to abandon it. Alarmingly, during the meeting, he desired to turn to the anti-corruption agency with an order to intensify the investigation (Vlast 2019). This very expensive and controversial project was meant to be ready for the EXPO-2017 under the pretext that it will be useful for the population of Nur-Sultan and the visitors of the international exhibition. However, the president is not convinced that the mayors of the city have truly considered the necessity of such a project and corruption has seemed to be the main cause of the demise of the LRT. The construction of the LRT is now contracted to Chinese construction companies, there are international obligations for the project to be completed (Vlast 2019).

Post Exhibition Legacy

In renewing the urban landscape and erecting the Expo site, the government aims at exploiting spectacular architectural infrastructure and urban iconography in the anticipation of producing economic value (Hall 1998; Zukin 1995). Just like the Eiffel tower in Paris, Kazakhstan aims at having its own post-expo icon for visual consumption.

Nur Alem is the emblematic structure, which was the national pavilion of Kazakhstan. The structure is introduced as the largest spherical building in the world with a diameter of 80 meters, a height of 100 meters, and a total area of 24’000 square meters.

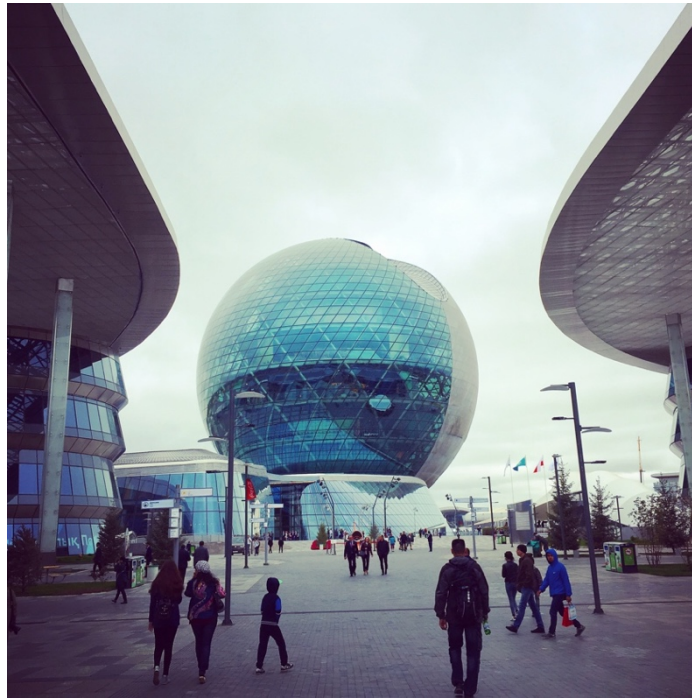


Figure 16 Nur Alem, source: Author

The EXPO-2017 legacy usage of Nur Alem is the ‘Future Energy Museum’ in the Nur-Alem ‘Growth of tourist attractiveness both during and after the event. For example, the use of one of the main objects of the EXPO architecture of the building of the energy museum ‘Nur Alem’ or the emergence of a new university in the premises of the remaining after the EXPO. Such Projects would not come into being on their own. They would be considered too costly, but on the contrary, after EXPO’. (Medeuova, personal communication, 3rd of January 2020) The interviewee states that these projects would probably not have emerged without the organization of EXPO-2017. None of the buildings were demolished after the event. Instead, many are used to be used as laboratories and research facilities for Nazarbayev University which is located right next to the Expo site.

Astana International Financial Center

After the exhibition, the facilities of EXPO-2017, the exhibition complex is used to the new financial center (AIFC) that has a special status. In July 2018, the government officially launched the AIFC for the purpose to provide beneficial conditions for investors. It is set to serve as a financial hub for Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Eurasian Economic Union and Mongolia (AIFC 2019). The center has a special legal regime, differing from the legislation of Kazakhstan and based on the principles of English Common law (*Ibid*, 2019). The participants enjoy special tax, currency and visa regimes, as well as a framework for attracting foreign labor

(*Ibid*, 2019). The tax regime will offer a 50 year-tax exemption for foreign employees. Astana International Financial Center aims to attract US\$40 billion of foreign investment until 2025 (Al Tamami 2019, n.p) The launch of the AIFC is part of the President's '100 Concrete Steps', a 'roadmap' which aims to bring Kazakhstan into the world's 30 most developed countries (Kazakh Invest 2018).

The Astana International Financial Center and the Astana International Exchange (AIX) will become the main stages for privatization. One of the main objectives of President Nazarbayev's recent address to the nation – 'New development opportunities under the Fourth Industrial Revolution' – is the acceleration of the implementation of the privatization plan³. To commence with 'Kazakhstan's USD 67 billion worth sovereign wealth fund Samruk-Kazyna has sold over 120 small and mid-sized assets and is preparing larger assets for Initial Public Offering under its privatization program' (Bloomberg 2019). This renewed privatization drive is aimed at decreasing the Kazakh government's influence on the economy and to foster business activity in order to hopefully improve the investment climate in Kazakhstan.

Within the entrepreneurial regime, Harvey suggests that the key strategy in urban regeneration programs is the public-private partnership (Harvey 1989). This hasn't been much the case in Kazakhstan pertaining to the development of Nur-Sultan. The interventionist government spent a considerable amount of investment to build the urban landscape with money from oil revenue owned by the state. The Kazakh government has traditionally encouraged economic growth through expansive public spending, but have come to recognize that they cannot finance the necessary investments in public infrastructure from current budgets anymore and that a major part of future financing must flow from private sector to meet demands of the immense infrastructure (Grata 2019). As mentioned previously, Kazakhstan is attempting to diversify its oil dependent economy as it is too dependent on the commodity prices that are too unpredictable and fluctuate too much (External shocks that are out of the Kazakh government's control).

As a consequence, to this, the government has recognized that to finance the growing infrastructure, public-private partnership (PPP) is needed (*Ibid* 2019). PPP is a financing

³ 'New Opportunities Under the Fourth Industrial Revolution' is a state address by the former president Nazarbayev (January 10 2018) in which one of his items is: 'It is important to accelerate the implementation of the privatisation plan, expanding it by reducing the number of subordinate organisations of state agencies (Nazarbayev 2018, n.p. Accessed on <http://mfa.gov.kz/en/tokyo/content-view/novye-vozmozhnosti-razvitiya-v-usloviyah-cetvertoj-promyslennoj-revolucii-poslanie-prezidenta-respubliki-kazahstan-nursultana-nazarbaeva-narodu-kazahstana>)

mechanism tool that can attract private sector funds to infrastructure projects and to provide a proper legal framework for the ongoing privatization of state-owned assets.

For instance, the LRT project in Nur-Sultan, which was not under the mechanism of the PPP with financing and investments coming from China, should have been implemented under PPP framework. The failure to structure this project as a PPP from the outset is now causing this project to fail and be an embarrassment for the Kazakh government as well as a waste of state budgets (Grate 2019).

Tableau 6 Author's adjusted cost-benefit matrix

	Long-term benefits	Short-term Benefits	Long-term Costs	Short-term Costs
Costs and benefits on a local scale (Nur-Sultan)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Urban Transformation: Development of infrastructure - Erection of landmarks - Development of the Service sector - Multifunctional facilities open for public use (malls, museums, art center etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Temporary job creation for the event - Expo site as a place of entertainment - Public participation through volunteering. - Local optimism - Enhancing Social capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lowering of the public trust towards the national and city governments. - High operation and maintenance costs of new facilities. - Misallocation of resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in project cost due to corruption.
Costs and Benefits for Kazakhstan (International Scale)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grand exposure of the city of Astana (attracting tourists) - Legitimacy towards the international scene - Attracting investment (AIFC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tourism due to the event - Contracting of local and foreign companies (exploiting expertise) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lowering of trust for investment through the failure of the LRT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Negative foreign press

Discussion

In sum, the spectacular urban development witnessed in Nur-Sultan has been legitimated through the hosting of mega-events, particularly with the international exhibition EXPO-2017. In order to redress its urban portfolio, Nur-Sultan has focused on ‘urban boosterism’ projects on the left bank of the river as well as the hosting of EXPO-2017 which were both mobilized with unparalleled largesse. Certainly, the Kazakh government has been less concerned with urban renewal and regeneration of deprived urban areas of Nur-Sultan but has instead focused on the construction of an entirely new spectacular infrastructural capacity, this including: new transport systems, infrastructure such as the development of hotels, parks, new housing/retail developments infrastructure and sports venues, expos site, monuments, and administrative buildings. These are sought after strategies in attracting potential investors and businesses (Hubbard, 1996), but also tourism. Through the erection of spectacular buildings and monuments since Nur-Sultan became a capital city, it is safe to claim that the government of Kazakhstan has thus learned to transform the urban landscape in Nur-Sultan for visual consumption, exploiting architectural infrastructure and urban iconography in the anticipation of producing economic value. However, following the logic of urban entrepreneurialism, the government of Kazakhstan is still lacking the implementation of the key strategy in urban regeneration programs which Harvey (1989) claims is the public-private partnership. The development of the framework is still in the early stages, but the intentions of the government are clear in the sense that the city is slowly following entering the process of urban entrepreneurialism described by Harvey (1989).

Findings

In my research, the observed infrastructural additions resulting from EXPO-2017 are an expansion in the transport infrastructural developments such as: a new airport terminal, new railway station, refurbishing of the old train station, but also the failure in Light Rail Transport which is a stark reminder of everything that is wrong with Kazakhstan informal and formal institutions. The Expo-2017 has fast tracked and prioritized urban development in Nur-Sultan: ‘Preparation for international events in Astana has also fast-tracked the urban transformation of the central parts of Astana’ (Medeuova, personal communication, 3rd of January 2020). Whether it is for the government’s legitimacy toward its local population or on the world stage, the

transformation is evident. However, the findings I have discovered is that what seems like the main objective is to develop tourism in the city of Nur-Sultan, and to create a ‘good business climate’ for future investments.

Lack of Proper Legal Framework for (PPP)

‘Within the entrepreneurial regime, the key strategy in urban regeneration programs is the public-private partnership’ (Harvey 1989, 11).

Lack of PPP framework, as examined in the previous chapter, too much of the planning and thinking about the social infrastructure of Nur-Sultan is confined to the government. There is a need for the government to further expand and diversify the concession mechanism of the PPP into a wider array. Kazakhstan lags behind on governance and institutional development. A reinforcement of the PPP laws needs to be adopted. Further, if the government urges foreign investors to join new PPP projects, measures should be taken to stabilize the applicable PPP legislative framework to augment trust and solidify its application. When talking to Medeuova, the failure of the LRT seems to be a burden on the city. This may have important negative effects on the country’s investment climate. It is rather positive that president Tokayev and the country’s authorities acknowledge these problems and that measures have been proposed to address disincentives to foreign investments, particularly on the local level in Nur-Sultan. However, ‘the structure of the polity, where financial groups’ interests remain entrenched and fear of dissent remained ingrained, continued to weaken the government’s ability to replace failed policies with innovative ones’ (BTI 2018, 34). The implementation of these directives cannot be achieved without the strong political will needed to overcome the rooted interests that benefit from the current situation.

White Elephants and misallocation of resources

Harvey (1989) already warned ‘the often-uneven distribution of costs and benefits in entrepreneurial partnerships, as the public sector assumes most of the risk while the private sector reaps the benefits’ (Pow 2002, 57). Expo-2017 have provided opportunities for graft and have not helped the ordinary citizen. Making EXPO-2017 projects beneficial for citizens remains an issue that is not yet absolutely clear on the policy agenda of the national and city governments of Kazakhstan. The perception of the role of this project in urban development

remains biased towards general achievements rather than actual outcomes for urban development. The primary objective for the Kazakh government in hosting mega-events has been to attract investment. Consequently, this objective overshadows the government's responsibility to satisfy local community needs. For example, the Kazakh government focuses on the great number of visitors and business opportunities provided by EXPO-2017. However, there are still issues of available places in educational institutions (Vlast, 2019). There are very few schools being built, even after the EXPO-2017 (*Ibid*, 2019). In addition, residents are dissatisfied with the quality of medical services. There is a shortage of medical personnel. It seems though the resource allocation could have been directed into that direction instead of erecting even more spectacular buildings. These projects could have carried broader opportunity costs that reduce government spending that could have been channeled to other more relevant local projects, such as healthcare or education.

The only observed white elephants signaled in this research is the large number of residential buildings built around the exposition site. As Medeuova stated, there are many unfinished building blocks that are left somewhat abandoned. These resources could have been reallocated for other purposes such as, as mentioned above, for education or public health.

Volunteering

‘Another fact is that with the development of the volunteer movement, many classes were held with young students about what volunteerism is and what forms of social activity they can use. Since the Expo, many of them have maintained this format of social responsibility while continuing to participate in various city activities. My students, for example, said they had a greater incentive to learn English and engage in socially responsible volunteering’ (Medeuova, personal communication, 3rd of January 2020). For the younger generation, the abundance in tourism over the exhibition period has created an incentive to not only learn English, but also participate in various activities around the city. Volunteering here seems to be a key part in social responsibility and can improve the culture in some ways, encouraging the younger generation to work together enhancing social capital.

‘I do not know exactly what the economic or political results of the EXPO are, but from the point of view of urban development, this area has become a livelier city, there are many public spheres and spaces. Insufficiencies include the fact that the Astana Contemporary Art Centre, which was very well established, could not stay on the Expo site after its completion, although it had very good plans to develop its own program and influence the Expo complex’ (Medeuova,

personal communication, 3rd of January 2020). Political and economic outcomes are rather difficult to measure the following years after the exhibition, from my experience, finding causality is very challenging, however, social capital seems to be the highlighted benefit resulting from the exhibition.

Future research

In the long run, it would be interesting to observe potential future ‘white elephants. There were numerous hotels planned to reflect to meet the demand of exhibition tourism. It would be interesting to examine the functional use of the service industry and the event venues over a larger time period.

Another interesting research could have been a comparative study between the right bank and the left bank. As the city seems to lack a singular development policy, it seems that there is an erection of a chaotic development in a number of areas, particularly the right bank. The only white elephant signaled in my findings were the unfinished residential construction complexes: ‘Yes, I generally like the investments that have been made in this area, but there are a few city blocks that look like a "big hoax". These are a few blocks that were never built, they are in close proximity to the Expo itself and therefore during the event they were kind of "hidden" behind the stretch marks. But now this large quarter is especially difficult for the city, because the degree of unfinished there is about 50%. It's such a starting ruin’ (Medeuova, personal communication, 3rd of January 2020). It has been three years since the EXPO-2017 happened and these residential complexes are still unfinished, again, a study of potential white elephants would be of interest for future research.

Conclusion

This master's thesis attempted to better theorize what happens when the concept of urban entrepreneurialism travels to the capital city of an authoritarian state - in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan. I tried to complement the gap in the literature as I took the approach of examining EXPO-2017 as a tool of urban entrepreneurialism. In essence, I try to demonstrate how state-scale actors in authoritarian settings use spectacular urban development and city beautification to promote the image Nur-Sultan as an attractive city for investment, eventually leading to the hosting of Central Asia's first mega-event: EXPO-2017 in Astana. The results of this study following the specific research questions, are summarized below:

The first sub-question: **what is the rationale for Kazakhstan to host mega-events?**

Since hosting mega-events are ideas promoted by elite segments, which ultimately become political initiatives, a rationale must be developed to mobilize public support. Kazakhstan pursues the hosting of mega-events to develop the country's international prestige. The rationale for hosting mega-events is to develop the tourism industry and also impulse to the national economy. The international exhibition Expo-2017 seems to be a tool to attract tourists and to give them an incentive to visit the capital city. In addition, the exhibition has also fast tracked the urban development of the left bank of Nur-Sultan-

The second sub question: **How has the EXPO-2017 as a mega-event contributed to the urban regeneration and renewal of the city?**

The results have shown that EXPO-2017 has immensely contributed to the physical development of the left bank of the capital city. Particularly in terms of transport infrastructure and the development of residential and commercial complexes that go beyond the 'expo site'. However, interestingly enough, the results have also highlighted the issues pertaining to the Kazakh formal and informal institutions and the failed project of the Light Rail Transport project. In addition, a few 'white elephants' have been pointed out, particularly concerning the hidden unfinished residential complex near the Expo site

The third sub question: **What are the local benefits and costs EXPO-2017? E.g As a city that has witnessed strong inward migration, have the resources been allocated to tackle issues of access healthcare, housing, and basic infrastructure (e.g transport)?**

The benefit presented in the discussion section is the social capital generated by the volunteering program. However, the project benefits for the citizens remains an issue. The Kazakh government have allocated astounding resources for the EXPO-2017 but have failed to address the local community needs such as the provision of more educational infrastructure and healthcare personnel. The EXPO-2017 could have carried broader opportunity costs that reduce government spending that could have been channeled to other more relevant local projects for the local citizens.

General Research question: **How has EXPO2017 contributed to the process of urban entrepreneurialism in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan?**

Since becoming the capital city, Nur-Sultan's transformation has been immense and costly. New spectacular buildings designed by world renowned architects have erected on the basis that it will attract investment to the capital. The government sought to position the city in the space of consumption. Nur-Sultan has followed that strategy of other aspiring world cities by using the power of iconic architecture as cultural capital. The organization of first tier events seems like a continuity of the government placing the city in the space of consumption. Spectacular urban developments are legitimated through the hosting of mega-events. EXPO-2017 seems to have been organized in order to attract tourists to give visitors a primary incentive to visit Nur-Sultan in the first place, and to consume in the city. Therefore, the Government of Kazakhstan has been picking up the trend and began to bid and win first-tier events, amongst a wave in other Post-Socialist states.

Furthermore, the government of Kazakhstan introduced a range of entrepreneurial policies that are designed to attract many investors creating an intensification of inter-urban competition. This involved setting up attractive financial packaging (Pre-Expo: Nur-Sultan as a 'Special Economic Zone'). Concerning the contribution of EXPO-2017, the national government introduced event related legislation in which they have authorized, consolidated, and legalized practices of legal exception in order to abide by demands of construction companies, and tourists. With the hosting of the EXPO-2017, the government of Kazakhstan has continued its

logic of spectacular urban development on the left bank with the development of the Expo site as well as many infrastructures related to the Expo.

Final thoughts

Mega-events are emerging in countries that are increasingly reaching beyond the traditional 'Western' geographical realm. In post-socialist countries such as Kazakhstan, hosting mega-events such as EXPO-2017 shared the similar rhetoric of place marketing and competitiveness, urban transformation, and economic development as 'Western' counterparts. However, the particularity with Kazakhstan is the interventionist government plays a much more important role in the urban transformation, securing and directing the investment, as well as the planning of the event. The primary driving force in hosting mega-events remains the same as in the rest of the world, as economic development is the main aim, and it has been for Nur-Sultan since day one. While mega-events are the urban and regional expression of globalization and city competitiveness, they also act as focal scope of the regime's nature in the country as they are entrenched into the host's society.

ANNEX

Annex 1 – Semi-structured interview questions

What are the contributions of EXPO-2017 to the Kazakh society on a local, national, and international level? (What benefits were achieved?)

- Staging of a mega-event is typically motivated by three concerns:

1. Putting the city 'on the world map', in essence: global visibility (increasing tourism)
2. Economic investment in the city and attracting capital
3. Urban renewal, regeneration, transformation

How did the EXPO-2017 contribute to the aforementioned concerns? Has EXPO-2017 reached the desired outcomes?

- While the construction of the government district and redevelopment of the old Soviet Centre in Astana proceeded on a tight schedule, the housing sector and public transport were neglected for a long-time. Residential construction fell far short of keeping up with the growing demand for living space by Astana's many new citizens.

The event, in essence, should make the city a better place: Has the event provided better infrastructure? Better quality of life to the people living in the city?

Did the new 'EXPO-2017 district' (and surroundings?) tackle issues such as housing, transport infrastructure, services and the issue of water access?

What is the legacy outcome of the Specialized EXPO-2017? What did the EXPO-2017 attempt to achieve?

ANNEX 2 Transcript

Kulshat Medeuova: Teacher at the Eurasian National University, Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan

Question 1) *What are the contributions of EXPO-2017 to the Kazakh society on a local, national, and international level? (What benefits were achieved?)*

Question 1 in Russian) *Каков вклад ЭКСПО-2017 в развитие казахстанского общества на местном, национальном и международном уровнях? (Какие выгоды были достигнуты?)*

Kulshat : Вклад ЭКСПО в развитие Астаны как города-столицы оцениваю достаточно высоко – 60% от возможных 100% . Был активизирован новый район города, появилась перспектива вдоль градостроительной оси связывающей центр левого берега (Байтерек) и постройками ЭКСПО городка и дальше для развития города в этом направлении.

Translation of the answer

I estimate EXPO's contribution to the development of Astana as a capital city quite highly - 60% of possible 100%. The new area of the city has been activated, there is a perspective along the town-planning axis connecting the center of the left bank (Baiterek) and constructions of the EXPO town and further for the development of the city in this direction.

Question 2) Staging of a mega-event is typically motivated by three concerns:

- Putting the city 'on the world map', in essence: global visibility (increasing tourism)
- Economic investment in the city and attracting capital
- Urban renewal, regeneration, transformation

How did the EXPO-2017 contribute to the aforementioned concerns?

Question 2 in Russian): Инсценировка мега-события, как правило, мотивирована тремя опасениями:

- Помещение города "на карту мира", по сути: глобальная видимость (рост туризма).
- Экономические инвестиции в город и привлечение капитала
- Обновление, регенерация, преобразование городов

Каким образом выставка ЭКСПО-2017 способствовала решению вышеупомянутых проблем?

Kulshat : По всем трем пунктам были определенные успехи, которые конечно могли быть и более выразительными, но то узнаваемость повысилась , это очевидно. Вы же пишете свою работу и включаете в нее Астану)).

Рост туристической привлекательности как в период проведения , так и после. Например использование одного из главных объектов ЭКСПО архитектуры здания музея энергии «Нур-Алем» или появления нового университета в помещениях оставшихся после ЭКСПО. Такие проекты сами по себе бы не возникли. Они бы считались слишком затратными, но после ЭКСПО, наоборот.

Есть еще один очень маленький кейс, но он показателен. На всей территории ЭКСПО было множество разнообразных детских площадок. Эти миниплощадки были распределены по всей территории, но после того как закончился период ЭКСПО и у территории были сняты ограждения, то эти объекты были сконцентрированы в сквере который располагается рядом. Тем самым был облагорожен (очень хорошо, более интересно чем обычно это делалось ранее) целый район. Или объекты общественных туалетов WC, билетные и сувенирных киоски, были распродоточены по всему городу. Это такие небольшие факты, но они говорят о том что была политика повторного использования основных инвестиций.

Еще один факт с развитием волонтерского движения, с молодыми студентами проводилось множество занятий о том что такое волонтерство и какие формы социальной активности они могут использовать. После ЭКСПО многие из них сохранили этот формат социальной ответственности , продолжая участвовать в различных городских акциях. Например мои студенты говорили о том что у них появился большой стимул учить английский язык и заниматься социально ответственным волонтерством.

Translation of the answer

On all three points there were some successes, which of course could be more expressive, but then the recognition has increased, it is obvious. You write your work and include Astana in it)).

Growth of tourist attractiveness both during and after the event. For example, the use of one of the main objects of the EXPO architecture of the building of the energy museum "Nur-Alem" or the emergence of a new university in the premises of the remaining after the EXPO. Such projects

would not come into being on their own. They would be considered too costly, but on the contrary, after EXPO.

There's another very small case, but it's indicative. There were many different playgrounds throughout Expo. These mini playgrounds were distributed all over the territory, but after the Expo period ended and the fences were removed, these objects were concentrated in the park which is located nearby. In this way the whole area was beautified (very well, more interesting than it was usually done before). Or public WC facilities, ticket and souvenir stalls, were spread all over the city. These are such small facts, but they show that there was a policy of reusing major investments. Another fact is that with the development of the volunteer movement, many classes were held with young students about what volunteerism is and what forms of social activity they can use. Since the Expo, many of them have maintained this format of social responsibility while continuing to participate in various city activities. My students, for example, said they had a greater incentive to learn English and engage in socially responsible volunteering.

Question 3) *The event, in essence, should make the city a better place: Has the event provided better infrastructure? Better quality of life to the people living in the city?*

Question 3 in Russian) Событие, по сути, должно сделать город лучше: Обеспечило ли мероприятие лучшую инфраструктуру? Лучшее качество жизни людей, живущих в городе?

Kulshat: Да, мне в целом нравится те инвестиции которые появились в этом районе, но есть несколько городских кварталов которые выглядят как «большой обман» , это несколько кварталов которые так и не были построены, они находятся в непосредственной близости от самого ЭКСПО и поэтому во время проведения они были как бы «скрыты» за растяжками. Но сейчас этот большой квартал представляет особую сложность для города, потому что степень недостроенности там около 50%. Это такие начинающиеся руины.

Translation of the answer

Yes, I generally like the investments that have been made in this area, but there are a few city blocks that look like a "big hoax". These are a few blocks that were never built, they are in close proximity to the Expo itself and therefore during the event they were kind of "hidden" behind the stretch

marks. But now this large quarter is especially difficult for the city, because the degree of unfinished there is about 50%. It's such a starting ruin.

Question 4) While the construction of the government district and redevelopment of the old Soviet Centre in Astana proceeded on a tight schedule, the housing sector and public transport were neglected for a long-time. Residential construction fell far short of keeping up with the growing demand for living space by Astana's many new citizens.

Did the new 'EXPO-2017 district' (and surroundings?) tackle issues such as housing or transport infrastructure?

Question 4 in Russian) В то время как строительство правительственного района и реконструкция старого советского центра в Астане велись в сжатые сроки, жилищный сектор и общественный транспорт долгое время оставались без внимания. Строительство жилья далеко не соответствовало растущему спросу на жилую площадь со стороны многих новых жителей Астаны.

Решил ли новый район "ЭКСПО-2017" (и его окрестности?) такие вопросы, как жилищная или транспортная инфраструктура?

Kulshat: Появилось определенное количество новых маршрутов, но так и не была построена ЛРТ (легко рельсовый транспорт). Но эта транспортная сеть не работает до сих пор и это очень большая проблема для города.

Translation in of the answer

There were a number of new routes, but no LRT (light rail) was built. But this transport network is still not working and this is a very big problem for the city.

Question 5) What is the legacy outcome of the Specialized EXPO-2017? What did the EXPO-2017 attempt to achieve?

Question 5 in Russian) Каковы итоги работы специализированной ЭКСПО-2017? Чего пытались достичь участники ЭКСПО-2017?

Kulshat: Я не знаю каковы точно экономические или политические результаты проведения ЭКСПО, но с точки зрения городского развития этот район стал гораздо живее, появилось множество публичных сфер, пространств. К недостаткам можно

отнести что очень хорошо себя зарекомендовавший центр современного искусства Astana Contemporary Art Centre не смог удержаться на площадке ЭКСПО после окончания, хотя у него были очень хорошие планы на развитие как собственной программы так и влияния на ЭКСПО комплекс.

Translation of the answer

I do not know exactly what the economic or political results of the EXPO are, but from the point of view of urban development, this area has become a livelier city, there are many public spheres and spaces. Insufficiencies include the fact that the Astana Contemporary Art Centre, which was very well established, could not stay on the Expo site after its completion, although it had very good plans to develop its own program and influence the Expo complex.

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